CENTER FOR GENDER IN ORGANIZATIONS

VIEWING DYADS IN TRIADIC TERMS: TOWARD A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE IN/VISIBLE THIRD IN RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS DIFFERENCE

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CONTENTS

Typically, when we examine relationships between two groups of people, we limit our examination to the two parties of interest. Outsiders may have some influence on the relationship, but they are clearly defined as being outside the boundary of the relationship in question. This paper presents an analytical framework for understanding attempts at building alliances, partnerships, and working relationships across race, sexual identity, and culture. The framework suggests that dyadic relationships be examined in triadic terms to gain a fuller understanding of the dynamics between the two. Further, this paper argues that there is asymmetry with respect to the influence of outsiders on the relationship, ensuring that the two parties will not perceive third party influence in an identical way. The in/visible third party is both present for one party and absent for the second, making it difficult for the two parties to establish a foundation for working together. Three illustrations of the framework are offered, using potential partnerships across race, union membership, and culture to illustrate the dynamics.

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Typically, when we study relationships between two groups of people, we limit our examination to the two parties of interest. The influence of outsiders receives less attention. It may even be considered desirable to exclude them from consideration in order to concentrate on interactions between the two parties in question. This paper presents an alternative analytical framework for understanding attempts at building alliances, partnerships, and working relationships across race, sexual identity, and culture. The focus is on a two-party relationship; however, the framework suggests that an examination of the influence of a third party enriches our understanding of the dynamics between the two (Wildschut, Insko, and Gaertner, 2002; Proudford, 1998; Labianca et al., 1998).

Two groups that are attempting to work together often reach an impasse at which they realize that fundamental—perhaps insurmountable—differences threaten their ability to build a constructive relationship. Bartunek et al. (1996) offer a model for collaborative advocacy in order to manage these difficulties. Their approach, and similar ones (e.g., Bond and Keys, 1993; Gray, 1989; Pasquero, 1991; Cross, 1992; Tung, 1993; Linnehan and Konrad, 1999) argue persuasively that acknowledging and legitimizing group memberships substantially improves intergroup interactions. Still, these approaches minimize the role of outside influence on the relationship. External influence is viewed as a distraction, and as an irrational, unfocused strategy for analyzing and resolving intergroup tension and conflict. Here I argue that outsiders, or more specifically, the level of awareness accorded outsiders, may have a significant impact on the two-party relationship. Further, this paper argues that there is asymmetry with respect to the influence of outsiders on the relationship. That is, the two parties will not perceive third-party influence in an identical way, thus making it difficult to establish a foundation for working together.

In the first section, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the framework. This framework relies on embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer and Smith, 1982) and its notion of organization and identity groups as basic building blocks in organizations. The theory also provides a basis for understanding the differential experiences of diverse groups in organizations. While classical organization theory supports the notion of an "organization man" (Whyte, 2002), embedded intergroup theory asserts that no such being—devoid of any identity save organizational identity—exists. Groups, and the individuals that comprise them, differ in terms of their organization and identity memberships, ensuring that they have differential experiences, attitudes, and outcomes in and outside of organizational life.[1]

The second section offers a triadic framework for understanding dyadic relationships. People who share one or more group memberships often think that they are similar enough—or have interests that are similar enough—to work together for change. Similarity raises expectations about the possibility of working together, but can ultimately be a source of dissension and conflict if the relationship to relevant other third parties is poorly understood.

In the third section, I offer three illustrations of the framework. The first case is a detailed discussion of the relationship between black and white women in the United States. These two

groups have a long history of attempts, successes, and failures at working together inside and outside of organizations. White men, I argue, operate as an *in/visible third* party—visible to black women but less so to white women—in a way that profoundly impacts the black-white female relationship. The second case focuses on the relationship between union and non-union gay/lesbian organizations. In this case, straight (heterosexual) labor operates as the in/visible third. The final illustrative case challenges prevailing assumptions about the ease with which "people of color" unite. White U.S. citizens, as the in/visible third in this example, significantly influence exchanges between and among people of color in the United States. The notion of the in/visible third does not refer to the physical presence and active participation of outsiders such as white men, straight labor, and white U.S. citizens. Instead, it captures and illuminates the amorphous, diffuse influence that those outsiders have on the way in which the two parties of interest make sense of their interactions. While the first case provides an in-depth discussion of the dynamics associated with the in/visible third, the latter two cases are offered to suggest a wider application of the framework. I close by discussing the implications of the in/visible third for understanding the complex tangle of dynamics with which diverse groups contend as they engage in alliance-building efforts (Proudford, 1998).

