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Invisibility Syndrome and Racial Identity Development in Psychotherapy and Counseling African American Men

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Success in counseling African American men is discussed in terms of an invisibility syndrome and the role played by their racial identity development. Invisibility is considered a psychological experience wherein the person feels that his or her personal identity and ability are undermined by racism in a myriad of interpersonal circumstances. A therapy case is used to explain how this experience helps determine Black men's perspective on cross-racial interpersonal encounters and supports racial identity development as fundamental to their personal identity and as a buffer against racism. Awareness of the dynamic interface between racism, invisibility, and racial identity development can help the counseling process and effectiveness of our interventions with African American men. Discussion of a therapeutic support group is used as an example.

The difficulty of getting Black men into counseling, let alone extended psychotherapeutic intervention, is legendary in the professional community. It is my belief that their resistance to counseling is related to their larger struggle in achieving value and recognition in common everyday encounters of life (Boyd & Allen, 1995; Cose, 1993; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Madhubuti, 1990). Intrinsic gender and racial barriers impede usage of counseling and psychotherapy as personal resources.

Many African American men believe they cannot be helped absent an appreciation of what it means to be Black and a male in this society. I believe the inner conflicts that grow out of living as a Black man can be understood by what I consider the recurrent theme of invisibility experienced within the African American community and the consequences of managing its impact.

Invisibility is defined as an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism. In his book about prejudice and racism, Jones (1997) defined these terms as

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> ways in which people devalue, disadvantage, demean, and in general, unfairly regard others. In this sense, they refer to negative attitudes about, and negative treatment of, people who belong to other groups. Prejudice and racism are also concepts that encompass the ways in which people value, advantage, esteem, and, in general, prefer and positively regard people who are like themselves or belong to their own group. (p. 7)

Consequently, a Black man's reliance on the African American community for recognition and validation may be adequate, but not sufficient, given the persistence of what Jones (1997) described as individual, institutional, and cultural racism directed at people of African descent. According to Jones, *individual racism* suggests a belief in the superiority of one's own race over another and in the behavioral enactments that maintain those superior and inferior positions. *Institutional racism* has two meanings: (a) It is the institutional extension of individual racist beliefs, consisting primarily of using and manipulating duly constituted institutions so as to maintain a racist advantage over others; (b) it is the byproduct of certain institutional practices that operate to restrict—on a racial basis—the choices, rights, mobility, and access of groups of individuals. These unequal consequences need not be intended, but they are no less real for being simply de facto. *Cultural racism* is the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage over that of another race.

This article, therefore, will first address how repeated encounters with prejudice and racism create an invisibility syndrome as well as a psychosocial context for African American men. Although this focus is on African American men, my thesis about invisibility also applies to African American women, whose experiences have parallels with, as well as differences from, Black men's experiences. I will rely rather exclusively on a single case example of an African American man in therapy to illustrate more in depth how invisibility influences the person and relationships. Second, I will address how racial identity development is crucial to Black male engagement of the world and how it can become a protective factor in personal resilience and managing stress from psychological invisibility. Finally, I will address how the struggle with invisibility and the process of racial identity development—manifest in the adaptive behavior of African American men—have implications for counseling and psychotherapy.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN ARE AT RISK

In my opinion, it is important and helpful in psychotherapy to have some knowledge of the broad social context of living for persons in treatment, such as the cultural, social, economic, political, and health conditions that impact

the specific community and daily life of the person. In this regard, understanding African American men requires some perspective on their well-being. Despite the continued struggle of African American men for complete inclusion in all the benefits of citizenry (Hacker, 1992; Jaynes & Williams, 1989), marginality in society and broad health risks continue as a reality and become a source for creating the aura of invisibility.

Violence and homicide are leading causes of death for African American men (Hammond & Yung, 1993; Prothrow-Stith, 1991). They face far greater health and mortality risks than White men, and a disproportionate number of young Black males are in jail, on parole, or on probation (Butterfield, 1995; Gibbs, 1988; Taylor, 1995).

Research by Krieger and Sidney (1996) indicated a significant relationship between perceived motivated acts of prejudice and cardiovascular health risks. Blacks reporting unfair treatment because of race in general had higher blood pressure than Whites. Those Black men and women who reported unfair treatment and accepted it had higher systolic blood pressure than those who challenged it. Krieger and Sidney concluded that these blood pressure differences for African Americans are "on par with or exceed those associated with other cardiovascular risk factors targeted for nonpharmacologic interventions (e.g., lack of exercise, smoking, and unhealthy high-fat, high-salt diets)" (p. 1376).

These conclusions provide further evidence that perceived prejudice and racism have health consequences as well as social, interpersonal consequences for both African American men and women. Moreover, in my opinion, the conclusions underscore how personal experience of prejudice and racism has profound psychodynamic consequences.

THE INVISIBILITY SYNDROME PARADIGM

I propose the invisibility syndrome paradigm as a conceptual model to aid in understanding the myriad of factors determining adaptive responses to racism and invisibility. It is presented as a way to explain the intrapsychic struggle for personal identity by African American men as the individual confronts specific encounters with racism, particularly in cross-racial circumstances, and how these experiences obscure genuine identity and promote inherent stress related to their management (Franklin, 1997).

There are seven dynamic elements to the invisibility syndrome paradigm that represent the intrapsychic process in feeling invisible, with the positive counterweight providing the dynamics of visibility (see Figure 1). For example, as a result of a given racial slight or cumulative encounters with them, (a) one feels a lack of recognition or appropriate acknowledgment; (b) one feels
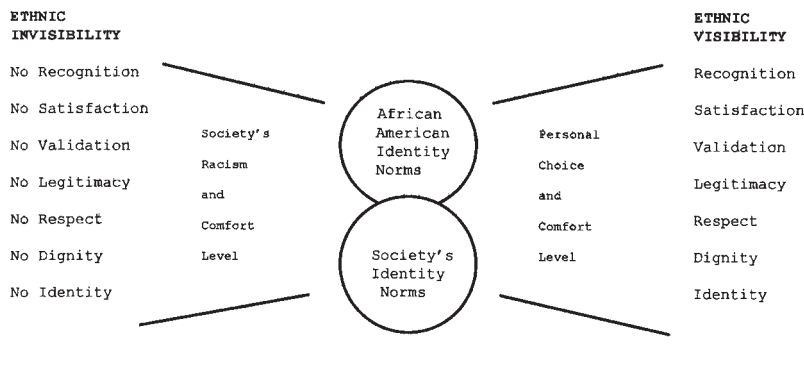
ETHNIC   ETHNIC
INVISIBILITY   VISIBILITY

No Recognition   Recognition

No Satisfaction   Society's   African   Personal   Satisfaction

No Validation   Racism   American   Choice   Validation
                                          Identity
No Legitimacy   and   Norms   and   Legitimacy

No Respect   Comfort   Comfort   Respect

No Dignity   Level   Society's   Level   Dignity
                                          Identity
No Identity   Norms   Identity

**Figure 1.   African Americans' struggle with ethnic group's and society's norms for com-
fort with identity.**

there is no satisfaction or gratification from the encounter (it is painful and injurious); (c) one feels self-doubt about legitimacy—such as "Am I in the right place; should I be here?"; (d) there is no validation from the experience— "Am I a person of worth?"—or the person seeks some form of corroboration of experiences from another person; (e) one feels disrespected (this is led to by the previous elements and is linked to the following); (f) one's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged; (g) one's basic identity is shaken, if not uprooted. Embracing the recognition and supportive identity attachments in the brotherhood of other African American men would be an example of a positive counterweight determining visibility.

