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Drawing from muted group and standpoint theories, this article advances an outsider within perspective describing the ways that traditionally marginalized group members communicate in mainstream organizational settings. Specifically, the author explicates the process by which different co-cultural group members (i.e., people of color, women, gay/lesbian/bisexuals, persons with disabilities) come to adopt one or more communication orientations while interacting within dominant organizations. The strength of the model presented lies in its approach to studying diversity in organizations based on the lived experiences of those traditionally situated on the margins of organizational power structures.

AN OUTSIDER WITHIN PERSPECTIVE TO ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION: Explicating the Communicative Practices of Co-Cultural Group Members

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Research in the area of organizational communication generally has been described as neutral in its attention to the ways in which cultural variables such as race or ethnicity affect workplace dynamics (Nkomo, 1992). In other words, according to Allen (1995), scholars have typically used knowledge about one group (European American males) as a reference point in their discussions of all organizational participants. This monocultural assumption is problematic because it has marginalized the experiences of nondominant group members and resulted in a literature largely void of the experiences of the "Other."

A review of the literature reveals a relatively small body of research related to diversity and organizational communication. The majority of the work in this area relates to what has become

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known as managing diversity (Baba, 1995; Dobbs, 1996; Hammer, 1993; Hopkins, Sterkel-Powell, & Hopkins, 1994; Hostager, Al-Khatib, Dwyer, & Close, 1995; Johnson, 1994; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Lindsay, 1993; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). This work takes a traditional pragmatic approach, typically from the perspective of middle/upper-level managers, to solving the new challenges (read: problems) associated with an increasingly diverse work force. A smaller body of work exists that explores the experiences of underrepresented group members as they function in the workplace. For instance, scholars have investigated the communicative experiences of women (Alvesson & Billing, 1992; Burrell, Buzzanell, & McMillan, 1992; Buzzanell, 1994; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994; Ramsey & Calvert, 1994; Wayne, Liden, & Sparrowe, 1994), people of color (Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1990; Ibarra, 1995; Nkomo, 1992), gay/lesbian/bisexuals (Hall, 1986; McNaught, 1993; Spradlin, 1995; Woods, 1993), and people with disabilities (Braithwaite & Labrecque, 1994; Emry & Wiseman, 1987; Fox & Giles, 1997; Pati & Bailey, 1995) as they function in the workplace.

Collins (1986, 1989, 1990) describes the African American woman in academia as occupying a societal positioning of an "outsider within." Her ideas, representing the construction of Black feminist thought, involve the following four dimensions unique to the experiences of the African American woman: (a) concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (c) the ethic of caring, and (d) the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 1989). Although Collins posits that these four concepts contribute directly to an Afrocentric feminist epistemology, she also makes it explicitly clear that other traditionally marginalized group members share the societal positioning of outsiders within.

As an extreme case of outsiders moving into a community that historically excluded them, Black women's experiences highlight the tension experienced by any group of less powerful outsiders encountering the paradigmatic thought of a more powerful insider community. In this sense, a variety of individuals [can be seen] as

outsiders within: Black men, working-class individuals, white women, other people of color, religious and sexual minorities. (Collins, 1986, p. S29)

Collins' ideas appear especially apropos to the lived experiences of other co-cultural group members as they function in organizational settings. From the perspective of many co-cultural group members (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities, and gay/lesbian/bisexuals), gaining access into dominant structures is done with little chance for full membership at the core of the organization. This positioning, however, does render the opportunity to experience patterns of organizational belief and/or behavior from a vantage point near to and obscure in its examination stance. In fact, Frankenberg (1993) attests that "the oppressed can see with the greatest clarity, not only their own position but . . . indeed the shape of social systems as a whole" (p. 8). Collins (1986) further submits that bringing co-cultural group members who share an outsider within status into the center of analysis assists in the process of revealing standpoints of reality that have been obscured by traditional approaches to research (see also Allen, 1995).

The objective of this article is to draw from this existing research on muted group theory, standpoint theory, and Black feminist thought in an attempt to advance a co-cultural theoretical model to organizational communication—one that is situated in the lived experiences of those persons occupying an outsider within positioning. Specifically, the article draws from a series of recent phenomenological studies that explored the everyday communicative experiences of a variety of co-cultural group members as they function in a variety of organizational contexts (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992a; Orbe, 1994a, 1996a; Roberts & Orbe, 1996a). The unique contribution of a co-cultural approach to organizational communication is that it presents a model that describes common patterns of communication across different marginalized groups, something currently not undertaken in any extensive form in either organizational communication or management research.

OVERVIEW OF CO-CULTURAL RESEARCH

CO-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In its most general form, co-cultural communication refers to interactions among underrepresented and dominant group members. The vast majority of the lived experiences included in this article involve co-cultural group members' (i.e., women, people with disabilities, people of color, gays/lesbians/bisexuals) interactions with dominant group members (i.e., men, able-bodied, European Americans, heterosexuals). It is important to note, however, that instances of co-cultural communication are defined from the perspective of underrepresented group members when they perceive cultural differences as salient during any given interaction. This may, in fact, include instances of intragroup communication in that another aspect of one's co-cultural identity becomes a salient issue (i.e., an African American woman with a disability interacting with an able-bodied African American woman). A co-cultural approach to organizational communication is designed to speak to the issues of traditionally underrepresented group members as they function within societal structures governed by cultural groups that have, over time, achieved dominant group status. A co-cultural communication framework draws and, subsequently, extends existing work by muted group and standpoint theorists; in this regard, a brief summary of these ideas are needed to help contextualize the ideas presented in this article.

Muted group theory. Muted group theory was initially established by anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener and later adopted by communication scholars to address the experiences of women (Kramarae, 1981). S. Ardener (1975, 1978) posits that in every society, a hierarchy exists that privileges some groups over others. Those groups that function at the top of the social hierarchy determine to a great extent the communication system of the entire society. Over time, the structures of this system—which reflect the

worldview of the dominant group members—are reinforced as the appropriate communicative system for both dominant and non-dominant group members (E. Ardener, 1978). This process renders those persons traditionally marginalized in society as largely muted because their lived experiences are not represented in dominant structures. It is important to note, however, that one's muted group status is not necessarily a fixed state but instead something that is constantly reinforced, augmented, or challenged through everyday discursive interaction (Herring, Johnson, & DiBenedetto, 1995).¹

Although the predominant amount of the work on muted group theory in the field of communication has focused on the experiences of women (i.e., Houston & Kramarae, 1991; Kramarae, 1981), a muted group framework exists on a number of levels within any society that maintains asymmetrical power relationships. For instance, Kramarae (1981) suggests that the ideas associated with muted group theory can be applied with equal validity to the relational interactions of a number of exchanges in the United States, including those involving children and adults, the working and middle class, and ethnic minorities and European Americans. A crucial aspect of the development of a co-cultural model to organizational communication is that it examines the phenomena from the perspective of those situated on the margins of society, a positioning central to the ideas of muted group theory. Feminist standpoint theory also represents a conceptual framework that lends itself to such a perspective.

Standpoint theory. Established recently by the work of several feminist scholars, including Harding (1987, 1991), Hartsock (1983), Smith (1987), and Wood (1992), standpoint theory focuses on the importance of acknowledging a specific societal positioning and the ways in which it serves as a subjective vantage point from which persons interact with themselves and the world. Standpoint epistemology is grounded in the idea that no Archimeden points exists from which to objectively survey other standpoints; in essence, all truths must be understood as representing some subjective standpoint. In addition, standpoint theory argues that although

group membership provides some commonalities, not all group members occupy the same standpoint (Buzzanell, 1994). Like muted group theory, communication scholars who have drawn from standpoint theory have focused their attention on the experiences of women (i.e., Wood, 1992). However, the applicability to other co-cultural group members is apparent: "Standpoint focuses on perspectives of women, but could also take the perspectives of African American women, poor white women/men, nonwhite women and men and individuals belonging to minority ethnic and religious groups outside modern Western society" (Wallace & Wolf, 1995, p. 270).