II.   VIEWING DYADIC ALLIANCES AS TRIADS: AN EMBEDDED INTERGROUP THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer and Smith, 1982) posits that individuals and organizations actively and continuously attempt to manage the intersection of identity and organization groups. Embedded intergroup theory identifies two types of groups that exist in a workplace: identity groups and organization groups (Alderfer, 1977, 1986). Identity groups include those based on race, ethnicity, gender, and age. Because members of these groups have similar historical experiences, they develop a shared view of the world. Organization groups—those based on function and hierarchy—have equivalent work histories and thus share organizational views. Organization group membership boundaries are highly permeable and frequently change as people enter and exit organizations. By contrast, identity group memberships are non-negotiable, either remaining constant or changing as an outgrowth of natural development (Alderfer and Smith, 1982).

Conflicts, distortions, and misperceptions that arise as individuals attempt to reconcile these two types of memberships become manifest in varying ways based on the pattern of embeddedness in an organization. Applied to race, for example, embeddedness refers to the extent to which power differences between racial groups at the societal level (suprasystem) are reflected in cross-race relationships in the organization (system) and between groups (subsystem). Congruent embeddedness is evident when power differentials between racial groups are the same across the subsystem, system, and suprasystem levels, while incongruent embeddedness occurs when the power and influence vary across the three levels. Congruently-embedded groups can also be described as dominant, advantaged (Tatum, 1997), or based on a majority (Waldo, 1999; Konrad, Winter and Gutek, 1992; Latane and Wolf, 1981; Webber, 1974) in that they enjoy the privileges associated with being a subset of the larger context. One may observe embeddedness and its impact at both the interpersonal and intergroup levels (Ragins, 1997). Behavior for diverse individuals can be expected to vary even if they occupy the same structural position in the organization.   The intersection of structure with other dimensions of differences produces unique and distinct situations for diverse individuals (Bond and Pyle, 1998), ensuring that their perceptions, interpretation, and experiences are not identical.

Congruently-embedded groups get advantages based on institutionalized privilege (Linnehan and Konrad, 1999; Jacques, 1997). Changing the context, or systems of privilege, often involves persuading the congruently-embedded, or dominant, members of the organization to alter the work climate, change promotion opportunity structures (DiPrete, 1987), and improve interaction processes (Ibarra, 1995; Bond and Pyle, 1998) such that members of incongruently embedded groups can successfully operate in the organization. Thus, when two groups build an alliance in order to effect change, they are likely seeking to influence a third, more powerful, dominant group.   In this way, embedded intergroup theory suggests the presence of third-party influence on a two-party alliance. The framework for analyzing interactions between two diverse (multiple identity or organization group memberships) parties can be stated as follows:

Given that

- X is a group membership, with X_1 representing the congruently-embedded group membership and X_2 representing the incongruently-embedded group membership
- Y is a group membership, with Y_1 representing the congruently-embedded group membership and Y_2 representing the incongruently-embedded group membership,
- XY is a group, with multiple (X and Y) group memberships,

a diverse organization would be comprised of the following groups,

$$X_1Y_1; X_1Y_2; X_2Y_1; X_2Y_2,$$

where X_1Y_1 is the most congruently-embedded group and X_2Y_2 is the most incongruently-embedded group. We can expect that groups will engage in an alliance in order to influence the most congruently-embedded group, X_1Y_1, making X_1Y_1 the in/visible third.

Potential alliances in order to bring about change can be illustrated as follows:

$$\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_1\}$$

$$\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_2\}$$

$$\{X_2Y_1, X_2Y_2\}$$

In the case of $\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_1\}$, there is symmetry. Put another way, X_1Y_1 is visible to both parties. This is because both X_1Y_2 and X_2Y_1 have group memberships that differ from X_1Y_1.

Asymmetry occurs when one party has a group membership in common with the most congruently-embedded group and the second party does not. Hence, we can expect asymmetry in the $\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_2\}$ and $\{X_2Y_1, X_2Y_2\}$ alliance, such that:

For $\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_2\}$, X_1Y_1 is invisible to X_1Y_2 and visible to X_2Y_2.

For $\{X_2Y_1, X_2Y_2\}$, X_1Y_1 is invisible to X_2Y_1 and visible to X_2Y_2.

In/visibility arises in connection with the salience of congruently-embedded (and often, valued) group memberships. Tatum (1997) has noted this tendency in examining the psychological development of identity. She notes that individuals have multiple identities that comprise their sense of self, and that the salience of particular aspects shifts in different situations and at various moments. She asked her students to describe themselves and noted that "…where a person is a member of the dominant or advantaged social group, the category is usually not mentioned…It is taken for granted by them because it is taken for granted by the dominant culture" (21). Thus, whites rarely mention being white, heterosexuals rarely mention being heterosexual, and, in the United States, Christians rarely identify themselves as such. Similarly, groups describe themselves in terms of their distance from power rather than their proximity to it.