Central to my model is understanding the underlying psychological dynamics and emotional distress experienced by African American men as they attempt to evolve an identity within the larger socioeconomic, political, and cultural entity we consider "society"—whose practice of racism manipulates the rules of conformity and inclusion for them. Society, through its promotion of values and rules, forces its members to conform for a "societal personal comfort level" akin to that of the individual. Attitudes toward race and members of racial groups form a part of society's rules about comfort, very often measured by similarity and inclusion. Jones (1997) discussed this as a process of "racialization" in which "racialistic beliefs are transformed into active instruments of categorization and judgment" (p. 357). It is the social construction of racism that provides the foundation for acts of prejudice.

Navigating the myriad of social circumstances in which race is salient involves understanding and decoding intent and purpose. Being able to discern when behavior is racist, and then acting consistent with one's sense of self, is the personal struggle for visibility against the racial slights that make

one feel invisible as a person (Franklin, 1993). This process has several dynamic elements, which interact in a manner that provides feedback to help the person resolve thoughts and feelings about a racial incident and shapes the person's inner perspective about identity and inclusion in, or exclusion from, society. In essence, this process determines the personal course of the visibility or invisibility struggle to become a respected person of value in society, despite encounters with racism.

The African American community serves as a vital component of this feedback loop for recognition and validation of Black men. The community creates, in its own right, conditions of visibility for Black men by the sense of belonging provided by other Black men and the activities, institutions, traditions, and practices of the brotherhood of Black men that typify the uniqueness of being an African American man. Within this community context, a particular visibility is supported and advocated (Ballard, 1984).

For Black men (or women), experiencing this process of sorting out feeling invisible/visible may or may not be connected to their racial identity as persons of African descent. But the experience of invisibility in cross-racial contexts is directly linked to the awareness that characteristics about them that have led to racial encounters are attributed to people with their heritage. Society has infinite social rules about the inclusion of African American men that can make them feel invisible and thus provoke attempts on their part to compensate for this feeling in their identity development.

This dilemma can be illustrated, for example, in the skin color controversy for Blacks. The emotionally charged issues associated with a person's skin color are manifestations of a racialized social environment. There are countless anecdotes in the African American community of people who view their skin color as the only attribute that separates them from being White. On the other hand, there are those who identify totally as Black, only to have their "non-African-like skin color and features" negate how others identify them because of the stereotypes about what is "Black." In other words, they are not "Black enough." In her book on skin color, Kathy Russell, an African American woman, offers a personal observation from her adolescence along this line. "(She) knew only that her features had the power to make others see her either as popular and attractive, with 'some pretty, long hair,' or as a snob and a social outcast, rejected for acting too 'white-like'" (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992, p. 4).

The invisibility syndrome, as a clinical paradigm, therefore assesses for African American men (as well as women) immersed in a racialized environment how recognition, satisfaction, legitimacy, validation, respect, dignity, and identity interact in an intrapsychic manner to determine their visibility or invisibility. It is equally important with this model to understand that society at large, and the African American community in particular, impose its own

rules of conformity and inclusion with a value system of recognition, rewards, legitimacy, validation, and codes for respect, dignity, and identity. Therefore, it is my contention that where the African American man positions himself, in terms of which identity attributes to internalize and how his position mediates his behavior in the world, is important to his resolution and management of challenges in his projection of himself as a man of African descent.

Moreover, it is important to be knowledgeable about the way society and the African American community shape visibility with rules and codes, as they do invisibility when exclusion is desired.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN INVISIBILITY SYNDROME

The continued struggle for civil rights has a parallel psychological struggle for African Americans, immortalized in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words: To "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (King, 1987, p. 83). Judgments based on skin color make genuine character invisible. Dealing with the myriad of prejudgmental views of character determined by prejudice and, in turn, acts of racism creates the psychological tension in feeling invisible.

Whether racism comes in the form of an act like being passed over for promotion or feeling misrepresented by the inundation of negative reporting about African American men in the media, many Black men feel that members of other ethnic groups do not *really* know African American men.

Given the level of misconceptions, managing the stress from sorting out intent in cross-racial encounters can be demanding and burdensome. It can tax logic and perceived rules about interpersonal relations as people seek to understand what they can change in their behavior to gain acceptance or what they risk by just being themselves.

It is important that individual changes in behavior to gain acceptance are consistent with one's personal identity and worldview, or a form of dissonance will occur that requires a reconciling of beliefs and anxiety. If an individual makes an adjustment in behavior with the belief that it will bring greater acceptance, yet he or she is rejected nonetheless because undesired group attributes are judged more salient, such encounters will be disillusioning and create confusion about the appropriate path to genuine acceptance. This process is part of the debate and controversy about assimilation, acculturation, and ethnocentrism (Landrine, 1996). Moreover, the process reflects both the group's dilemma and the individual's challenge in deciding how to evolve identity. This is a complex process that involves, on one hand, acquisi-

tion of meaning of values, rules, and behaviors, but, on the other hand, risks diminution or loss of those very same things from one's group of origin. LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) discussed the factors that contribute to obtaining competence in being a part of both a dominant and a minority culture. They argued for a bicultural competence model and the importance of bicultural efficacy, or individual confidence in living effectively in two cultures without compromising one's sense of cultural identity. Bicultural competence necessitates being grounded by social networks in both cultures.

Efforts at bicultural transformation of personal identity are prevented by invisibility, however, because of racism's rejection and intolerance of the group of origin's defining attributes (e.g., skin color, intelligence, language, spiritual beliefs). Racism's unconditional rejection of people puts the individual's task of identity development in a quandary. There are social pressures on the individual, as a member of a minority group, to assimilate, and "tolerance"—not acceptance—is the normative code of behavior of the dominant group.

A prevalent tactic for signaling tolerance toward those persons who are considered inferior in social status is through racial slights. Racial slights not only serve as "social status reminders" but are provocative, emotionally stressful, anxiety producing, and anger inducing; they are the primary behaviors inducing the feeling of invisibility.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Racial slights from deceptively subtle yet malevolent cross-racial interactions induce disillusionment, confusion, and chronic doubts about self and personal efficacy in decision making, in African American men. Chester Pierce (1988, 1992), an African American psychiatrist, considers these assaults to self-esteem "micro-aggressions." Franklin (1997) defined *microaggressions* as subtle acts or attitudes experienced as hostile, which fit a personal history and pattern of racial slights and disregard. The history and pattern of racial slights help determine the kind of response an individual will have and the manner in which meaning from the encounter gets internalized and connected to interpretations from previous incidents.

As a reaction to feeling invisible from those scenarios of superficial acceptance, confusion and disillusionment can manipulate the individual into constantly searching for scenarios in which he or she can gain genuine acceptance. Theorists (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) postulated that an individual's experience in identity development involves deciding between life's

alternatives and taking personal stances; racism interjects a unique factor to this dynamic equation.

Pierce (1988, 1992) perceived microaggressions as verbal offensive mechanisms and nonverbal, sometimes kinetic offensive mechanisms that control "space, time, energy, and mobility of the Black, while producing feelings of degradation, and erosion of self-confidence and self-image" (1988, p. 31), which, in their pervasiveness, have a cumulative deleterious psychological effect over time. Pierce perceived these racial dynamics emanating from covert assumptions that minorities in the United States are placed at a disadvantage in all negotiations. This leads to what he believes are three major confusions with stressful and enduring psychosocial sequelae:

1. Blacks are confused about whether they are being tolerated or being accepted,
2. Blacks are confused about the supportive effort of individual Whites versus the destructive action by Whites as a collective, and
3. Blacks are confused about when, where, and how to resist oppression versus when, where, and how to accommodate to it (1988, p. 27).