The co-cultural model to organizational communication described in this article is grounded in one of the central tenets associated with standpoint theory—research must begin from a person's concrete lived experiences. Such an approach encourages the recognition of an assortment of standpoints within and between cultural groups. In addition, standpoint theory describes the importance of incorporating the lived experiences of marginalized group members within the process of inquiry in meaningful ways. Through this process of inclusion, alternative understandings of the world that are situated within the everyday/everynight activities of co-cultural and dominant group members can be revealed (Smith, 1987). In some regards—such as the ways that both theories embrace the value of alternative understandings of the world—muted group and standpoint theories are comparatively similar. However, as articulated in the brief descriptions presented here, both also make unique contributions to the development of a model that examines the communicative experiences of different co-cultural group members.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY AND THE EMERGENCE OF A CO-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION MODEL

The model explicated in this article is the product of a series of recent phenomenological studies, all of which focused on how co-cultural group members communicate. These studies examined the communicative experiences of African American women and

men (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992a), African American men (Orbe, 1994a), women, people of color, gay/lesbian/bisexuals, people with disabilities, persons from a lower socioeconomic status (Orbe, 1996a), and gay men (Roberts & Orbe, 1996a). Although each of these studies have been reported individually, it is important to understand the ways in which they collaboratively prompted the emergence of an outsider within perspective to organizational communication. Before such a development can be adequately articulated, however, some explanation of phenomenology is warranted.

Phenomenology. Classified as a human science (van Manen, 1990) and described by some as feminist methodology (Nelson, 1989), hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry focuses on the conscious experiences of people as they relate to the lived world (Lanigan, 1979). Phenomenological research involves three inter-related steps. The first stage involves a series of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions used to collect descriptions of lived experiences from *co-researchers*. The term, "co-researchers," reflects the active process in which persons are involved in the research process in meaningful ways; in this regard, they are not simply participants. Interactive sessions are facilitated via a general conversational approach and use a topical protocol (Orbe, 1994a) to guide the flow of discussion around specific topical areas.

The second phase of phenomenological inquiry focuses on thematic reduction, a multileveled process of analysis in which phenomenologists review the descriptions of lived experiences until central themes emerge. In this stage, audiotapes of each focus group/interview are reviewed through a meticulous process that involves analyzing each text independently and then collectively until a chain of preliminary themes emerge. Following the identification of these initial themes, a process known as *imaginative free variation* (Lanigan, 1979) is followed. Here, each theme is analyzed as an essential component of the phenomenon under investigation while all other initial themes are bracketed or consciously set aside (for detailed description of this process, see Nelson, 1989.) Through

this rigorous process of review, a cluster of themes emerges as central to the communicative experiences of the co-researchers.

The third phase of phenomenological inquiry works to provide an interpretation of themes. According to Merleau-Ponty (1968), a hyper-reflection occurs when one significant idea emerges that appears to interconnect all of the central themes. In this regard, the second and third steps described above invoke a hermeneutic spiral—an ongoing process in which researchers thematize, bracket, and interpret themes. Through this process, researchers work to acknowledge that persons are multidimensional and complex beings with particular social, cultural, and historical life circumstances (van Manen, 1990). Such a methodological approach, coupled with the theoretical foundations of muted group and standpoint theories, appears especially appropriate to gain insights into populations that traditionally have been marginalized in organizational communication research and theory.

The most important lesson of phenomenological inquiry is the impossibility of a complete reduction or interpretation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The intersubjective nature of interpretations, as de Lauretis (1984) puts it, is “an ongoing construction, not a fixed departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world” (p. 159). Because phenomenological researchers are consciously engaged in their own lifeworld, interpretations change the instant that they view the finished product and begin to reflect on it. Such is the case for the interpretations explicated in this article. In this regard, an outsider within perspective to organizational communication represents another point of reflection that focuses on the communicative experiences of co-cultural group members as they function in dominant societal structures.

Chronicling the development of an outsider within perspective. As articulated earlier, the conceptual model presented here is the result of a series of independent yet related scholarly inquiries into the ways in which co-cultural group members communicate. Each study has contributed significantly in its own way and collectively stimulated a reexamination that led to the development of an outsider within perspective to organizational communication.

Ford-Ahmed and Orbe's (1992a) study on the lived experiences of nine African American graduate students at a predominately European American university served as the launching pad for this line of inquiry. For these in-depth (30- to 75-minute) interviews, researchers used several open-ended questions (e.g., How would you describe your communication with others on any given day?) to prompt co-researchers to describe their everyday lived experiences. Following the phenomenological methods outlined earlier, Ford-Ahmed and Orbe, independently and then collectively, reviewed the transcripts of the interviews. Through the process of thematic reduction and interpretation, themes emerged that gave insight in to how co-researchers negotiated, via a series of bonding strategies (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992a), the ethnic prejudice they faced on campus. Of great significance to the development of an outsider within perspective was recognition of the important role that communication with other African Americans played in how the co-researchers dealt with their minority status on campus.

Orbe's (1994a) work on African American men sought to further explore the ways in which underrepresented group members communicate within and outside of dominant societal structures. During this study, Orbe solicited insight from 35 African American men representing a diverse set of lived experiences via three avenues. Using the critical incident technique, 25 co-researchers supplied descriptions of communicative experiences. In addition, Orbe facilitated seven in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions (ranging from three to six co-researchers) around a number of general research questions, such as "What is one word that could describe how you view your interactions with non-African Americans?" (Orbe, 1994a, p. 300). The findings of this phenomenological inquiry focused on a number of issues central to African American male communication, including the importance of communicating with other African Americans, learning how to interact with non-African Americans, and an intense social responsibility to uplift others. Interwoven within these themes were several practices that African American men enact to "keep a safe distance" while "testing the sincerity of non-African Americans" (Orbe, 1994a, p. 293). A phenomenological interpretation of this work

suggested that these themes reflect a cultural perspective maintained by African American men as a means to survive in a historically racist society.

Immediately, this work generated a number of questions with regard to the larger framework of intercultural communication: Is the perspective described by Orbe (1994a) unique to African American men? Is a similar standpoint assumed by other co-cultural group members? Roberts and Orbe (1996a) explored the culture of the gay community through a series of interviews and focus group discussions with 17 gay men. Using phenomenological methods, the researchers facilitated nine in-depth interviews with gay men 45 to 60 years of age and two focus group discussions, each with 4 young gay men (under 25 years of age). The interview protocol for these sessions involved general questions regarding their communication with others like as well as unlike themselves. Although this research project ultimately focused on instances of intergenerational communication within the gay (male) community, the issues salient to ingroup and outgroup interaction mirrored those described by African Americans (i.e., the importance of communicating with others like yourself, the impact of out-group stereotypes, and the great diversity within co-cultural communities). Upon reflection of earlier studies, these findings appeared to reveal some similarity between the ways in which African American men and gay men negotiate their positioning in a racist, heterosexist, and ageist society. Would other studies involving different co-cultural groups produce similar results?

This specific point of inquiry was examined when 27 co-cultural group members (people of color, women, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, persons with disabilities, and those from a lower socioeconomic background) were involved in a study that sought insight into how they negotiated issues of difference when communicating with others (Orbe, 1996a). In terms of the development of the outsider within perspective to organizational communication in this article, this study was significant in that it sought to identify communication similarities and differences across co-cultural groups. Specifically, Orbe facilitated 14 in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions with (three to four persons in each) around questions

of how co-researchers communicate during their everyday lives. In addition, the last two focus groups were used to gain insight into the preliminary thematization/interpretation that had begun to develop from earlier sessions. The primary contribution of this work was the identification and explication of 13 communication strategies that appeared to be common across different co-cultural groups. Reflecting on the co-researchers' descriptions of how and why these strategies were enacted, the beginnings of a co-cultural model of communication began to formulate based on two primary factors: communication approach and preferred outcome (Orbe, 1996a).