Thus, when X_1Y_1 is invisible to X_1Y_2, the privileges associated with being a member of X_1 will be less salient for X_1Y_2 when they are in interaction with X_2Y_2. They (X_1Y_2) will be likely to underemphasize:

(a)   the ways in which experiences and outcomes differ for X_1Y_2 and X_2Y_2 because of the advantages X_1Y_2 receives by virtue of being members of the congruently-embedded X group;

(b)   the connection they (X_1Y_2) have to X_1Y_1. This connection gives them access to resources, influence, and power unavailable to incongruently-embedded group membership Y; and

(c)   the role they (X_1Y_2) play in sustaining the system of privileges associated with X group membership. X_1Y_2 plays an important role in partnership with X_1Y_1 in order to maintain its dominance. Moreover, X_1Y_2 exerts power and control over X_2Y_2, with whom X_1Y_2 is actively seeking to form an alliance.

III. YOUR BLUES AIN'T LIKE MINE: BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN AS DISSIMILAR ALLIES

It might seem as if black and white women would be natural, easy allies in organizational settings that have historically blocked the access of both groups to power, status, influence, and control.   There is no research to support this expectation, however. Research in organizational behavior has tended to focus on the ways in which the experiences of each group differ (e.g., Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Bell, 1990, 1992; Bell, Denton, and Nkomo, 1993). This literature arose in response to the lack of understanding about black female experiences in organizations. Black women's experiences were assumed to approximate those of white women or black men. When research on race was conducted, significant differences between the experiences of black men and women were minimized. By contrast, little attention was given to the ways in which the experiences of black and white women differ when gender was the focus. Gender was ignored in the former instance, and race in the latter. The distinct experiences of black women, then, were rendered invisible (Holvino, 2001; Hurtado, 1999; Blake-Beard, 1999; Catalyst, 1998, 1997; Proudford and Thomas, 1999).

Relationship-building between black and white women in organizational life, however, remains unexplored. We learn the most from feminists' accounts and theorizing about the strains in relationship-building efforts of white feminists and black feminists and/or feminists of color (e.g., Caraway, 1991). A familiar, problematic refrain runs through accounts of black and white women working together. When white women express an interest in working with black women, differences in interests and opinions begin to emerge, and then tensions erupt, leaving black women feeling irritated or angry and white women feeling rejected and/or confused (Wolf, 1993).

Embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer and Smith, 1982) would suggest that black and white women are differently situated in the organizational context (Trickett, 1996, cf. Bond and Pyle, 1998). This has profound implications for how they are viewed, what they receive, and the experiences they have. When applied to relations between black and white women, embedded intergroup theory reveals similar, but distinct, patterns of embeddedness for each group. With respect to gender, both white and black women are incongruently embedded in both the system and suprasystem levels. However, black women are incongruently embedded with respect to race as well. In both cases, there is an intersection of race and gender. However, the nature of the intersection differs; the intersection of race and gender for black women means a dual pattern of incongruent embeddedness, while the intersection of race and gender for white women means a single pattern of incongruent embeddedness and a single pattern of congruent embeddedness. For black women, there is no attachment to the power base—white men—in the organizational structure. By contrast, race joins white women with the power base. Thus, black and white women are dissimilarly situated in relation to the most congruently-embedded group in the organizational context, making it unlikely that they will have identical experiences and likely that they will have asymmetrical views of the presence and influence of white men.

The black-white female relationship can be captured as:

$\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_2\}$ with X_1Y_1 as the in/visible third, where
X is race, X_1 is white and X_2 is black, and
Y is gender, Y_1 is male and Y_2 is female.

Consequently, white men will be invisible to white women and visible to black women.

The focus of this section is on black and white women who were attempting to form coalitions or alliances to bring about organizational change. As Granovetter (1973) suggested, when two parties each have a relationship with a third (as both black and white women have with white men), some relationship will inevitably develop between the two parties. In U.S. organizations, white men continue to dominate the spheres of influence that control what happens in organizations. Attempting to bring about organizational change, then, in part, means influencing white men. White men become a third party in the interaction between black and white women. However, there is asymmetry in the black-white female relationship, arising from the perceptual differences discussed above. For black women, the felt influence of white men is palpable, even if they are physically absent. By contrast, white women tend to construct white men as exogenous to the black-white female relationship. Because black and white women are dissimilar allies, their sameness will be insufficient to establish and sustain productive connections. Discounting the influence of white men, or the shadow that white men cast over the relationship between women, sets the relationship up for difficulty. Adding white men to the equation raises doubts about the motives for entering into a partnership, ensures that the two groups will develop polarized positions, and surfaces unacknowledged power differences that may threaten hopes of an effective coalition or alliance.

A. COMMON DIFFERENCES

As I have argued, building relationships is often based on recognition of the common interests that unite two groups. Gender and its impact on the opportunity sets available to women can be the basis for establishing common ground. "Common" does not imply identical, however; while the experiences of black and white women may be similar, they are not wholly interchangeable. Common differences (Ayvazian and Tatum, 1994) get submerged when the experiences of black and white women are represented as those of "women." For example, in the U.S. there is a tendency to discuss "women entering the workforce" as a phenomenon that occurred during, or as a result of, the feminist movement. However, black women have been in the workforce since they arrived in this country. When statements are offered about the experiences of "women" in the workplace, they often miss those of black women, particularly those in lower socioeconomic groups. Bell et al. (1993) call this the "prefix error." Similarly, Proudford (1999) asserts that such a representation is "white understood," meaning that the race of women is implied. Even the most harmless statements can be stated as if they represent the understanding and experiences of all women. They hide and effectively silence important and, for black women, often very painful experiences.