INVISIBILITY IN LIFE EXPERIENCES

The widespread belief among African American men that racism is a primary contributor to their life circumstances is borne out by the various social and health indicators discussed above. Another powerful sustainer is the verbal corroboration, which can be ascertained from other African American men about their personal experiences of racism. Jones (1991) noted that this pervasive group validation must lead theorists to consider how racism has a thematic unity in the lives of African Americans—although reactions to prejudice can vary from person to person—and shapes their personality. This is illustrated by Sam, a client in therapy, who indicates one person's reaction to biased beliefs.

THE CASE OF SAM

Sam, a 30-year-old African American man, worked his way up from the hardships of inner-city life and limited family resources to become a successful young lawyer. He is the oldest of three children raised by his mother. On occasion, after his parents separated when he was 8, he had contact with his father, but Sam attributes his mother as the big influence in his life. In recent years, Sam has regained contact with his father but is conflicted about the genuineness and the meaningfulness of that relationship. He finds his par-

ticular attraction to his renewed contact with his father to be the hope of learning from some of his father's experiences as a Black man.

Sam characterizes his mother as a "traditional Black mother" from the school of "no nonsense" child rearing. She was strict and religious, with high expectations for school performance and achievement by her children. Her parental goal was to keep her children from "temptations of the street and flesh" with the objective of their succeeding in careers that improved their "station in life."

Sam's case illustrates the psychological experience of invisibility. One day, in therapy, he related an incident that is typical of cross-racial encounters experienced by Black men, which are momentarily disarming, confusing, and disillusioning, but also serve as potential triggers to the blood pressure–anger relationship noted earlier.

Sam was riding alone in the courthouse elevator one day when a young White woman entered at another floor. Sam gave her a slight acknowledging smile as she entered. He was dressed impeccably, as usual, in part from being mindful of his mother's emphasis on the importance of proper attire in public.

When the door closed, the young woman looked at Sam and said with fearfulness, "You're not going to hurt me, are you?"

Sam was stunned by her comment and its stinging audacity. The insinuation made him angry, with an impulse to strike back. His gut twisted into knots from the flood of emotions and thoughts of what to do. At the moment, Sam knew he could not let her get away with this insult. Before he realized it, he found himself stretching his frame to its fullest height, narrowing his eyes, then slowly growling through clinched teeth in a thinly veiled intimidating manner, "no, not today." At the next floor, they went their separate ways.

The experience was a "leveler" for Sam—a painful status reducer and reminder that, irrespective of appearance, biased attitudes about African American men distort judgment of their character. He knew he was being fitted into this woman's stereotypes about Black men as threatening and aggressive predators. Sam was not naive about these types of occurrences—Black male friends talked often of similar incidents. What rattled him was how this incident nearly surpassed his threshold for exercising good judgment in reacting to racial slights. The way he responded to the provocation was little short of confirming the young woman's expectations. He related imagining how an angry outburst of indignation on his part could have led to a racial incident, blown out of proportion with newspaper headlines: "Black man accosted White woman in elevator."

In his belief, his innocence would be left unreported, much less his hard-earned distinction as a lawyer. It would not be represented that his deportment as a Black man and professional was deliberately honed while he was growing up by his mother's insinuating words, "don't act like a ghetto

child—I've taught you better that that." Nor would anyone appreciate his inner struggle with properly projecting his conception of dignity as a man of African descent, in spite of people's reaction to him as a Black man. Barriers to positive and genuine interracial contact foster ignorance, feed stereotypes, and hide the real person behind prejudice.

Likewise, Nathan McCall (1994), in his autobiographical book, *Make You Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*, shared how an incident shaped his outlook as a young Black child. He and his siblings were with their mother in a local restaurant where he witnessed some White children acting wild and crazy with little discipline by their mother. The contrast was sharp. Whenever he or his brother "dared to cut up in public," it brought quick reactions from his mother, who admonished them to "stop acting like a nigger." He internalized the apparent difference in liberties as privileges bestowed on White children that came with skin color. As McCall observed, "without knowing what they were doing, a lot of adults in Black families passed along notions to their young about white folks' superiority" (p. 12).

Both White and Black children learn about what society dictates as acceptable social relations by public interpersonal behavior. African American child-rearing practices, which have well-intentioned origins as a survival tactic—like those imposed by McCall's mother—also have the consequence of racializing a child's socialization. Another example may be seen in Black mothers who educate their male children in how their hyperactive, assertive behavior runs a risk for misinterpretation as aggressive and hence threatening. Although this may be motivated by their necessary child-rearing goal of protecting their children, it contributes in its own way to the racial divide.

Stevenson (1995, 1997) has studied racial socialization and identity in African American male adolescents; he concluded that psychologically healthy outcomes are influenced by several variables in very complex ways. Protective, proactive, and adaptive racial socialization are identified as three distinct views of the world that Black male adolescents can acquire from messages and experiences given by caregivers. Those having protective racial socialization beliefs view the world as distrustful and filled with racially hostile intents; they learn caution and are encouraged to succeed despite these circumstances. Racism awareness teaching is an important component of protective racial socialization. Those who experience more proactive racial socialization are encouraged to focus on personal talent and cultural heritage, and less on racial hostility. Within proactive racial socialization are three important factors: spiritual and religious coping, cultural pride reinforcement, and extended family caring. Adaptive racial socialization is represented as an integration of protective and proactive beliefs (Stevenson, 1997).

Black men, either from parents, extended family, peers, or life experiences, learn to integrate conventional male values along with lessons specific to being African American men. This is the source of some of a person's inner tension about places and manner in which to show anger as well as aggressive or assertive behavior. Nevertheless, a common message explicitly shared, and most certainly inferred, by African American men is that one can, in many ways, be as much a man within the brotherhood of an African American community as he can be a "nigger" outside of it.

INVISIBILITY AS A DYNAMIC
ASPECT OF RACISM

Sam's response in the elevator, as well as his deeply contemplative self-analysis after the incident, are examples of a self-healing and adaptive process many African Americans employ after some incidents of prejudice. The curative step for Sam involved venting his anger to an African American colleague, Rich, in the office. This behavior also allowed him to receive corroboration for his indignation from someone who he thought could identify with it, and served as what I call a "sanity check." Although the verification he received from his African American colleague defused Sam's initial anger, it did not resolve the underlying issues.

Through several sessions, Sam's disclosures revealed how his indignation was connected both to his history of racial treatment and his mother's training about handling prejudice and discrimination. When provoked by such incidents, Sam recalls the many personal attributes of Black men that have been used to manipulate their acceptability in society (e.g., physique, size, skin color, intelligence, language, competitiveness, etc.). He talked about the conflict of values over acceptable behavior in this country for Black and White people.

Sam's mother instilled in him the view that his behavior reflected on how other people view African Americans. She imparted in him a virtual interracial-relations manual to go along with the lessons from his neighborhood. His mother firmly believed that her children, in their behavior and accomplishments, must represent what African Americans can achieve and insisted that their behavior defy the stereotyped and racist beliefs held about Black people. Although they were instructed to carry pride and dignity in being African American, there were prescribed limitations on how visible this pride should be; for example, Sam's mother did not like him to wear African-style jewelry or clothing, and she disapproved of pictures he would display and his penchant for being outspoken on race matters. One interpretation of Sam's mother's beliefs is that they might reflect aspects of what

Stevenson (1997) considers a proactive orientation to childcare. For Sam and his siblings, success in life was a reflection of their mother's parenting of them. Therefore Sam's mother, by her parenting, prescribed particular psychological and racial parameters for his personal identity (i.e., his visibility).