This article seeks to describe the insight that was generated when the descriptions of lived experiences from the 89 co-researchers involved in all four previously mentioned studies were revisited with a specific focus on the strategies and issues raised from this line of research. This point of reflection/reinterpretation generated considerable support for the conclusions of Orbe's (1996a) work and also revealed several advancements to the general development of a co-cultural model of communication. Whereas the earlier studies reported on communication across contexts for the purposes of advancing an outsider within perspective, explicit attention during the reinterpretation was given to the experiences of co-cultural group members in organizations. The result was the conceptualization of an outsider within perspective to communication. In short, this article generates insight into the communication process of those persons traditionally marginalized in dominant societal structures. The essence of the model revolves around the explication of how four factors influence the process by which co-cultural group members adopt various communication orientations during their interactions in organizational settings. In this regard, this endeavor responds to the call by Allen (1995) for organizational communication research that uses "frameworks which strive to understand human interaction and social systems . . . [and] give 'voice' to participants" (p. 149) whose lived experiences have historically been muted from the production of knowledge. In addition, an outsider within perspective to organizational communication is unique in fostering a union of three existing theoretical

frameworks, namely, muted group theory, standpoint theory, and phenomenology.² The ideologies inherent in each approach contribute (independently) some fundamental concepts to an outsider within perspective to organizational communication; however, the ultimate contribution of such a theoretical model lies in the synergy that is generated by the collaborative union (and subsequent extension) of these existing ideas.

AN OUTSIDER WITHIN PERSPECTIVE TO ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The foundational research on co-cultural communication, generally, as well as the perspective described are situated in several epistemological assumptions. These ideas can be viewed as extensions of muted group and standpoint theories as well as of Black feminist thought. In terms of a focus on the communication of those persons situated as outsiders within organizational settings, the following three specific assumptions were made: (a) although representing a widely diverse array of lived experiences, co-cultural group members will share a similar societal positioning that renders them marginalized and underrepresented within dominant organizational structures; (b) to confront oppressive dominant structures and achieve any measure of organizational success, co-cultural group members adopt certain communication orientations when functioning in organizational settings; and (c) the ways that co-cultural group members negotiate oppressive forces in organizations (sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, ableism) take similar forms but also vary among and within co-cultural groups, depending on the particular standpoint of the particular person.

CO-CULTURAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Initially, work in co-cultural communication focused on specific practices enacted in a variety of settings by traditionally marginalized group members. Advancing the findings of the earlier work

		<u>Preferred Outcome</u>		
		Separation	Accommodation	Assimilation
Communication Approach	Nonassertive	Nonassertive Separation Orientation	Nonassertive Accommodation Orientation	Nonassertive Assimilation Orientation
	Assertive	Assertive Separation Orientation	Assertive Accommodation Orientation	Assertive Assimilation Orientation
	Aggressive	Aggressive Separation Orientation	Aggressive Accommodation Orientation	Aggressive Assimilation Orientation

Figure 1: Formulation of Outsider Within Communication Orientations

described above, especially Orbe (1996a), the model presented here offers a framework for understanding the different ways that co-cultural group members approach organizational communication. The model illustrates how a revisitation/reinterpretation of transcripts from earlier co-cultural studies reveal how particular strategies are clustered together to formulate nine different communica-

tion orientations assumed by those positioned as outsiders within organizations (see Figure 1). These orientations appear to be based on two specific factors: preferred outcome and communication approach. Following an explication of how these two issues work collaboratively to give form to different co-cultural communication orientations, the attention of the article moves to an explication of how four additional factors (field of experience, perceived costs and rewards, abilities, and situational context) influence the process by which certain orientations are adopted by co-cultural group members.

Preferred outcome. One of the fundamental factors that influences the orientations that co-cultural group members adopt in dominant organizational settings is the preferred outcome for their interactions. Each person reflects on the following question: "What communication behavior will lead to the effect that I desire?" To this end, co-cultural group members typically (consciously or unconsciously) give some thought to how their communicative behaviors affect their immediate and ultimate relationships in various organizations. Although one's preferred outcome undoubtedly changes among—or even possibly within—different situations, three primary interactional outcomes appear as options for those persons positioned outside the dominant structures in society: assimilation, accommodation, and separation (see Figure 1). Although these issues were given significance within the descriptions of lived experiences of co-researchers and are explicated as such, they also are given attention in some communication (Golden & Rieke, 1971) and other related literature (Parrillo, 1996). The use of these ideas, however, is most directly situated in the ways that Collins (1986) uses them to describe the alternatives for outsiders within organizations.

Assimilation involves attempts to eliminate cultural differences, including the loss of any distinctive characteristics, to fit in with dominant society. Collins (1986) describes this alternative as one in which outsiders within "choose to suppress their difference by striving to become bonafide, 'thinking as usual' . . . insiders" (p. S29). Although this process can be quite natural for some

co-cultural group members, it also can involve concerted efforts to fit in, as reflected by the comments of an African American man:

I think that for some of us there is a specific tendency to turn our radios down [when playing music associated with Black culture], take up golf, and other things like that to say that "Oh, okay, I fit in. I'm like one of you guys now." (Orbe, 1996b)

The reasoning behind the assimilation perspective is simple: To effectively participate in dominant organizational settings, one must conform to the structures of mainstream organizations. For co-cultural group members, this translates into learning and using the communication structures of dominant society while completely losing their own normative behaviors or at least minimizing any differences to the point of marginal insignificance. Assimilation is the preferred outcome for those whose primary quest is to fit in within the expectations of organizational members; the following excerpt explains why this positioning is necessary.

Top executive promotions aren't granted after a fun evening at the bowling alley or to men who wear earrings or to people who drive pick-up trucks with gun racks. People who come from cultures where those things are normal have to decide if they want to stay where they are or move up. You can say that "I don't want to fit in." That's a choice but it probably means you are out of the game. (Harvey Coleman cited in Wade, 1996, p. B14)

Although the co-cultural group members operating within an assimilationist perspective seek to blend into dominant organizations, accommodation rejects the arguments for a great melting pot of organizational subcultures and instead promotes the collaborative strengths of a multicultural society. In this regard, attempts to eliminate cultural differences or mute the voices that are associated with co-cultural groups are often resisted. Those striving toward accommodation work with other co-cultural group and/or dominant group members to change the organizational culture so that many cultural experiences are reflected in it. Collins (1986) describes this alternative as a way to "conserve the creative tension

of outsider within status by encouraging and institutionalizing outsider within ways of seeing” (p. S29).

The experiences of one person with a disability reflect how preferred outcomes can be salient issues in how one communicates within corporate America. Although a strong desire to just fit in prompted a more nonassertive stance initially, his need to challenge the status quo (as it failed to accommodate for his special needs) inspired a more assertive voice.

When I first started working, I wouldn't say anything about my needs . . . I felt like I was being pushy . . . If I had to use the bathroom and they didn't have a handicapped-accessible restroom, I would just try to hold it . . . I was afraid that if I asked for what I needed, I would lose my job. I've since found that you have to be assertive . . . to get what you need. (Cebreco cited in Hunter, 1996, p. A4)

In addition to assimilation and accommodation, a third alternative for co-cultural group members is separation. The preferred outcome of separation rejects the notion of forming a common bond with dominant group members as well as other co-cultural groups. Instead, they seek to create and maintain separate group identities outside or within dominant structures; in Collins's (1986) words, “they resolve the tension generated by their new status [as outsiders within] by . . . remaining . . . outsiders” (p. S29). As indicated by a 31-year-old African American man, the choice of separation is one that may be a result of a realization that it is futile to try to change or work within dominant structures:

If you look at the plight of African Americans and other people of color in regards to the beginning of time in this country, an institutional legacy of racism has been ingrained and perpetuated through the years. It has been here so long that you or I are not going to change it. (Orbe, 1994b)

Instead of accepting the label of *extremist* often cast on co-cultural group members who adopt this communicative stance, most maintain that they are simply trying to be realistic about intergroup

relations. In the words of one person of color: “We’re realists . . . the time for acceptance is long past. I think history taught us that there won’t be true integration in the white corporate world or suburbs . . . so we build our own institutions and our own suburbs” (James Ezeilo cited in Hamilton, 1996, p. A4).