What black and white women want does not differ so much as what they get. Catalyst (1997) reports that 38.9 percent of black female managers earned college and advanced degrees, compared with 33.6 percent of white female managers. Despite this, black women held only 6.6 percent of the managerial and administrative jobs in the United States in 1995 and 1996. White women overwhelmingly dominated the job category, accounting for 85.7 percent of the total. Moreover, black women earned less: median weekly earnings for black female managers ($514) were slightly lower than for white female managers ($528). This disparity persists. According

to the U.S. Department of Labor (2002), white women earned 15.5% more ($521 median weekly earnings) than black women ($451) in 2001. These statistics contradict beliefs about the "dual advantages" black women receive as a result of affirmative action efforts (Bell, 1992).

An analysis of wage and salary disparities becomes even more compelling when marriage rates are taken into account. Black female managers earn an average of $.58 and white women $.59 for every $1.00 that white male managers earn (Catalyst, 1997). However, white female managers are much more likely to be married than black female managers. Over 60% of white female managers were married, while 60% of black female managers were unmarried. This disparity means that the wage gap does not have the same consequences for white women as it does for black women in terms of standard-of-living and access to the resources, influence, and power that white men typically hold. Black women indicate that their opportunities are constrained in part by a lack of role models, colleagues, and mentors of the same race (Catalyst, 1998; Giscombe and Mattis, 2002).

The challenges of working both within and outside of the home (later captured by Hochschild, 1989, as "the second shift"), of having to manage one's emotions (again, later captured by Hochschild, 1985, as "the managed heart"), and of having to mind what one says (later captured as political correctness) have long been an everyday struggle for black women laboring as low-paid domestics in order to fulfill their roles as the sole, or most stable, provider in their households. The phenomenon—a complicated mix of gender, race, and class (Holvino, 2001; Marks, 2000)—existed before it was named. When such issues are discussed as if they have just occurred—as if women just entered the workforce, as if we now face challenges that we have not faced in the past—it signals to many black women that their experiences were insignificant, that experiences do not acquire significance until white women discuss, name, and frame them. The frame may not fit easily for black women, however. White women have benefited substantially from having husbands who could provide financially for their households. Though black and white women may both have an interest in childcare, for example, for white women it may mean hiring someone. For black women, it may mean finding family members to supervise their own children while they tend to their white employer's children.

There is also a tendency to identify black women as bold, courageous warriors for justice, without an in-depth understanding of or discussion about how they came to be that way. Some white women view black women as "natural" fighters who are "just stronger" without a serious consideration of the way in which black women have been, and many still are, treated in this society. This praise, though it may be well-intentioned, can generate considerable animosity from black women, whose history of being viewed as property, sexually violated at will (often by white males), worked like mules, and expected to raise other (often, white) people's children is often discounted or ignored. Without an acknowledgement of the dire circumstances that often compel black women to speak and act forcefully, and, more importantly, the role white women may have played in defining those circumstances, black women may respond to such compliments with what bell hooks calls a "killing rage" (hooks, 1995).

Simply put, the social, historical, cultural, and organizational influences on the circumstances of black and white women often get combined in problematic ways. Not only does making statements about "women" make black women invisible, it also distorts our understanding of the

experiences of white women. Because race is largely absent when framing these experiences, white women articulate concerns on the professional and personal lives of both black and white women that ignore the influence of being white and of their connection to white men (e.g., see Holvino, 2001, for a discussion of white privilege and feminism).

B. ACCESS TO POWER AND BETRAYAL

Differences in the accessibility to power become more evident when we look at the black-white female relationship in triadic terms. White males are, I would argue, natural allies for white females. Black women do not see white women in isolation but rather "see" white women as key contributors to partnerships with white men that have worked to the detriment of blacks. Kanter (1977) devoted a chapter of her seminal work, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, to wives. A consideration of race is noticeably absent as she discusses the importance of wives as "motivational factor[s]" (105) for white men and notes that "[s]ome wives considered themselves unpaid workers for the corporation" (106). Moreover, she discusses the complicated sexually-charged dynamics that play out between husbands, their wives, and female employees, suggesting instances in which men "used their wives' jealousies as reasons why women should not be hired for certain jobs, like those that involved travel with men" (107). She concludes that "wives cannot be ignored when looking at men and women in the administration of corporate bureaucracies. But at the same time, it is hard to know exactly where they do fit in the system or how to conceptualize their nature as both insiders and outsiders" (107). It would also be interesting to incorporate race into the dynamics Kanter observed. Thomas (1989) addresses race directly in his assessment of the taboos, which often have sexually-charged components, that make cross-race, cross-gender mentoring relationships risky terrain. Clearly, the push-pull of white male-female attraction may have serious, and to date poorly understood, implications for the opportunity structures for those unfortunate black females who find themselves entangled in complicated, unpredictable sexual dynamics.[2]