Like parenting styles, over time, African Americans' adaptive responses to psychological invisibility have been many and varied. Boyd-Franklin (1989) emphasized therapists' need to be familiar with the role extended family members and multisystems (e.g., church and social clubs) play within the African American community in supporting child-rearing goals. For example, Sam also attributed extended family activities with his uncles and several male cousins as shaping his view of himself as a man. They, along with his male peers, used a number of gathering places (e.g., the basketball court, corner store, parties, and school) to bond around various Black male brotherhood rites of passage and activities. The particular visibility and identity attained within the brotherhood of Black men has been instrumental and appropriate, as well as dysfunctional and destructive, in combating the racism felt from the larger society. Attempts by members of the African American community to direct the socialization and development of young Black men and to be a significant agent of positive visibility have led to the creation of "manhood" programs focused on training in heritage, pride, and responsibility (Watts & Jagers, 1997).

RACISM'S INFLUENCE ON
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Identity is achieved by successfully resolving the crises inherent in life choices and making purposeful decisions and stable commitments. Many developmental theorists (Crain, 1992; Muuss, 1996) represent the personal inner tension and conflict that make up the dynamic struggle to evaluate, choose, and internalize personal values, codes of conduct, and worldview amidst an array of life choices. Erik Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stages of development and James Marcia's (1980) expansion of it represent identity development as a product of individuals' experiencing crises from making choices and commitments in their lives.

In short, interactions with one's social environment evolve an ideological or philosophical view of the world that guides a person's behavior and develops an orientation toward work and career goals. Individuals evolve a set of guiding values governing interpersonal relationships. Accomplishing these objectives of identity development is dependent on the kind and quality of experiences with the world and one's intrapsychic makeup. It is these very

presumptions about experiences and their internalization that differentiates Black personal identity development from other groups'.

The encounter described by Sam illustrates the unique experience of racism by Black people in their dialectical struggle for personal identity—a struggle which resonates prominently in literary works portraying African American life. Although Sam did not describe the incident in which he had been involved in terms of invisibility, the theme of being mistaken for someone other than who he is has parallels in many literary accounts of such experiences for Black men (Bell, 1992; Boyd & Allen, 1995; Wright, 1940). For example, Ralph Ellison (1952), in his classic novel *Invisible Man,* portrayed the encounters in Harlem of a nameless narrating protagonist whose confusion and disillusionment is in reaction to his evolving personal identity being overshadowed by the needs of others, although obscured behind their avowed motives of acting in his best interest. This particular subjective experience represented by Ellison is not inconsistent with the tenets of conventional theory of identity development.

If we accept the above notions that our ideological, occupational, and interpersonal stance grounds our identity development, then African Americans' experiences of racism must be incorporated into the development of their worldviews accordingly. African Americans will, of course, vary in their degree of encounters with, reaction to, and internalization of the social climate of enmity toward Blacks that remains a part of the interracial environment. These variations only add to the complexity of the task of understanding group and individual differences in identity and personality development within the African American community.

Personal identity achievement for African Americans is influenced by attaining personal comfort with oneself, given racism and in spite of it. There is the presumed element of individual choice in this process, which may or may not conflict with society's values about conformity and identity depending on the ascribed values of the individual.

In my view, incidents of racial slights momentarily force the individual into a mold structured by stereotypes and the negative associations attached to them. Repeated incidents of racial slights support beliefs about unfair treatment and discrimination. They help develop an individual's social construction of racism. It is this cumulative experience with incidents of prejudice across the life span, along with indigenous training in race relations, that must be considered in understanding African American identity and personality development. This is represented in one of Sam's reflections that he thinks, feels, and acts like a lawyer until he is confronted with a racial slight that forces him to process the meaning of it to his life, if only momentarily.

Sam recalled numerous occasions when his personal outlook, aspirations, career choice, and friendships conflicted with what others expressed as

appropriate for a young Black man. Such confrontations challenged his sense of personal identity and made him think about his stance on being African American. Jones (1991) proposed some suggestions on how to view the intersection of racism and Black personality:

1. The thematic unity of Black personality exists both in the cumulative reactions to racism and in the ways an African cultural legacy influences the unfolding of Black culture.
2. If Black personality reflects cumulative adaptation to racial discrimination, then changes in Black personality should reflect changes in society.
3. Any theory of Black personality must account for: (a) The diversity of adaptations to the fundamental realities of racialism in this society, and (b) the fact that coping with the subtle and sometimes blatant forms that racism takes will often lead to strength of character and creativity in its expression (pp. 314-315).

Jones is clearly reemphasizing the importance of a dynamic perspective on personality, the underlying assumptions of which are (a) racism changes in society; (b) there is diversity in adaptive responses to racism; and (c) in spite of racism's barriers, positive adaptive responses can develop, such as individual resilience and personal efficacy.

THE DYNAMIC ELEMENT IN IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

In an evolving personal identity, the individual is engaged in a dynamic process that is both evaluative and selective. This dynamic process is represented in acquiring gender roles (Gilligan, 1993; Levant & Pollack, 1995; Pleck, 1984) and racial and ethnic identity (Cross, 1991; Landrine, 1995; Phinney, 1996; Thompson, 1996). Wachtel (1987) noted in his book, *Action and Insight*, that

> When one looks closely enough at the person's daily interactions, one finds that each person skews his experiences in distinctive fashion, selecting with whom to interact and evoking particular sides of those he does encounter so as to make his environment as unique and pathognomonic as a fingerprint. (p. 45)

Consequently, how we feel about ourselves and the role we assume from one social and relational context to the next depends on the consistency and continuity of the feedback, verifying and validating who we think and feel we are. From the moment-to-moment, day-to-day interactions with people and places, we draw and convert the psychological fuel that energizes and directs the evolution of our personal identity.

Therefore, we evaluate micro and macro interpersonal interactions on many different psychodynamic levels. When we interact, whether we are conscious of the process or not, our self-evaluative process is activated. If we consider the different roles we engage every day, evaluation and selection of encounters occur constantly. They make up our choices from food to career. If personal encounters challenge our sense of competence we can be shaken, but expect recovery to be consistent with our sense of identity and capacity to be resilient. Even if we do not experience this as a contemporaneous process, it is not unusual for us to reflect over the course of a day on the quality of our personal experiences, measure them against past experiences, then project and plan for future experiences in the manner of an "identity barometer." Encounters that challenge areas of weakness or self-doubt require a greater time for our sense of self to recuperate.

Sam was always vigilant and mindful about encounters with White women. A major part of his socialization as a Black man—from his mother, uncles, and peers—was to be vigilant, if not overreactive, to such potential circumstances, given the penchant for misinterpretations by the White community about Black male intent in contact with White women. This becomes particularly provocative, if not risky, for Black men if fear and threat to the safety of White women is construed. The various opinions, attitudes, and beliefs in both the White and African American community triggered by the O. J. Simpson trial is a case in point. Therefore, Sam knew the origin of this young woman's attitude, which angered him, and given that knowledge, he blamed himself for being blindsided by such an incident, which only angered him further. Although most encounters with White women have been uneventful for Sam, this incident served as a reminder to him that there remain associations attached to Black men that can be problematic for him in cross-racial interpersonal encounters.