Communication approach. Another fundamental factor recognized as influential to the ways in which outsiders within function in organizations is communication approach. For the purposes of a co-cultural perspective, communication approach is used to connote practices that fall along the continuum of nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive behaviors (see Figure 1). Again, like the issues associated with preferred outcome, these ideas emerged from the experiences of co-cultural group members as central to the ways that they described their interactions in various organizational settings. These three approaches, however, are also discussed in communication research (Alberti & Emmons, 1990; G. Wilson, Hantz, & Hanna, 1995). In some instances, co-researchers used specific language in describing their communication; in other instances, different terms were used that correlate with the ideas of nonassertiveness (i.e., *passive*, *weak*, or *soft*), assertiveness (*being real* or *telling them like it is*), and aggressiveness (*going off*, *calling someone to the carpet*, or *reading somebody*). These descriptions were not necessarily characterized as mutually exclusive; instead, they were regarded as overlapping and sometimes difficult to distinguish. Nonassertive communicative practices generally include behaviors in which individuals are inhibited and nonconfrontational while putting the needs of others before their own. Some co-cultural group members attribute their soft-spoken style as inherent to their specific culture (i.e., first-generation Asian American women); however, others explain how their nonassertive approaches were more of strategic decisions in certain situations. One woman who works in a Fortune 500 company describes how this process works with her male supervisors.

I know what all of the research says about women using less powerful speech—like tag questions, for example. But don’t be fooled! Some of us women purposely use these things to get our

points across . . . We know that some men won't listen to women who come off as too confident. (Orbe, 1996b)

More aggressive communicative practices would include those behaviors described as hurtfully expressive, self-promoting, and assuming control over the choices of others. Whereas certain co-cultural communicative practices assume a nonassertive stance, others such as confronting, attacking, or sabotaging others clearly take on a more aggressive stance. Often, a more aggressive approach is used by co-cultural group members when previous (nonassertive or assertive) attempts were unsuccessful. Such is the case with one African American man who spoke at great length about his attempts to improve the treatment of people of color: "At one point it got real ugly . . . I mean calling names, threatening lawsuits, personal attacks—you wouldn't believe it. But that was the first time that they seen that I really meant business about being pro-Black" (Orbe, 1994b).

Representing a balance between the borders of nonassertiveness and aggressiveness, assertive communicative practices encompass self-enhancing, expressive behaviors that take into account both one's own and others' needs. In other words, co-cultural group members attempt to promote their own rights, needs, and desires without violating the rights of others (both dominant group members as well as other co-cultural group members). It is also important to note, however, that certain assertive practices when enacted by co-cultural group members may be perceived as aggressive moves by dominant group members. Such was the case with one woman, as illustrated below.

I found that in small groups men tend to have no faith in my abilities or my suggestions. I hate it when I know what I am talking about and someone tries to shrug me off for no reason. So I try to say my piece without stepping on any toes but sometimes it just comes across as "we are going to do it this way, no if's and and's about it." (Orbe, 1996b)

Some co-cultural group members describe their interaction with dominant group members as guided by a natural tendency toward a specific approach (e.g., nonassertive: "It's not my style to yell, so

I do things more quietly”). Others possess a more balanced proficiency to be nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive and strategically select the most effective approach (e.g., assertive: “She appreciates an open, honest approach to decision making,” or aggressive: “Yelling and screaming is the only thing that works with him”) for specific situations.

The central premise for a co-cultural communication model involves the recognition of diverse standpoints as equally valid. An earlier discussion of preferred outcome made it clear that no one objective (assimilation, accommodation, or separation) was inherently correct; an individual’s preference for one outcome over the others is navigated through a complex process of interrelated factors. In similar fashion, an outsider within perspective to organizational communication functions within the belief that one communication approach is not more appropriate or ideal than are others. Each co-cultural practice, as it reflects a general nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive communication approach, can be effective and/or appropriate depending on how the specific co-cultural group member perceives the situation.³

COMMUNICATION ORIENTATIONS

Initial thematizations of co-researchers’ experiences revealed a variety of communicative practices that outsiders within used while functioning in dominant organizational settings. Meshed within descriptions of particular communication behaviors were explanations as to how certain general factors played into decisions to enact certain strategies over others. A revisit of these explanations revealed that two of these factors (preferred outcome and communication approach) work together to constitute nine general orientations that outsiders within adopt for their participation in mainstream organizations and that offer a framework for co-researchers’ communication choices and practices (see Table 1).

Nonassertive assimilation. For times when co-cultural group members use a nonassertive approach when functioning in dominant society, three basic orientations exist (depending on the par-

TABLE 1: Practices and Orientations Summary

<i>Examples of Practices</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
Nonassertive assimilation Emphasizing commonalities	Focusing on human similarities while downplaying or ignoring co-cultural differences
Developing positive face	Assuming a gracious communicator stance in which one is more considerate, polite, and attentive to dominant group members
Censoring self	Remaining silent when comments from dominant group members are inappropriate, indirectly insulting, or highly offensive
Averting controversy	Averting communication away from controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas
Assertive assimilation Extensive preparation	Engaging in an extensive amount of detailed (mental/concrete) groundwork prior to interactions with dominant group members
Overcompensating	Conscious attempts—consistently enacted in response to a pervasive fear of discrimination—to become a superstar
Manipulating stereotypes	Conforming to commonly accepted beliefs about group members as a strategic means to exploit them for personal gain
Bargaining	Striking a covert or overt arrangement with dominant group members in which both parties agree to ignore co-cultural differences
Aggressive assimilation Dissociating	Making a concerted effort to elude any connection with behaviors typically associated with one's co-cultural group
Mirroring	Adopting dominant group codes in attempt to make one's co-cultural identity more (or totally) invisible
Strategic distancing	Avoiding any association with other co-cultural group members in attempts to be perceived as a distinct individual
Ridiculing self	Invoking or participating in discourse, either passively or actively, which is demeaning to co-cultural group members
Nonassertive accommodation Increasing visibility	Covertly yet strategically maintaining a co-cultural presence within dominant structures
Dispelling stereotypes	Myths of generalized group characteristics and behaviors are countered through the process of just being one's self

(continued)

TABLE 1: (Continued)

<p>Assertive accommodation Communicating self</p>	<p>Interacting with dominant group members in an authentic, open, and genuine manner; used by those with strong self-concepts</p>
<p>Intragroup networking</p>	<p>Identifying and working with other co-cultural group members who share common philosophies, convictions, and goals</p>
<p>Using liaisons</p>	<p>Identifying specific dominant group members who can be trusted for support, guidance, and assistance</p>
<p>Educating others</p>	<p>Taking the role of teacher in co-cultural interactions; enlightening dominant group members of co-cultural norms, values, and so forth</p>
<p>Aggressive accommodation</p>	
<p>Confronting</p>	<p>Using the necessary aggressive methods, including ones that seemingly violate the rights of others, to assert one's voice</p>
<p>Gaining advantage</p>	<p>Inserting references to co-cultural oppression as a means to provoke dominant group reactions and gain advantage</p>
<p>Nonassertive separation</p>	
<p>Avoiding</p>	<p>Maintaining a distance from dominant group members; refraining from activities and/or locations where interaction is likely</p>
<p>Maintaining barriers</p>	<p>Imposing, through the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, a psychological distance from dominant group members</p>
<p>Assertive separation</p>	
<p>Exemplifying strength</p>	<p>Promoting the recognition of co-cultural group strengths, past accomplishments, and contributions to society</p>
<p>Embracing stereotypes</p>	<p>Applying a negotiated reading to dominant group perceptions and merging them into a positive co-cultural self-concept</p>
<p>Aggressive separation</p>	
<p>Attacking</p>	<p>Inflicting psychological pain through personal attacks on dominant group members' self-concepts</p>
<p>Sabotaging others</p>	<p>Undermining the ability of dominant group members to take full advantage of their privilege inherent in dominant structures</p>

NOTE: These communicative practices are examples of tactics enacted to promote each orientation. It is important to recognize that depending on the other personal, interpersonal, or organizational factors, one tactic (i.e., communicating self) can be used innovatively to promote more than one communication orientation.

ticular preferred outcome for that situational context). One option is that of a nonassertive assimilation orientation. A nonassertive assimilation orientation typically involves co-cultural communicative practices such as emphasizing commonalities, developing positive face, averting controversy, and censoring self as a means to blend unobtrusively into dominant society (see Table 1). These efforts are enacted in a seemingly yet sometimes strategically inhibited manner that tries to avoid conflict with dominant group members. For instance, one young gay man's approach to relationships while at work reflects a nonassertive assimilation stance that avoids any extra attention. While in the office, he explained, "I don't get involved too much . . . They will have these conversations [regarding a variety of topics] . . . but I don't get involved because I don't want to lead them on one way or the other [concerning his closeted identity] . . . I just don't want to deal with it at work" (Orbe, 1996a, p. 164).