From black women's viewpoint, race gives white women access to white men and the associated power and privilege of having husbands, brothers, and sons who control organizations. Unless this is acknowledged and attended to by white women, black women may feel suspicious and reluctant about building relationships with white women. Black women who insist that white women learn about race are talking both about learning about what organizational life may be like for blacks *and* about what organizational life is like for whites. While white women may have, in some sense, the luxury of discounting or minimizing the importance of their connection to white men, black women do not necessarily view themselves as having the same. In a recent article in the popular press "White Women at Work: Their Privilege, Our Pain" (Golden, 2002), one black female executive asserts:

> *Whether we like it or not, the corporate environment is what it is: White men generally rule, and they are going to feel more comfortable with White women, because in them they see reflections of their mothers, sisters, daughters. That's why it's so important to build relationships with both White women and White men so that they are comfortable with you as an individual* (192).

For this black woman, the white male is ever-present. Moreover, she advises her counterparts to build relationships with *both* white men and women. Clearly, her strategy for surviving in the

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corporate U.S. environment includes an emphasis on the presence and influence of white men. Though white women may experience gender in a compartmentalized way, it is unlikely that black women will do so. From the moment that they accept the view of white women as separate from their husbands, brothers, and sons, black women risk betrayal. At some difficult point in the relationship-building process, it is likely that white women will find themselves returning to, joining with, being rescued by, and re-establishing loyalty with the very system that black women are fighting.

Proudford (2001) described the typical dynamics this way:

> *The dynamics that can appear when white and black women and white men are interacting are often surprising. I'd like to be concrete: The black women have formed a coalition with white women, both groups "connect" with respect to gender, they approach white men to discuss a plan for addressing the concerns of women in an organization. Part of organizational life is the "one-upsmanship" that can characterize interactions. Individuals, wanting to be viewed as competent, sometimes lobby for their own ideas and/or diminish the importance of ideas of others in order to be viewed as a valuable contributor. It is within this type of context that minorities can be at risk of being challenged, and (in the example I am developing) that white men can be expected to question, ignore, or outright attack black women. Black women may respond angrily. If this should happen, white women—rather than defending the black women—may find themselves supporting the white men (because that's what they've been socialized to do, or because they did not notice the attack, etc.) or at least questioning the black women. The latter may happen because they don't understand the black women's response to being attacked; nor do they understand that many black women are accustomed to being questioned and attacked. The implications for alliance-building, however, is that not only do black women have to deal with being attacked by white men; they also have to deal with white women remaining silent about it. It is at this critical point that there is a realization that much more knowledge about race is needed (6).*

The fact that black women are constantly aware of the latent or manifest influence of white men, while white women are not, sets the stage for possible eruptions. When "the lines are drawn" and loyalty and trust are required, more fundamental alliances along racial lines may surface. Hence the distrust, suspicion, and resistance on the part of black women. These alliances may not be recognized as such by white men and women, and perhaps they are influenced by organization group memberships as well. To say that race influenced the dynamics is not to suggest that it is the sole cause; rather, it is to acknowledge its presence. Having entered an alliance with white women, black women may find themselves isolated when the alliance confronts the power structure.

C. USE OF POWER: WHITE FEMALE AUTHORITY

In addition to white women having access to white men/privilege, black women may also believe that white women are not willing to accept accountability for their role in perpetuating white dominance (Hurtado, 1999; Sleeter, 1992; Caraway, 1991; Collins, 1986). Black women often consider black men to be at risk if they interact with white women (Davis, 1981). With white men as supporters, white women have the option of using their power at will without being held accountable for their complicity in perpetuating racism. Moreover, white women may be

unwilling to act explicitly in ways that will challenge white men and racism (Bell et al., 2001). Their silence, a necessary condition for maintaining their coveted, privileged position, is deafening for many feminists of color.[3] Hurtado (1999) notes that white women tend to engage at the individual level rather than group level. She says:

> *Significantly, it does not matter how good you are, as a person, if the political structures provide privilege to you individually based on the group oppression of others; in fact, individuals belonging to dominant groups can be infinitely good because they never are required to be personally bad. That is the irony of structural privilege: the more you have, the less you have to fight for it* (13).