Like everyone, Sam's sense of self is complex, and the purpose in sharing some detail of his thinking is to illustrate how a racialized interaction can challenge a person's view of self and sense of self-efficacy. For Sam, the issue was less the reaction of the woman, but the interpretation and meaning of his reaction for himself. Core areas of his self-concept were challenged, and these became the prevalent—albeit not the exclusive—themes in therapy after the provocation in the elevator. These areas concerned the following: (a) how he saw himself as a lawyer, (b) his identity as a young professional and the knowledge that early missteps could endanger his career, (c) carrying the burden of a "family success story" (i.e., the "street kid who made good") but having doubts about the precariousness of such status (i.e., did he have what it took to sustain achievement?), (d) concern about whether he was living up to the image of his mother's son, and (e) concern about whether he was carrying himself properly as a Black man.

Sam believed the self-doubts that had been activated by the encounter were unwarranted self-doubts. Moreover, he was bitter that such doubts arose at all and that they could still upset him. He saw his self-confidence and crystallization of self-purpose as far less stable than he had thought. He had seen himself as having possessed a greater ability to manage racial slights than he had demonstrated, and he had viewed himself as too strong to let his self-doubts unnerve him to the extent of what he feared would derail his momentum in pursuit of personal goals. He felt that, were he not so acquiescent to the influence of others who encouraged him to forsake his pessimistic view of racial matters, the woman's reaction would not have been so surprising. He felt he set himself up for racially loaded situations when he tried to suppress his instinct to view the world through a racial lens. In a moment of broader reflection, Sam worried whether he might be becoming less of an advocate against racial injustice with career accomplishments than in the past.

Sam wondered aloud what it was about him that prompted this young woman to react the way she had. His contemplation was not based in naiveté but originated out of momentary bewilderment, flooded with emotions from reacting to an unanticipated encounter. Sam knew exactly why and how incidents like these occur and chastised himself for the stupidity of his reflection. This awareness independently "stirred the emotional pot" for additional personal reflections as Sam worked to achieve a resolution for himself about his self-management in highly radicalized environments.

As an African American man, Sam has to struggle against society's stereotypes of Black men or be victimized by their determination of his personal identity through uninformed beliefs (Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1995). He is also dismissive of people's intolerance of him as a Black man because Sam believes his Afrocentric worldview anchors his identity both in and out of the African American community. Such a centering of self for him makes his dealing with misconceptions about himself more a liability of social interactions in a racist society. He knows on many levels that through the utilization of stereotypes, society categorizes and contains the status of individuals and groups as a means of determining membership and acceptance in the larger society. Social barriers to genuine meaningful contact between most ethnic groups permit their misconceptions to disproportionately guide their assumptions about another group's differences (Franklin, 1998). In my opinion, this is one of the outcomes of a racialized climate in society.

Sam believes in the importance of his African ancestry, and he believes that he can find a way to display and project that part of his personal identity under any circumstances. On the other hand, he finds racism rejecting of what he feels and declares himself to be as well as what the African American community strives to be. Therefore, he feels obligated to repel the imposition of

an identity development process, and conforming to societal expectations, if that process is formed out of disrespect for him.

From my model, I see that competing forces affect Sam's personal identity: His own unique struggle to develop his identity according to his sense of himself as a man of African descent versus society's pressure to conform to normative rules for identity development, with strong sanctions about inclusion of attributes associated with men of African descent. Competing values about personal identity development and personal comfort are, therefore, at work. There are independent criteria and judgments about acceptable behavior, rewards for that behavior, and places validating and legitimizing that behavior. There are Sam's beliefs about what is appropriate behavior and society's and the African American community's sanctions of appropriate behavior. The correspondence between the various beliefs have both overlapping and independent areas, that is, Sam's beliefs and behavior are sometimes consistent with the expectations of society and the African American community, and sometimes they are not.

INVISIBILITY AND RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

For African Americans, doubt and uncertainty about acceptance can arise from the personal—a simple racial slight—to the impersonal—reading about the glaring socioeconomic disparity between African Americans and Whites caused by racism.

SENSITIVITY AND AWARENESS

Awareness of and sensitivity to the racial context—including blatant forms of discrimination, subtle innuendoes and slights from individual microaggressions, and institutional racism—is essential to the experience of invisibility. Jones (1997) proposed that we are exposed to three levels of racism: individual, institutional, and cultural. He noted that "these correspond to levels of analysis and are distinguished by the interactions among psychological, behavioral, institutional, structural, and cultural dynamics in the unfolding of racialist beliefs and practices" (p. 13). Awareness and sensitivity to these racial contexts cultivates a "group instinct," or what is commonly known among African Americans as a "sixth sense." The gut level psychological receptors that activate an intuitive detection of racial intent and acts of prejudice reinforce the feeling of invisibility.

Many interracial encounters across the life spans of Black men and women reinforce this psychological experience of being invisible. In the history of African Americans, that experience has particularly been determined by conflict and power issues with White men (Bowser & Hunt, 1996; Kovel, 1970). A popular depiction of this was the powerful TV adaptation of the book *Roots* (Haley, 1976), which explored the multigenerational legacy of an African American family from slavery to the civil rights era.

The magnitude of one's response to any given incident of racial prejudice depends on personal awareness and sensitivity. In my view, this phenomenon is essential to racial identity development theory, the essential theme of which is growth and maturation of the individual in interaction with his or her interpersonal environment. The theory and research on racial identity development has grown and expanded over the years (Carter, 1995; Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990) to become the subject of controversy and lively debate.

Level of awareness and sensitivity to one's interpersonal environment is represented by what theorists define as the attributes and behavior manifested by the various ego statuses. For Carter (1995), racial identity is not limited to awareness and understanding of one's own group, but encompasses that of other dominant or nondominant groups as well.

> Racial identity represents ego differentiation or statuses, where one's racial worldview is more or less mature. Less mature ego statuses derive definition from external sources (peers, media, family, institutions, and so on), and more mature and differentiated racial identity ego statuses are internally derived through a personal process of exploration, discovery, integration, and maturation. (p. 88)

Racial identity is a dynamic process. Helms and Piper (1994) noted that

> It is possible for each of the racial-group appropriate statuses to develop in a person and govern her or his race-related behavior; whether they do depends on a combination of life experiences, especially intrapsychic dissonance and race-related environmental pressures, as well as cognitive readiness. (pp. 127-128)

Although revised by further thinking and research, many theorists fundamentally adhere to five ego statuses in racial identity development (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990).

1. *Preencounter* is the first ego status, when the salience of race is low, little awareness exists of social and racial concerns, or one's own group is devalued.

2. *Encounter* is the ego status brought about by some "eye opening" incident such as a microaggression in which there is confusion, disillusionment, and a loss of clarity in perspective.

3. *Immersion-emersion* is seen as a transitional ego status in which race becomes highly salient. This can be seen, for example, in Afrocentrism. There is idealization, a new basis for values, commitment, loyalty, and a metamorphosis driven by one's racial group as the standard. Both Cross and Helms note that this process brings a particular anxiety and hypervigilance around race matters. At a later point in this ego status, theoretically, the individual, gaining clarity and new perspective, lessens his or her embrace of all that is Black and opens his or her worldview to a broader and gradually more racially inclusive one.

4. *Internalization* is the ego status level in which there is more balanced perspective and acceptance of one's own racial group as well as objective assessment of other racial groups. There is a greater level of inner self-confidence and flexibility in thinking.