Like each communication orientation, nonassertive assimilation involves both potential benefits and costs for outsiders within who assume this communicative stance. Nonassertive assimilation may be advantageous for co-cultural group members who seek to be regarded as persons whose goal is a focus on task production and/or social standing. In this regard, a nonassertive assimilation orientation to co-cultural communication may enhance persons' ability to participate within the confines of dominant structures. However, this communicative stance also produces several potential costs. Through this positioning, for example, co-cultural group members may endure negative effects to their self-concepts. In addition, enacting the communicative practices associated with this orientation promotes an unhealthy communication climate that inherently reinforces the dominant group's institutional and social power.

Assertive assimilation. Similar to their nonassertive counterparts, an assertive assimilation orientation strives to downplay co-cultural differences and promotes trying to blend into existing dominant structures. However, instead of doing so in a presumably passive voice, this primary communication orientation employs a more assertive communication approach. An assertive assimilation

orientation enlists communicative practices that do not necessarily give privilege to either one's own or others' needs.

Instead, those co-cultural group members adopting this orientation enact communicative practices such as bargaining, manipulating stereotypes, overcompensating, and extensive preparation (see Table 1). Bargaining, for instance, relates to instances when co-cultural and dominant group members negotiate an arrangement in which neither party makes an issue of co-cultural differences. The preferred outcome (reward) is to fit into dominant structures; co-cultural group members are able to focus on being productive team players while demonstrating their ability to achieve a certain degree of success in life. The experiences of a Latino man illustrate how bargaining works toward an assertive assimilation stance:

I am the first and only Latino to be hired at my job. It's funny because all through the interview, my probation period, and last year, no one—except some of the black guys I hang around with—gave any indication that they have noticed that I'm not white. I mean they must have noticed . . . it's not like my last name is Smith or Jones. I guess that we have just struck an understanding where I don't make a big deal of it and neither do they. (Orbe, 1996b)

The means by which this preferred outcome is achieved involves some costs for both participants. The commitment toward personal, social, and/or organizational success coupled with the additional efforts necessary to suppress group members' co-cultural identities as a means to fit in often is not accomplished without a significant amount of exertion, stress, and burnout. In addition, certain communicative practices, such as manipulating stereotypes and overcompensating, may work to reinforce co-cultural stereotypes and power differences associated with an us-them mentality (i.e., "You are not like other African Americans"). In any case, those co-cultural group members assuming an assertive assimilation stance typically reported that it was difficult to persevere with this orientation—in the end, the productivity of both co-cultural and dominant group members may suffer.

Aggressive assimilation. Although some co-cultural group members assume a nonassertive or assertive approach to becoming an

integral part of dominant organizational structures, others take a more aggressive communication approach to fit in. As compared to nonassertive or assertive assimilation orientations, the co-cultural communicative practices that these persons enact are generally perceived as more self-promoting and/or hurtfully expressive (see Table 1). In this regard, an aggressive assimilation orientation takes a determined, sometimes belligerent stance in their efforts to be like dominant group members. Using such communicative practices as dissociating, mirroring, or strategic distancing, outsiders within who use this primary communication orientation place a great importance on fitting in—to the extent that others' rights and beliefs are viewed as less important in comparison. The tendency to engage in self-ridicule (i.e., derogatory banter or jokes concerning co-cultural groups) illustrates the extent to which some outsiders within will go to be perceived as one of the guys. Such is the case for one woman of Asian descent who wanted to make sure that she was perceived more like the other (European American) graduate students than other Asians:

One day in the mall, I ran into a student who I know from the dorms. Instead of being Americanized, she was the perfect image of the stereotypical subservient geisha girl. I didn't want my friends to think that all Asians were like that, so when she left I started mocking her. (Orbe, 1996b)

The benefits associated with an aggressive assimilation orientation revolve around persons' ability to fit into organizations and to be regarded as individuals (avoiding the label of *typical* co-cultural group member). However, these advantages do not occur without the potential of several disadvantages. In addition to expending significant amounts of time and energy enacting the communicative practices associated with aggressive assimilation, these efforts may also solicit negative reactions from other co-cultural group members in the organization. Those consistently adopting an aggressive assimilation orientation find themselves repeatedly negotiating their positioning with dominant group members in the organization while being isolated from other outsiders within who often label them as *self-hating sellouts*.

Nonassertive accommodation. In some instances, those situated as outsiders strive to blend in with dominant group members. However, in other situations, the preferred outcome is to have their diverse standpoints recognized and appreciated. Inherent in an accommodation perspective is a desire to change organizational policy and culture to reflect the experiences of persons traditionally situated on the margins of organizational decision making. Those persons using the primary communication orientation of nonassertive accommodation attempt to achieve this preferred outcome in a seemingly constrained and nonconfrontational manner.

Adopting a nonassertive accommodation stance includes enacting communicative practices, such as increasing visibility and dispelling stereotypes, while functioning in mainstream organizations. Although some instances of these strategic efforts may be considered more assertive than nonassertive (see Table 1), most outsiders within describe using both of these communicative practices as a means to delicately challenge the status quo of the organizations in which they participate. This can be seen in the comments from one African American woman below concerning her visibility around the office.

I like to make sure that I am “around” at different gatherings. I doubt my attendance at these events does anything to drastically change the opinions of others . . . [but] I do think that my mere presence changes the setting to some extent. (Orbe, 1996b)

According to co-researchers, this strategic interaction was initiated through an inhibited voice so that dominant group members would not react with defensiveness or circumspection. From this perspective, a nonassertive accommodation orientation allowed outsiders within to influence decision-making processes while simultaneously demonstrating their commitment to the larger organizational goals.

Although the potential advantages of this communication orientation are readily apparent for all organizational members, a number of potential risks also exist. Those adopting a nonassertive accommodation stance often are criticized by other co-cultural

group members (especially those adopting the five orientations described later) as being too passive and unwilling to take risks in challenging organizational norms. Another detriment associated with this orientation involves the reality that although a nonassertive accommodation stance can subtly influence certain issues, this orientation, if used consistently, is unable to promote any major organizational change.

Assertive accommodation. Some co-cultural group members, such as those using a nonassertive assimilation orientation, are often overly concerned with reactions from dominant group members in the organization. For others, regard for dominant group rights is not given preference over their own needs as co-cultural group members. Instead, efforts aimed to create a cooperative balance between consideration for both those within and on the margins of the organization guide their behaviors. These persons often find themselves using an assertive accommodation orientation to guide how they communicate in various organizations.

Several different co-cultural communicative practices appear to promote the goal of accommodation through an assertive voice. By using such practices as communicating self, intragroup networking, using liaisons, and educating others (see Table 1), assertive accommodationists are able to work with others (outsiders or insiders) to change existing organizational policy and culture. In some instances, such as the Hispanic faculty member whose story of harassment at the hands of a male colleague is shared below, several strategies are necessary before change occurs. Her communication reflects an assertive accommodation orientation in that she works toward improving the departmental climate without violating the rights of others (including the harasser).

The only thing that worked was when we went to the affirmative action officer. But only after all that. You see, during whole semester, I tried with him. First verbally, then in writing, then verbally again. Nothing worked. It was a disaster. Then only [through] force—through affirmative action and the administration—was it better the second semester. (Orbe, 1996a, p. 169)

In addition to promoting intergroup interdependence, co-cultural group members adopting an assertive accommodation stance are able to employ a wide variety of valuable resources in their quest to promote significant change in the structures that work to marginalize co-cultural group experiences.