She goes on to say, "Their structural privilege is independent of their individual actions, and therefore accountability feels like a burden to them, because there is not a one-to-one correspondence between behavior, attitudes, values, and merit" (13). Focusing on individual action allows white women to circumvent a serious examination of the privileges they enjoy as whites, the role they play in raising/socializing children in a way that perpetuates rather than challenges racism, and the ways in which they directly use their power to the detriment of black people. Nevertheless, white females act as transmitters of white privilege, as Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us:

> *I wheel my two-year-old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket in Eastchester in 1967, and a little white girl riding past in her mother's cart calls out excitedly, "Oh look, Mommy, a baby maid!" And your mother shushes you, but she does not correct you. And so fifteen years later, at a conference on racism, you can still find that story humorous. But I hear your laughter is full of terror and dis-ease* (126).

In many cases, the sensibilities of black women have been shaped by their direct knowledge about working for whites in private arenas. Many black women today have mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers who recall stories about plantation life, and/or who worked in white homes. For them, black-white female working relationships began much earlier than for white women. For many black women, it may seem impossible to consider their experiences of white women separate from their knowledge of them as employers. Angela Davis (1981) notes:

> *Proportionately, more Black women have always worked outside their homes than have their white sisters. The enormous space that work occupies in Black women's lives today follows a pattern established during the very earliest days of slavery. As slaves, compulsory labor overshadowed every other aspect of women's existence. It would seem, therefore, that the starting point for any exploration of Black women's lives under slavery would be an appraisal of their role as workers* (5).

McKay (1992) adds:

> *Since Emancipation, large numbers of black men, to say nothing of millions of black children, have survived because black women scrubbed floors, cooked thousands of meals, took care of children and the sick and/or aged, tolerated abuses of all kinds, and generally worked themselves into illnesses and early deaths in the houses of white people* (283).

Though white women may not "own" their power, black women can recount clear instances in which power and privilege were wielded by white women. Rarely is authority that women wield over one another examined by researchers (see Bartunek et al., 2000, for an exception).

Proudford (1999) presents a case in which white and black women consider the possibility of building a coalition in order to effect organizational changes beneficial for women. The black women were reluctant to form such a partnership when approached by the white women because, in their view, the white women had little or no understanding of the racial dynamics that operated in concert with gender to the detriment of black women. In fact, some of the white women supervised the black women with whom they were trying to form a partnership. The white women, frustrated with attempts to meet with the black women—and surprised that the black women had met with the white male chief executive already—indicated to the chief executive that the black women had been "uncooperative" in working with the white women. Though the white women denied making such a remark (no individual could remember making the comment), the chief executive indicated that the white women (he could not remember the individual either) had told him that the black women were not cooperative. The black women were incensed about the way in which white women had labeled them—and with how easily it was accepted by the white male chief executive.

In other instances, white women may actually subvert black female authority. Dumas (1985) gives an account of a black female administrator hired to supervise a predominantly white staff. White women were eager to connect personally (e.g., see Wolf, 1993, regarding the tendency for white women to focus on friendship ties) with the black female—something the black female resisted. In response, the performance of the white women deteriorated; they refused to carry out tasks as instructed by the black female. The black female eventually exited the organization after receiving an Afro wig in the mail. The argument here is that the presence of white men (i.e., being located in a predominantly white setting) buttresses the ability of white women to discount or ignore black female authority. White women can call on their natural allies, white men, in order to refute allegations that their behavior is overtly or covertly racist. Thus, black women who confront white female racism will likely find themselves in conflict with both white women and white men.

V. LABOR AND NON-LABOR AS DISSIMILAR ALLIES: GETTING GAYS AND LESBIANS TO WORK TOGETHER

The intersection of sexual identity and union membership provides another illustration of the in/visible third dynamics. Gays and lesbians have been successful in gaining recognition of the challenges that they face in U.S. society and in working environments. Many have explicitly engaged in coalition- and alliance-building efforts in order to bring about fundamental change (e.g., Frank, 1999) in unionized settings. One might assume that similarities in sexual orientation might be strong enough to supercede other differences. This may not always be the case, however.

One effort to work across union lines was described by Ginny Cutting, a lesbian activist in Boston. Cutting (2001) described the initiatives undertaken by the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network (GALLAN) in Boston to forge ties with the labor movement and within labor organizations that would advance the efforts to ensure that gay/lesbian concerns were articulated and addressed.   As part of their initiative, GALLAN held a charitable event for a community health center noted for its service to the gay and lesbian populations. In exchange for this support, the community health center board agreed to use union labor to build its new facility. The fundraising event was a great success. GALLAN was particularly encouraged by the warm response from leaders and members of local union organizations; GALLAN members worked hard to reach out to union organizations.

At this point, GALLAN, a gay/lesbian union organization, had successfully built relationships with the community center, a gay/lesbian non-union organization, and with straight union leaders/organizations. Cutting noted, however, that the community health center did not reciprocate as agreed. Their board decided against using union labor to construct their new building, citing the higher cost as a factor. Cutting commented, "I felt betrayed by my [gay/lesbian community center] brothers and sisters, not the labor movement" (6). GALLAN representatives, together with members of the carpenter's union, tried unsuccessfully to meet with the community center board to get them to reconsider their decision. As Cutting put it:

> At one point when I was talking to a member of the [community health center] Board she asked why the organization should do anything to help labor. Her question to me was, "What has it ever done for [gays/lesbians]?" It was a very difficult experience for me. The only good thing to come out of this experience was that an ally from the Greater Boston Building Trades Council had joined us in the meetings with the [community health center] committee. As a result, he could attest to the fact that GALLAN had done everything in its power to have the [community center] center hold up its end of the bargain. That made a difference to leaders of organized labor (7).