5. *Internalization-commitment* is an ego status reflecting an integration of values that allows for life-long commitment that embraces awareness and pride in one's own group worth as well as the virtues intrinsic to other racial groups. This status is endowed with genuine biculturalism and a humanistic worldview.

Although theorists offer a complex presentation about racial identity development—how it evolves and becomes integrated into our personality— what is lacking is the clinical perspective: What is the person's intrapsychic process when race is so salient?

My understanding of racial identity development theory, combined with my personal clinical experience treating African American patients, leads me to the following conclusions: Racial identity development (a) is dynamic, not static; (b) includes ego statuses whose boundaries are flexible; (c) is contextual; (d) evolves over the life span and is thus responsive to the age, generation, and life history of the individual; and (e) contains important dynamic features such as recycling as well as regression and fixation.

I see race and racial identity as one dimension of an individual's personal identity. The degree to which it is primary to one's personal identity varies based on context and individual interpretation of life encounters. A person may have a dominant racial worldview, but it may not be referenced in every interpersonal circumstance. In addition, context and social milieu are instrumental in how racial identity develops. For example, family and peers can play a powerful role in socialization about race matters.

Carter (1995) noted that "the manner in which one's own racial identity is integrated into his or her personality depends on style, and the manner in which important peers validate, deny, or ignore this aspect of one's identity"

(p. 89). We must also add to the equation the life transitions peers and family make as we change over time. Continued internalization of coping strategies over the life span constitutes an ever-changing reference point in our managing the stress and anxiety from racial encounters.

In my view, racial identity development is dynamic; the process engages awareness, sensitivity, and individual responsiveness to racial environments. This is related to managing feelings of invisibility in which the person monitors the interpersonal environment for the recognition, satisfaction, validation, and legitimacy that are essential to his or her sense of worthiness. It is connected to the intrapsychic makeup of that individual and is therefore a part of the internal structure and functioning of his or her personal identity.

Attaining certain ego statuses, I believe, is not as clearly evident clinically as it is perhaps represented in theory. Maturation, context, and attunement are some of the factors we, as clinicians, assess in the behavior and dynamic issues presented by our patients. Confusion and disillusionment—essential to the invisibility syndrome as well as being transition markers in racial identity development—address the vulnerability of people.

Parham has introduced the notion of "recycling" in racial identity development. Life circumstances can bring encounters that can uproot personal beliefs and force a return to the developmental process. He believes "a person could theoretically achieve identity resolution by completing one cycle through the nigrescence process (internalization), and as a result of identity confusion, recycle through the stages again" (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991, pp. 331-332). Consequently, one's racial identity, like other dimensions of personal identity, does not contain a pure trajectory.

One illustration can be seen in the psychological devastation that results from downsizing and reorganization in business, as represented in a seven-article series in *The New York Times* (Bragg, 1996). Many therapists have treated patients whose loss of privilege as a result of layoffs has caused them to reanalyze their personal or ideological stance on racial identity: Ethnic group status depends on stability of privilege and acquisitions in this country. Jones (1997) succinctly captured the significance of racial identity: "Who one is depends, in part, on what racial group one belongs to, what sociopolitical position that group has in society, and how one is socialized within that group and in relation to other groups" (p. 288). Individual vulnerability is, therefore, tied to group vulnerability.

Although Parham's notion of recycling is predicated on a return to previous ego statuses, resolution of any particular ego status may not be repeated in the same fashion previously attained. Traumatic encounters that precipitate regression will likely result in psychological scar tissue as part of recovery.

Moreover, people can get fixated in the process of development both in the growth process and during regressive episodes. Individual psychological vulnerability is an outcome of the pathogens intrinsic to the invisibility syndrome, and I would therefore conclude that it is equally a risk factor in racial identity development.

RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR AGAINST RACISM

One of my beliefs is that racial identity development can serve as a buffer against the deleterious internalization of racism. As discussed above, encounters of prejudice and discrimination make physical health and psychological well-being for African Americans vulnerable and at risk (Braithwaite & Taylor, 1992; Franklin, 1993, 1997; Neighbors & Jackson, 1996). Rejection reinforces a belief that cross-racial relations are deceptive and manipulative interpersonal encounters. A person can choose to handle this circumstance by denial or acknowledgment. Once acknowledged and engaged, the person must then choose the best means to cope with the situation.

Although awareness and vigilance are necessary to manage racism's everyday stress, this state of readiness for its unpredictable emergence is a risk factor to personal resilience. *Personal resilience* can be viewed as the individual's effective management of the hassles of daily life, cumulating over one's life history, which enhances one's adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies. Rutter (1985) considers resilience as an amplified availability of "protective factors . . . influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person's response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome" (p. 600).

Racism is a form of adversity that requires a capacity to be resilient, particularly when well-being is at serious risk. Confusion and disillusionment brought about by the invisibility syndrome may or may not be connected to a process of racial identity development. But the disruptive nature of a racial encounter can force individuals into a "sanity check," much as Sam sought from a fellow African American colleague after the elevator incident. This corroboration and validation from a fellow African American regarding the legitimacy of one's reaction to a racially provocative incident is an ethnic/cultural practice for African Americans that bolsters protective factors against racism and serves as a device of personal resilience that helps one bounce back from an emotionally injurious encounter that threatens self-esteem.

Many African Americans have risen above their encounters with racism to thrive in the United States. Prominent examples are Jackie Robinson

(Rampersad, 1997), Arthur Ashe (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993), Colin Powell (Powell & Persico, 1995), and Maya Angelou (1969), but there are also many examples to be found in the lives of the less visible, "average" person (Boyd & Allen, 1995; Chiplin, 1996). In many models of resilience, a race consciousness, sense of self, and personal efficacy was apparent in the face of encounters in racialized environments. Racial identity development, therefore, can be viewed as an adaptive response to racism. A case can conceivably be made for how each ego status functions as an adaptive response to racism.

Cohler, Stott, and Musick (1995) raised the importance of culture or ethnicity in origin and progress of personal distress. They emphasized the importance of understanding culturally constructed meanings of psychological health, illness, distress, and self-help for interventions to be effective.

> Recognition of psychological development is essential for the study of psychological resilience to major psychopathology across the life course. Both expected and eruptive life changes, as well as shared knowledge of self and others, can provide constraints and opportunities for understanding particular life experiences. (p. 753)

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN INVISIBILITY AND RACIAL IDENTITY MODELS

In my opinion, racism and the individual's reaction to racialized encounters are key elements to understanding the dynamic process of both the invisibility syndrome paradigm and the racial identity development model. An important distinction between the two models lies in intent and scope. The invisibility syndrome paradigm is designed as an explanatory model to aid clinicians in understanding the intrapsychic experience for African American men dealing with racialized encounters. It is also applicable to the experiences of invisibility for African American women, as more development of the model with their examples will show in the future.

The scope of the invisibility syndrome paradigm is broader, I posit, than the racial identity model because it allows for interpretation of greater domains of human experiences that make up one's personal identity, as impacted by encounters of racism. In addition, the paradigm is intended to help assess personal self-efficacy and resilience in the face of encounters with racialized environments. Racial identity theory is salient to the invisibility syndrome paradigm, but so are other facets of personal identity development—gender, sexuality, marital/intimate partner identity, parent, worker identity,

and so forth. As clinicians, we grapple with these intrapsychic aspects of the person as well.