Potential disadvantages associated with this communication orientation involve being prone to stress and burnout as well as criticisms from others (i.e., co-cultural group members adopting the three different separation orientations) who regard their efforts to work with, instead of against, dominant group members as misled and ultimately useless. In addition, persons assuming an assertive accommodation may be confronted with resistance and defensiveness on the part of others in the organization who perceive their attempts to maintain an assertive voice as unproductively aggressive.

Aggressive accommodation. The focus for an aggressive accommodation orientation is to become a committed part of the organization and then work from within to promote significant change regardless of personal costs. At times, these efforts may be perceived as self-promoting, confrontational, or unnecessarily intense; however, outsiders within who adopt this primary communication orientation are not overly concerned with dominant group perceptions. Their fundamental goal is to change the culture of the organization that marginalizes the experiences of those traditionally not given access to full organizational membership. In some instances, this involves making others uncomfortable about issues of difference. Such was the case for one European American man:

I get a little satisfaction by throwing my past [growing up in a housing project, on and off of welfare] in their face. Everyone is generally pretty good about it . . . and very supportive and encouraging. But every now and then, I'll make certain comments that catch them off guard. Like once . . . when we were discussing childhood memories, everyone was talking about these "golden moments," so I said "the best thing that every happened to us was when my father deserted us so that we could get more food stamps." (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992b)

An aggressive accommodation stance, while fighting for societal change, also cultivates a genuine desire to work with and not necessarily against the organization. Using practices such as confronting and gaining advantage (see Table 1), outsiders within may be able to strike such a balance. However, to avoid dominant group perceptions of their behaviors as more separatist in nature, persons employing an aggressive accommodation orientation to organizational communication may periodically use practices within the assertive accommodation orientation. They are able to reap the benefits of such a positioning (including the positive perceptions of their honesty, persistence, and commitment to promoting societal change) while eluding several potentially harmful effects. Co-cultural group members who consistently embrace an aggressive accommodation orientation stand the risk of being labeled as *overly sensitive, radical, or someone constantly crying wolf*. These persons also must contend with succeeding in an organizational setting isolated from both dominant and co-cultural group members who do not want to be associated with some of their more aggressive practices. This, in turn, can make their ability to promote major institutional change somewhat difficult.

Nonassertive separation. Most of the coresearchers who contributed their experiences to the studies from which this article is based participated in organizations (primarily work-related) with both co-cultural and dominant group members. However, some outsiders within describe their participation in organizations run by “the man” as mostly consisting of interaction with others like them. Some co-cultural group members reportedly view this separation as a naturally occurring reality; others use subtle communicative practices to maintain a separatist stance during co-cultural group interactions. A European American woman says:

On several occasions, he has said inappropriate things. So, even when I have to sit next to him in a meeting or something—and this is usually because there are no chairs left—I don’t make eye contact or position my body so that we’ll have to make any small talk. (Orbe, 1996b)

As illustrated in Table 1, co-cultural communicative practices, such as avoiding and maintaining interpersonal barriers, are often enacted as a means to further encourage co-cultural separation. For those outsiders within who assume this primary communication orientation, physical avoidance is implemented whenever possible. However, when some interaction with dominant group members is unavoidable, co-cultural group members find themselves fulfilling existing expectations placed on them by dominant society. In other words, co-cultural group members unconsciously participate in efforts reinforcing their place on the margins of the organization, an ideology that is grounded in the basic notion that certain groups should not occupy organizational spaces reserved for dominant group members. Although this communication orientation can work to encourage intragroup unity, self-determination, and independence, it also hinders outsiders within in terms of tapping into the valuable resources and advocating societal change.

Assertive separation. Compared to a nonassertive separation orientation, an assertive separation stance involves more self-assuredness in co-cultural attempts to create productive in-group structures exclusive of dominant group members. In this regard, they reinforce their positioning as organizational outsiders (in a literal sense). Persons adopting a nonassertive separation orientation simply, albeit somewhat passively, maintain existing separation between groups; this can occur within or outside dominant organizational settings. In comparison, more assertive co-cultural group members minimize their participation in dominant organizations. An assertive separation orientation makes a conscious choice to maintain societal spaces between dominant and co-cultural group members. In doing so, they actively work to counter hegemonic messages that signify that natural separation is a product of cultural superiority/inferiority differences. To this end, an assertive separation orientation uses co-cultural communicative practices, such as exemplifying strengths, as seen in the comments from a gay man:

Every chance I get I let my straight co-workers know about gay achievements. My favorite thing is to identify all of the famous

people who were gay . . . usually this comes after they have just talked about how much they like them. I love to see their reactions! They usually accuse me of “getting on my soapbox,” but it’s important for them to get this information. (Roberts & Orbe, 1996b)

From the standpoint of outsiders within, assertive practices that could be effectively used toward the preferred outcome of accommodation could also be equally productive in separatist endeavors. For instance, communicating self and intragroup networking (see Table 1) appear to be communicative practices that both assertive accommodationists and separatists employ with equal success. The consequences of these co-cultural practices, in relation to the achievement of a preferred outcome, are contingent on other influential factors such as situational context and field of experience (to be discussed in subsequent sections). One of the benefits of an assertive separation orientation, like its nonassertive counterpart, is that it promotes co-cultural unity and self-determination. In addition, this communication orientation also can work to enhance the self-concepts of co-cultural group members through the increased visibility of positive co-cultural group role models.

However, it is important to consider that the efforts of outsiders within assuming an assertive separation orientation must be implemented without access to most of the organizational resources controlled by dominant group members. For their progroup rhetoric (see Table 1), assertive separatists are often designated as *anti-dominant group* (as opposed to simply pro-co-cultural group) by dominant group members. This outsider positioning reduces the ability of co-cultural group members to influence decisions made outside their specific communities, including a wide variety of decisions that directly or indirectly affect their livelihood.

Aggressive separation. Sometimes perceived by dominant and co-cultural group members as radically iconoclastic, an aggressive separation stance is primarily a communication orientation that outsiders within enact when co-cultural segregation is a top urgency. In other words, separation is sought through whatever means necessary. These persons are likely to strongly criticize other co-cultural group members who habitually adopt an assimilation

or accommodation orientation because their efforts are viewed as ill-guided, inconsequential, and potentially destructive.

An aggressive separation orientation, as it relates to communication in mainstream organizations, involves co-cultural group members exerting their personal power through the use of communicative practices such as attacking and sabotaging others. As described in Table 1, these two practices involve personal attacks on organizational members' (both dominant group members and other outsiders within) characters and livelihoods. Such is the case for one African American woman whose organizational behaviors were viewed as paybacks for discriminatory practices:

My first job was as a cashier at [a local grocery store.]. The only reason that I got the job was because the NAACP had picketed his store because [the owner] didn't have any blacks working there. So, he hired me and this other girl . . . he didn't like us and we hated [him]. So, I made sure that whenever someone black came through my check-out lane that they got something for free. I would just bag it without ringing it up. (Orbe, 1996b)

Although the levels of personal and group power used by those co-cultural group members adopting an aggressive separation orientation do not match the societal and organizational power bases of dominant group members, they do enable some co-cultural group members to confront the pervasiveness of oppression on smaller levels (e.g., free items). To this end, these individuals can demonstrate the intragroup power of co-cultural solidarity while maintaining a strong voice in confronting the evils of dominant societal organizations. However, it is exactly the strength and intensity of these voices that often receive negative attention from dominant group members (i.e., portraying those adopting an aggressive separation orientation as radical extremists). Co-cultural group members assuming this communicative stance also stand the risk of displays of power (i.e., legal, political, or institutional retaliation for aggressive tactics) by organizations who retaliate against co-cultural aggressive practices.