This impasse illustrates again the power of the in/visible third. For the community health center (gay/lesbian, non-union), the union membership had little meaning. Their experience of unions clearly differed from that of GALLAN. While GALLAN had an understanding of how labor union organizations supported gays/lesbians, informed by their own status as union members, the community health center board did not. For them, labor unions are visible, though they are not considered allies. There are likely ways in which labor has not exercised its influence to the

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benefit of non-union gays/lesbians. The board member's question to Cutting illustrates this. For GALLAN, the straight union organizations (that is, unions dominated by heterosexuals) were invisible. Having successfully joined with leaders of the union organizations, GALLAN was less aware of differential experiences of union and non-union gays/lesbians. Consequently, they were surprised by the response of the community health center board.

The union – non-union gay/lesbian relationship can be captured as:

$\{X_1Y_2, X_2Y_2\}$ with X_1Y_1 as the in/visible third, where
X is union membership, X_1 is union and X_2 is non-union,[4] and
Y is sexuality, Y_1 is straight and Y_2 is gay/lesbian.

Consequently, straight unionized organizations will be invisible to gay/lesbian labor and visible to gay/lesbian non-labor. In this case, it is important to note that, even though I use the terms visible and invisible, it clearly does not indicate the presence or absence of the third party. Here, I am referring to the extent to which individuals or groups are cognitively aware of the third party as they interact with each other.

VI. PEOPLE OF COLOR: WHEN "OTHERS" UNITE

The final illustration of the impact of the in/visible third addresses the notion of "people of color." People of color is a term often used to identify non-whites in the United States. By implication, it suggests that those who are non-white are similar enough to be placed in a single category. The differences between persons of color are hypothesized to be minimal in comparison to their differences vis-à-vis whites. There is some evidence for this. Hurtado (1999) has noted, for example, key differences in the relationships that women of color and white women have with white men. Thomas, Proudford, and Cader (1999) have also discussed the informal roles that women of color adopt in order to occupy leadership roles in organizations. Race and culture, they argue, are as significant as gender in shaping the experiences of women of color.

Despite these similarities, the term "people of color" often generates considerable debate. Some suggest that the emphasis on color represents a bias toward identifying race, which may or may not capture how some people of color would self-identify (Landrine and Klonoff, 1996). Some people of color—for example, Latinos, Asians, and West Indians—may identify more in terms of their country of origin. They may view cultural differences as salient, critical factors impacting their lives. By contrast, U.S.-born persons of color, such as blacks, are likely to focus on race. Secondly, it is often assumed that people of color will or should be natural allies. However, this may not necessarily be the case. The interests and sensibilities of various groups of non-whites are often disparate enough to ensure that efforts at building and sustaining alliances are challenging.

The relationship between people of color, U.S.-born and foreign-born, can be captured as:

> $\{X_2Y_1, X_2Y_2\}$ with X_1Y_1 as the in/visible third, where
> X is race, X_1 is white and X_2 is of color, and
> Y is country of origin, Y_1 is U.S. citizen and Y_2 is non-U.S. citizen.

Consequently, U.S. whites will be invisible to U.S. persons of color and visible to non-U.S. persons of color. While persons of color are often categorized as if their experiences are highly similar, this framework suggests that country of origin may be as significant an influence as race on the experiences of non-whites. U.S. blacks, for example, are likely to concentrate on racial disparities, while minimizing the advantages associated with being a U.S. citizen. A consideration of their group memberships, however, highlights that U.S. blacks are congruently-embedded in U.S. society with respect to country of origin. They presumably receive advantages that non-U.S. citizens do not; moreover, non-U.S. citizens are likely to be aware of the advantages accorded U.S. citizens, regardless of race. Consequently, when people of color attempt to work together, there may be a debate about whether country of origin (culture) or race is to receive the most attention. If Latinos, for example, agree to emphasize race, their cultural experiences will likely be overlooked or ignored. Important differences in their experiences and those of U.S. blacks will be lost. In addition, U.S. blacks most likely will not have an understanding of how they, as U.S. citizens, contribute to the oppression of non-U.S. citizens.