Race and racial identity development are, to be sure, components of how to be a man, intimate partner, and father or the internalization of sexual orientation and spirituality. But these "identities" within personal identity can vary in importance and attribution. Likewise, they can vary in their own complex developmental process. Certainly achieving an identity as an intimate partner or identity as a father can be viewed as having its own intricate growth process akin to attaining ego statuses in racial identity development.

The invisibility syndrome paradigm allows us to evaluate how a racial encounter or a racialized milieu in a given incident impacts an African American's sense of self as a man, intimate partner, father, and worker. The assumption is that, irrespective of the particular racial identity ego status, encounters in a racialized milieu can create the feeling of invisibility along with the concomitant stress and necessity to manage it.

Recognition of and reaction to a racial incident, in and of itself, does not have to engage or alter significantly racial identity development. It could, however, have a greater impact on another dimension of personal identity development, such as gender. For example, Sam's encounter in the elevator did not significantly challenge his sense of Africentrism as much as it did his evolving identity as a professional man in relationship to his Africentric worldview. That the two interact is a given, but the subtlety and primacy of that interaction for at least clinical interpretation is important to guiding therapeutic intervention.

THE CASE OF SAM AND RICH

Sam's incident on the elevator serves to illustrate how we might use both the invisibility syndrome paradigm and racial identity development in clinical practice. Interesting also, differences between Sam and his colleague's ego profile, or style of expressing it, provide insight into the complexity and difficulty of applying these models in an actual treatment process.

When Sam portrayed the incident to his colleague, Rich, he did so in a demonstrative fashion that clearly represented his lingering indignation and hurt by the situation. Moreover, interspersed in his comments were his observations about the historical treatment of Black men, the perpetuation of racism in the United States, how Black men are constantly fighting stereotypes of them, and how the African American community needs to band closer together.

From his remarks, but more from my therapy sessions with Sam, it was apparent that his anger in part came from his identification with the historical legacy of oppression for African Americans in the United States and a strong sense of Africentrism, mixed with beliefs that he could be a success in this country. He also admitted that, in spite of his encounters with racism, he has had, and probably will in the future have, genuine help and acceptance by a small number of Whites. Given the theoretical model of racial identity development, and based on my clinical judgment from how Sam represented himself in therapy, his attitudes parallel the immersion-emersion ego profile.

Although my knowledge of Rich extends only as far as Sam's representations in therapy, Sam has related other stories about their relationship in and out of the workplace. Sam told me that Rich, on first seeing Sam from a distance approaching his desk after the elevator incident, knew that Sam was distressed about something. Because Sam had come to him in this mood numerous times in the past, Rich did not seem particularly alarmed, and, as was Rich's fashion, he immediately sought to calm Sam, and cautioned him not to overreact even before Sam disclosed any details of the incident. As Sam ultimately admitted, he was frequently reactive and outspoken about many scenarios of racial slights and discrimination.

According to Sam, Rich's behavior was at great variance: Rich was never as reactive or as outspoken as Sam was, and, in fact, Sam thought him too accommodating of the powers that be. Despite this difference, however, Rich never belittled Sam's views; he responded to Sam's dilemma with insightful recommendations based on a broader analysis of the circumstances that was inclusive, if not totally accepting, of Sam's perspective. According to Sam, both he and Rich had similar views about race relations; their differences were of temperament and style. Rich seemed more forgiving and philosophical about these issues than Sam. What Sam saw as binding their relationship was that Rich was the more level-headed of the two, whose observations and suggestions seemed often strategically appropriate and in Sam's best interest.

OBSERVATIONS

Based on how Sam portrayed Rich, I would estimate that Rich's racial identity development also corresponds to the immersion-emersion attitudes, with Rich perhaps in its latter phase if not incorporating features of the internalization ego profile.

The lack of definitive theoretical or research demarcation of intrapsychic transitions in racial identity—as we can see in a case like Rich, who shows

evidence of overlap in both ego profiles—is the reason I emphasize the need to conceptualize the model as being dynamic, with flexible boundaries delineating ego profiles. This degree of fluidity, however, does not make the context, content, or developmental process, as outlined for each ego profile in the racial identity model, any less salient. It means that this is an area for needed clinical research to ascertain in greater detail the intrapsychic structures and functions of racial identity ego profiles in psychological well-being and self-efficacy.

In sum, I return to a basic premise of mine that the invisibility-visibility dilemma for African Americans is interactive with racial identity development but also can be triggered by requirements in other domains of personal identity, such as gender (Franklin, 1999; Wyatt, 1997). Sorting out how race and gender have independent and overlapping rules of exclusion and inclusion in society and then how a person interprets those rules contributes to the enigma about acceptance, rewards, and legitimization discussed in the invisibility syndrome paradigm.

Nevertheless, a struggle of African American men is determining how to accept and be a person of African descent in a society where one's group is a primary object of prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, a highly significant psychological context for African American men is being in an ethnic group whose racial identity is highly differentiated, with little group consensus about what it is to be African American. This lack of consensus permits a range of personal inner conflict about individual acceptance of being an African American man.

Therefore, racial identity development for African American men has its own affective and cognitive stressors related to affiliation with people of African descent. But it also is affected by interactions with White people and other ethnic groups as they equally are impacted by context and transition in their own ethnic group identity development (Bowser & Hunt, 1996; Carter, 1995; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Helms, 1990; Root, 1996).

Racial identity development also can be enigmatic for African American men in their efforts to resolve a "persona dilemma"—the correspondence between one's public and private identity. It can create its own confusion and disillusionment, disappointment, and anger, which can be particularly psychologically destructive if there is significant dissonance between one's public and private identity. Consequently, persons can reject or regress in their racial identity development because the developmental tasks and contextual supports are too problematic, making alternative personal identity paths attractive for relief of emotional distress and acquisition of personal comfort.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING
AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

The responsibility we assume, as therapists, is to bring professional exper-
tise to our patients when providing counseling and psychotherapy. To me,
that includes not only competence in the theory and skills of psychotherapy
that we adhere to, but also an awareness and understanding of the context and
content of our patients' lives and the relevance of our theory and skills to
address them. I support the position that our professional competence must
include acquiring expertise with the issues formed by patients' cultural,
social, political, and economic context affecting their daily lives. Toward that
goal, my invisibility syndrome paradigm and the racial identity development
model represent efforts to advance thinking about how to conceptualize sig-
nificant circumstances making up the life experience for African American
men.

These models also have implications for helping us to gain greater insight
into the factors that might shape the motivation of African American men, for
example, in the usage of mental health services. To illustrate, I will offer the
example of my efforts with a therapeutic support group for Black men. But as
represented by the African American community's initiatives with manhood
training programs (Watts & Jagers, 1997), there is an urgent need for innova-
tive, ethnic-appropriate interventions to improve effective delivery of ser-
vices to Black men. Along with the common considerations and general
process of starting a support group, engaging African American men in this
instance used specific ethnic-group-focused conceptual models to aid in pre-
paring and launching a particular intervention. It also served as a reference in
presenting the opportunity to the men and theoretically grounding preassess-
ment of patient attributes and life circumstances that matched the strategy
and goals of the intervention.

The three main areas of challenge I faced were, in particular: (a) getting
the men to join such a group (the "getting them into therapy" dilemma), (b)
the men's developing trust in the group process and each other, and (c) their
feeling able to make personal disclosures.

GETTING MEN TO JOIN A GROUP

The task of getting African American men to join a group is more formida-
ble than getting them to come for individual treatment, in my opinion. This
assumption is based not only on professional experience but on knowledge
that the structure of a group has many additional gender barriers for Black
men than individual treatment.