ASSUMING AN OUTSIDER WITHIN ORIENTATION

The process of adopting one or more communication orientations is one that involves a constant interplay of self-assessment, implementation, evaluation, and modification. It is important to recognize that these decisions are simultaneously negotiated with the co-cultural and dominant group members involved in the interactions and are guided by the complexity of other interdependent factors. Most significant to an outsider within perspective is the recognition of no one communication orientation as appropriate, effective, and/or ideal; instead, any one of the nine orientations may be the most fitting contingent on the specific standpoints of the co-cultural group members. Even within one specific setting, some co-cultural group members may find that they adopt different communication orientations to maintain a certain level of effectiveness. Now that some brief explication has been provided for each orientation, the remaining sections of this article address four primary factors that co-cultural group members described as influential to the decisions to adopt different communication orientations in organizational settings that regard them as outsiders within: (a) perceived costs and rewards, (b) field of experience, (c) abilities, and (d) situational context.

Perceived costs and rewards. As co-cultural group members engage in the ongoing process of selecting, enacting, and evaluating the use of different communicative practices, one factor that is brought into consideration is the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with each practice. As evidence of the interrelated nature of the factors influencing the adoption of outsider within orientations, discussion of the feasible advantages and disadvantages for each orientation were included within the description of each orientation. As consistent with its grounding in standpoint theory, however, it is crucial to understand that depending on their perceptions of other factors, each co-cultural group member may evaluate the anticipated costs and rewards of each communication orientation differently. These perceptions are situated within

a particular cognitive, emotional, and experiential positioning (Frank, 1988).

Within an organizational setting, a number of potential costs and rewards are affiliated with the ways that outsiders within communicate with others. Contingent on the specific culture of the organization (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985) as well as the field experiences of the people as they negotiate the culture, the adoption of any specific communication orientation can result in direct and indirect consequences. Existing literature has provided insight into how communication leads to a number of positive outcomes, including social support (Albrecht & Alderman, 1982), meaningful participation in decision making (Miller, Ellis, Zook, & Lyles, 1990), clarification of roles (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997), and positive performance evaluations and career advancement (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1990). Along the same lines, the orientations of outsiders within can generate equally problematic conditions, including social isolation (Albrecht & Alderman, 1982), stress and burnout (Ray & Miller, 1991), suppression of true feelings (Cox, 1994; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987), increased workload (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997), and superficial intergroup interactions (Dace, 1994).

The descriptions of lived experiences provided by the co-cultural group members that ultimately led to the emergence of an outsider within perspective to organizational communication gave clear direction to the diverse ways that they regarded personal and professional costs and rewards. For instance, some co-cultural group members may adopt the communication orientation of assertive assimilation that results in direct benefits (i.e., communication effectiveness, social approval, or increased money/status). These advantages are given greater priority than are the disadvantages associated with them (expended energy or time, increased workload, or criticism from other co-cultural group members). By working long hours and taking the initiative on projects, one outsider within, a European American gay man, was able to establish an assertive assimilation stance with the organization despite a salient cultural difference.

I run circles around everyone else so no one will ever be able to say
I don't outperform anybody in the building. And it's not because I

have this great desire to do well. I feel I *have* to outperform everybody . . . I can't be just okay. (Woods, 1993, p. 210)

Presented with similar circumstances, another person may negotiate his or her outsider within status differently, as illustrated by the comments of an African American woman who adopted a more nonassertive assimilation orientation:

I tend to be respectful and guarded with what I say, because I know that what you say can be a big reflection on your job . . . job security and stuff like that. I'm not always comfortable with it . . . but this involves my livelihood. (Orbe, 1996b)

It is important to recognize that the process of weighing the costs and rewards of each situation can be quite different depending on the field of experience of the specific co-cultural group member. For instance, the first quote appears to give priority to certain rewards (i.e., career success); however, other co-cultural group members involved in research from which this article is based articulated that the costs associated with these things (e.g., losing one's self-respect or burnout) are not worth the effort to obtain such rewards. Each orientation, contingent on the standpoint of the person, reaps some rewards and costs (albeit they are sometimes difficult to calculate). Clearly, the strategic decisions that co-cultural group members make regarding their communication in various organizations involve varying awareness levels of available alternatives and a predictive understanding of consequences affiliated with each orientation.

Field of experience. The field of experience or sum of life experiences of co-cultural group members directly affects their conceptualization of other factors (such as preferred outcome) and, consequently, their adoption of one or several communication orientations. The importance of this idea, as it relates to human communication, is well-documented (e.g., Brislin, 1993; DeVito, 1998). Attention to this issue is especially pertinent for an outsider within perspective for organizational communication because most existing research assumes that the co-cultural experience is not

crucial to understanding the dynamics of diversity in the workplace (Allen, 1995).

Through a lifelong series of experiences, co-cultural group members are involved in a dynamic process of contemplating/choosing/implementing/evaluating their communication in various organizations. This process directly draws from previous experiences in and out of dominant organizational settings (i.e., previous work experience, discussions in private spaces, previous interactions within a particular organization). Through the multiplicity of incidents within their fields of experience, those often positioned as outsiders within are engaged in a process of constructing and, subsequently, deconstructing, the perceptions of what constitutes appropriate and effective communication (Meade, 1996). The ways in which co-cultural group members negotiate through this lifelong undertaking vary as much as do their fields of experience themselves. One thing is for sure, however; co-cultural group members (like their dominant group counterparts) are products of their life experiences. The comments from a young Mexican American man illustrate that regardless of how far removed he is from his past, his current behaviors are situated within a specific field of experience:

My father's influence and general background has a lot to do with the way I act in public. He is 47 or 48, speaks broken English, and is a back-country Mexican . . . from the heart of Mexico. We live in an all-Mexican neighborhood. It's kind of rough around here a little bit; we have gangs running around—I used to be in a gang. I got hommies here and there. But I'm trying to clean up—not to say that I've done anything real bad, but I'm trying to do things right. But that doesn't mean forgetting who I am or where I came from. (Orbe, 1996b)

Although outsiders within share some common experiences based on their societal positioning, it is important to acknowledge that depending on other cultural circumstances, each field of experience is uniquely different. In this regard, an outsider within perspective to organizational communication, much like standpoint theory, seeks to recognize the diverse perspectives within each co-cultural group. From a particular standpoint, as it represents the

sum of their life experiences, co-cultural group members experience varying levels of group identity (Cox, 1994; Giles & Johnson, 1986), need for social approval (Albrecht & Alderman, 1982), and communication competence (Chen & Starosta, 1995)—all of which influence the process of adopting varying communication orientations.

Abilities. One factor that must be acknowledged in the process of adopting outsider within orientations are the personal constraints that affect persons' relative ability to engage in different behaviors. The ability to use certain co-cultural communicative practices may vary greatly depending on specific personal characteristics and situational circumstances. As evidenced in interview and focus group transcripts, some persons positioned as outsiders within their organizations explained that the ability to use certain communicative practices varies greatly depending on specific characteristics and situational circumstances. For instance, some co-cultural group members explain that they do not have the natural ability to adopt orientations that include certain practices that go against their personal styles. For instance, an African American women characterizes her nonassertive orientation as an insurmountable barrier to certain communicative practices, such as confronting, attacking, and gaining advantage. "Other people can do those things [more aggressive practices] well but that has never been something that I'm comfortable doing . . . I am not much of a confrontational person, so I just like to get things done in different ways" (Orbe, 1996b).

Clearly, people's opportunities to assimilate into certain environments is affected by a number of personal characteristics. Despite their attempts to act, dress, or talk like dominant group members, some co-cultural groups—such as women, the differently abled, or dark-skinned people of color—will inevitably still be seen (to some extent) as not like dominant group members.⁴ However, other group members (i.e., those from a lower socioeconomic background or gay/lesbian/bisexuals) may actually pass as dominant group members; in doing so, their negotiation of outsider within statuses is different than for those who visibly cannot appear

like insiders. This is not to say that those co-cultural group members who are visibly different are less likely to strive for assimilation; in fact, some of these persons may employ other communicative practices (such as those associated with an aggressive assimilation orientation) to further demonstrate their likeness with dominant group members.