Barvosa-Carter (1999) has suggested that having multiple identities (Tatum, 1997; Hurtado, 1997; Ferdman, 1995; Ferdman, 1999; Deaux, 1996; Nkomo and Cox, 1996) can actually help rather than harm efforts to build coalitions, though the relationships are no less complicated. She encourages us not to think of identity in fixed and unidimensional ways, but rather to use our multiple identities effectively to engage in partnerships with each other. In addition to noting the potential for improving ideas, she notes that operating with multiple identities provides for a flexibility that can ultimately facilitate interactions. If members are able to move identities that are not relevant to the immediate task to the background, and allow those that are relevant to move to the foreground, that can help the coalition tap into various parts of members' identities at helpful times. I would add that it is not always easy to determine which identities are relevant. It seems equally important that individuals and groups allow for fluid movement between and among multiple identities. Lewicki et al. (1998) also encourage us to look at relationships in more complex ways, as do Anzaldúa (1987) and Holvino (2001). In the context of attempting to bring about change, taking an expansive view of the relationship is also necessary (Cheng, 1995) in order to effectively manage the tensions and strains of constructing a partnership. Clearly, our multiple group memberships bring with them both advantages and disadvantages. Some tie us more closely to those in power while others distance us from them.

As Tatum (1997) noted, "The task of resisting our own oppression does not relieve us of the responsibility of acknowledging our complicity in the oppression of others" (27)—particularly when we are attempting to build alliances with others for whom our advantages create disadvantages.   Examining these relationships at the group level requires that we acknowledge the impact that our membership in a congruent, dominant, majority group may have on our lives and on the lives of others. This acknowledgement differs from individual responsibility, which we may assume if we have engaged in particular acts that harm others. In other words, our membership alone confers certain advantages that we are often unaware of and/or reluctant to acknowledge (McIntosh, 1989). To the extent that we focus only on the ways in which we are disadvantaged (Tatum, 1997), we cripple our attempts to build alliances with others.

We are all both teaching and learning. Heterosexual black women who find themselves teaching white women about race are likely being taught about their heterosexism by gays and lesbians. Unionized gays and lesbians who are teaching non-unionized gays and lesbians about unionization are likely being taught about race by non-unionized gays and lesbians of color. And people of color from outside the U.S. who are teaching U.S. blacks about culture are likely being taught about class by poor people of color. To say this is not to erase the inequalities or to suggest that the same urgency should be associated with addressing those disparities. Rather it is to suggest that connection may not happen in transaction-oriented, reciprocal ways within the limits of a two-party relationship. We may need a broader view in order to understand how our attempts at connection serve the interests of justice, equal opportunity, and access for all rather than for our interest group. Moreover, women will hopefully avoid the desire to "fix the women" (Smith et al., 1989; see also Ely and Meyerson, 2000), or in this instance, to "fix the white women," as the sole requirement for improving the nature of black-white female interactions.

Looking at relationships in triads and with actors being both visible and invisible highlights this for us in a way that dyad analysis does not. There is no determination of whether black or white women, union or non-union gays/lesbians, or U.S.- or foreign-born people of color are "right." For the two party relationships discussed here, the debate between which group membership is of most import—race or gender, sexuality or union membership, and race or culture—can be a fruitless one. In each case, both identities are key to understanding how to construct a productive relationship. Accepting the asymmetry that arises from the differences in how groups are situated in the organizational context provides a foundation for more fully understanding both one's own interests and experiences as well as those of the other group. Rather than erasing this asymmetry in order to create a false common ground, groups may consider acknowledging it and working with it. Seeing the multi-faceted nature of these interactions is a skill that can enable potential partners to accept the duality inherent in the relationship and move forward, rather than searching for singularity as a basis for moving forward.

It is important to note that it is not the intentions and actions of the third party that are of primary concern. My argument does not suggest that white men, straight labor union organizations, or white U.S. citizens are or should be mediators or intermediaries in these relationships. Rather, the two parties engaged in an interaction can learn more about their own intentions, interests, and actions by considering the role of the in/visible third. In doing so, each group will be able to interact with the other in a way that resolves, rather than resurrects, barriers.

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[1] The focus of the framework offered in this paper is on group and intergroup behavior. Because intergroup dynamics can be seen at multiple levels (Alderfer and Smith, 1989), references in this paper to individual and/or interpersonal interactions are considered relevant to the extent that they are consonant with the group and intergroup dynamics under consideration.

[2] Black men are noticeably absent here, which speaks to the difficulty of keeping *both* black men and black women focal as these dynamics are elaborated.

[3] Bell et al. (2001) include a compelling discussion of silence as a strategy used by white women to change race dynamics. This is a promising and fruitful area for more research. I thank Stacy Blake-Beard for calling my attention to this point. In relation to the ideas discussed in this paper, for example, one might examine the use, by white women, of voice to address gender (i.e., white women tend to speak eloquently and forcefully with white men about gender) and silence to address race (i.e., white women adopt a different strategy, silence, to speak with white men about race, while simultaneously minimizing the importance of race in their interactions with black women). The notion of the in/visible third suggests more complexity about strategic choices regarding voice and silence.

[4] Union membership is considered a congruently-embedded group membership here. I would argue that unions operate in close proximity to management, receiving rights and privileges unavailable to those in non-union settings.