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

Getting the men to join the group included recognizing these barriers but believing that a forum—focused on talking about the struggles of being a Black man in today's world—would, in its appeal, supersede personal inhibitions. This thinking was augmented by both my theoretical notions of invisibility—that Black men feel their talents and genuine persona are challenged by racism—and the presumption that they would respond to a forum that validates, acknowledges, and respects their inner feelings. Another initial presumption was that the appeal of this support group would be augmented by a certain level of racial identity development and awareness in the men. Moreover, initial credibility for the enterprise was enhanced by the therapist's being an African American man advocating for the "righteousness" of this kind of group. Certainly my race as well as my own projected racial identity profile and self-efficacy as a therapist contributes to the ongoing debate about race and racial identity of therapist-patient matches in psychotherapy effectiveness. But race of the therapist issue is not determinative: Therapists from other ethnic groups have more professional latitude in devising better treatment intervention matches with specific patient attributes than is generally used by them. It seems to me that, by evolving theory and interventions more attuned to, and in consideration of, the cultural, ethnic, and social context of our patient populations, we will facilitate usage and effectiveness of our services for them.

DEVELOPING TRUST IN THE GROUP

Part of developing trust in the group was accomplished by the connectedness between the stated purpose and goals of the group and the needs of the men. Once again, in thinking about bridging the legendary trust gap for Black men in any kind of mental health service, the invisibility paradigm helped me to understand first how mistrust, bred by microaggressions and racism in the men's lives, would create a trust barrier.

Furthermore, as a result of a preliminary assessment of their encounters with racism, I made a clinical judgment about their racial identity attitudes and hypothesized about the manner in which they may evaluate, and respond

to, trust issues in the group. This kind of assessment was helpful in evaluating the possible inhibitions and difficulties the men may encounter with each other and the group process.

For example, men in the group who epitomized more of the characteristics of persons with an immersion-emersion ego profile had greater suspicion of the broader perspective of those men who were closer to the emersion and internalization ego profile. The former, embracing a more Africentric perspective, represented their experiences more passionately as being linked to the oppression of Black men and therefore received the broader and more inclusive perspective of men closer to the internalization ego profile with some suspicion.

Likewise, understanding the meaning and experience of trust for these men was facilitated by initially encouraging them to talk about their everyday experiences of racism and how such experiences made them feel misunderstood and invisible as men. By assessing this intrinsic stress from the invisibility-visibility struggle, I also gained some insight into how they might handle trust issues in the group. This was acquired by evaluating the degree of confusion and disillusionment the men experienced as they reacted to being treated in accordance with the common pejorative stereotypes of Black men and how they psychologically bounced back and projected their desired personal identity. In other words, how they represented their personal resilience in their life stories was crucial to clinical interpretation and guiding of the therapeutic process.

A crucial part of self-efficacy for these African American men was their ability to mitigate oppressive forces of racism. Their belief in the success of their efforts to buffer everyday hassles of racism was an indicator of self-confidence and trust in themselves. Concomitantly, their representation of perceived self-efficacy and personal resilience was considered a measure of the degree to which they would also trust themselves in this group process.

FEELING ABLE TO MAKE DISCLOSURES

The context of the group was also important for facilitating disclosures by the men (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1997). By virtue of the intent of the group, which set a tone and expectation about climate, as well as the racial identity of the men, an atmosphere built on respect for "codes of the brotherhood" for disclosures (e.g., you can't be weak or show vulnerability to prejudice) determined the initial pace and willingness of the men to share. Therefore, discussing life as a Black man as well as the inclination of "brothers" to vent their indignation from racial treatment were capitalized on to set the initial focus and pace of the group.

My thinking about starting this therapeutic support group specifically for African American men relied on the assumptions of the invisibility syndrome paradigm about the importance of recognition, validation, and sense of legitimacy in visibility. These elements were obvious in the men's initial sharing about common episodes of racial slights but also subsequently as future sessions reduced the prohibitions of the brotherhood from talking about other personally vulnerable areas.

To continue the bonding and comfort with disclosures among the men in later group sessions, I focused my intervention on several key goals: (a) Each man was helped to voice his views and concerns about life in general, being a Black man in today's society, and expectations and assumptions about men; (b) each man was helped to become aware that his life experiences are in many ways a mirror, and thus a reflection, of the others' issues as Black men—their silent concerns about being unique in their inner experiences are unnecessary because there are many shared experiences; (c) group sessions routinely included the men's providing each other with therapeutically guided recommendations and suggestions about managing a personal life issue. This facet of the group process was essential to the men's learning and experiencing the support of each. Earlier sessions limited this experience to less emotionally loaded issues and those likely to yield positive outcomes from their efforts, such as setting ground rules and sanctions for attendance and lateness to group sessions.

A major part of the intervention was to end every session by the group's forming a circle, hand in hand, heads bowed, eyes closed in a moment of silence. This was considered, by me, a way for the men to process the group session together differently, symbolically attaching ourselves to our mutual capacity to overcome personal struggles and attain personal empowerment. The aim of the circle is to reinforce their experience of the group as a support as well as achieve a collective closure to the group process. It also was building on the symbolism and significance of a circle in the African and African American traditions and values. The circle is ended by any member saying the word "peace," with each member being embraced by each member.

CONCLUSION

Working with African American men in a group or a variety of other settings, I found that their stories contain experiences with racism. Sam's encounter is an example of how a particular experience can challenge and consolidate beliefs about identity in a racialized environment. It also represents the importance of understanding the implications for the intrapsychic process in an ethnically appropriate manner. Therapy, with a therapist knowl-

edgeable about African American men, their particular encounters and response to racism, and the challenges to their dignity and self-respect, is extremely useful and important in the therapeutic process.

For example, with the therapist's projecting this wisdom, coupled with the mantle of professional confidentiality, empathy, and skills, Sam permitted himself to disclose his doubts without the guardedness that comes with apprehension over being judged as a brother, a man not able to handle properly a racialized encounter. Moreover, his comfort level and bond to the therapist allowed him to feel safe in talking about his periods of confusion and disillusionment about life as a Black man. In particular, Sam expressed comfort in feeling that the therapist understood his dilemma without Sam's needing to unduly educate the therapist about the common experiences of Black men.

Sam's willingness to struggle with his uncertainties was important. The therapy was active, supportive, and empowering in its goals. With both the invisibility syndrome paradigm and racial identity models, clinical hypotheses were developed, related interpretations were applied, and self-empowerment strategies explored, with behavioral outcomes. The encounter forced Sam to reexamine his integration of his Afrocentric worldview, his management strategies in racialized social environments, the implications of his career aspirations, and his relationships with others. He became more clear about the lessons his mother and extended family provided about being an African American man. He was also clearer about how he differed from those interpretations of life and where he has different decisions to make as the first member of his family to be a professional.

In conclusion, the invisibility syndrome paradigm allows for the clinician to evaluate personal self-efficacy and resilience of African American men, given their life experiences in a racialized milieu. Used with the racial identity models, it allows for representing a greater complexity of the African American male experience, as well as better accounting for within-group differences in response to racism. An example is the analysis and evaluation of microaggressions, particularly the impact of everyday racial hassles, and their relative contributions to the intrapsychic invisibility-visibility struggle of the individual African American man.

Finally, this model is in need of systematic research in the tradition of efforts to substantiate racial identity development and other theoretical models based on the ethnic and cultural context of patients' lives. However, research efforts with the invisibility syndrome paradigm must have basic and applied goals in keeping with the intent of the model to enhance the delivery of health and mental health services to African American men and women.

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