One specific example of a co-cultural element that can be difficult or impossible to discard during interactions within mainstream organizations involves language use. As a means of promoting assimilation, some outsiders within master the ability to participate in code-switching, meaning that they learn how to communicate in the language of both dominant and co-cultural groups and enact the appropriate voice when the situation arises (e.g., Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987). However, this ability is not something that is always in the repertoire of each person's co-cultural communication competencies. For instance, some people of color who contributed to this project described their inability to eliminate certain accents, phrases, or speech mannerisms that immediately label them as an outsider within certain organizational settings (e.g., those associated with ebonics or the rural South). Others, such as those from lower economic statuses or rural geographical areas, shared similar difficulties in trying to mirror the voices of dominant group members. The example of George's experiences exemplify how a co-cultural group member's ability level is affected by other factors (such as situational context):

"I really demonstrate gayness in my voice," says George. "I wish I could have a different speech pattern and just be able to fade into the woodwork when I want to. But I don't." At least in the United States, George feels he has a little choice but to come out in work settings. It's a different story, however, when he does business abroad. "By American standards I'm more effeminate than your average business man. But internationally that gets lost. You're suddenly an American, and there are so many other issues of difference that this pales in comparison." In part this explains George's decision to work for an airline that is headquartered in Europe. "My esteem is much better internationally," he says. "I

probably speak German with a gay twang, but nobody seems to notice.” (Woods, 1993, p. 89)

Situational context. As illustrated in George’s scenario, an important consideration in the process of co-cultural communication is situational context. Like field of experience, situational context has been regarded as central to human communication behaviors (e.g., DeVito, 1998). Without question, an outsider within perspective is situated in the idea that different orientations are considered the most appropriate and effective depending on the specific situational circumstances. With this in mind, a conscious attempt has been made throughout the descriptions of this approach to avoid commentary that would regard certain orientations as inherently more appropriate and/or effective than are others. This presumption is consistent with the philosophy that one prototypical preferred outcome or communication approach (i.e., accommodation and assertiveness) does not exist for all situations. To give an inclination that some strategic decisions are ideal (and in comparison, others less than ideal) would ignore the important role that the particular standpoint plays in the communication that occurs. When addressing the context of the particular organizational setting in which outsiders within function, a number of issues must be acknowledged, including organizational norms, communication climate, internal politics, management styles, and the organization’s stated and enacted approaches to diversity (Baba, 1995; Buzzanell, 1994; Conrad, 1994; Cox, 1994; Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1990; Hostager et al., 1995; Ibarra, 1995; Johnson, 1994).

Situational factors have a great impact on the calculation of how an assortment of variables/factors converge on the ultimate decision to adopt one or more communication orientations. One of the primary considerations related to this influential factor is the organizational communication setting (e.g., one’s private office, general staff meeting, cafeteria/break room, departmental retreat, or meeting with outside agencies). From the perspective of an outsider within, subtle changes may exist within a setting and may directly influence the selection of a particular orientation. For instance, an

employee from an underrepresented group may experience a number of different situational contexts all within a single day on the job, including a variety of personal, social, or organizational structures that work to marginalize him or her. These include various forms of harassment (Clair, 1993; Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997), stereotypes, and discrimination (Cox, 1994). Therefore, his or her communication at work may be altered depending on the specific context within the larger setting. The specific communication orientation that is adopted also can be affected by the presence of others in that setting. The decision to opt for a distinct practice may be the direct result of the other parties in the interaction; it is important to remember that co-cultural practices are enacted transactionally with others (Spradlin, 1995). Within the same setting, for example, a co-cultural group member often communicates differently when interacting with different dominant group members. As one Korean American woman described, "It varies a lot. Some white male bosses are okay and others are not. Some treat you as a walking stereotype, while others don't seem to be fazed. You have to determine what their deal is" (Orbe, 1996b).

In addition, the absence or presence of other co-cultural group members within a specific setting may influence the outsider within orientation that is enacted. The decision to confront insensitive comments, for instance, might be influenced by the behaviors of others:

For the longest time, I was the only woman at weekly meetings. And I was very conscious about my presence there. Whenever inappropriate comments about women were made I would bite my tongue and not respond. I guess that it was just the price for my participation . . . This all changed when another woman joined the meetings. She was quick to challenge sexist comments . . . shortly after her arrival I found myself doing the same thing. (Orbe, 1996b)

The presence of another outsider within prompted the woman to change her communication orientation from nonassertive assimilation toward a more assertive accommodation stance. Depending on the standpoints of others—as they represent a vantage point for

experiencing this specific situation—a number of other communicative responses are possible.

DISCUSSION

Evident throughout the explanations of how various factors influence the communication of underrepresented group members in organizations was the interconnectedness of these issues. Without question, the intersections of these factors directly affect the ways that those from various co-cultures communicate at work. In other words, the ways that persons positioned as outsiders within communicate in an organizational setting can be summarized as follows: Situated within a particular field of experience that governs their perceptions of the costs and rewards associated with as well as their ability to engage in various communicative practices, co-cultural group members will adopt communication orientations—based on their preferred outcomes and communication approaches—to fit the circumstances of specific situations.

The description of co-cultural communication shared above contains the term *communication orientation*, a concept referring to a specific stance that outsiders within assume during their interactions in dominant organizational structures. The concept of communication orientation focuses on how two factors—communication approach and preferred outcome—converge to formulate nine different communicative stances associated with an outsiders within perspective to organizational communication. In addition to summarizing these orientations, an explication was provided that presented insight as to the ways in which four factors (perceived costs and rewards, field of experience, abilities, and situational context) influence the process by which orientations are selected.

The outsider within perspective to organizational communication explicated in this article represents a theoretical framework that emerged from the experiences of those traditionally marginalized in mainstream organizations. This perspective is part of a more

general development of a co-cultural communication model that attempts “to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xvii). The strength of this perspective lies within its embodiment of lived experiences of those traditionally muted in organizational communication research and theory. The model offers an insightful approach to studying diversity in organizations from the perspective of those traditionally situated on the margins of organizational power structures. Although promoting the recognition of similarities among the responses to oppressive practices such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism, it also compels researchers and practitioners alike to acknowledge the great diversity within and among co-cultural group members’ behaviors.

The co-cultural communication model presented here is not to be regarded as the definitive source on the communicative experiences of those situated as outsiders within. Instead, like standpoint theory, it represents a continued point “of inquiry, always ongoing, opening things up, discovering” (Smith, 1992, p. 88). It is important to note that the insight generated in this article represents a specific point in the revisitation and reinterpretation of data, something in phenomenology referred to as a *hermeneutic spiral*. The metaphor of the spiral is especially apropos as it captures the essence of an ongoing, constantly developing, constantly changing, reflective process of theory development. An outsider within perspective to organizational communication represents one point of development in the ideas associated with co-cultural communication. From a feminist phenomenological perspective (Nelson, 1989), the evidence and validity of the theoretical model articulated in this article lies within the personal experiences of co-researchers themselves (Foss & Foss, 1994). Although existing literature in organizational communication—especially that which situates dominant group ideologies and practices as the norm (Allen, 1995)—should not be used as the standard of measurement for the value of an outsider within perspective, it does represent a valuable source for advancing current research in co-cultural communication. Extensions of this line of inquiry would be wise to review the existing work in

organizational communication and attempt to draw from this literature as it contributes to a deeper level of understanding of an outsider within perspective.

For instance, a review of existing literature reveals that a variety of research has been completed that investigates how individual co-cultural groups have negotiated their positioning in various organizations (Burrell et al. 1992; Foeman & Pressley, 1987; Fox & Giles, 1997; Ohlott et al., 1994; Spradlin, 1995). Although the insight generated by these studies formulated a point of initiation for the development of an outsider within perspective to organizational communication, it also can serve as a valuable point of return and critique of the perspective as it specifically speaks to the experiences of different co-cultural groups (i.e., women of color, gays and lesbians, persons with disabilities). In addition, future research in this area can draw from a number of existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks that can assist in the further development of co-cultural communication as it is enacted in the context of organizations. This includes existing research on sense making in organizations (Weick, 1979, 1995), rhetorical sensitivity (Hart & Burks, 1972), communication accommodation theory (Giles et al., 1987), compliance gaining strategies (Dillard, 1990), intercultural communication competence (Chen & Starosta, 1995), and interaction goals (S. Wilson & Putnam, 1990). For instance, Weick's (1979) work on how some organizational members experience an enacted environment based on partial inclusion appears directly apropos to a co-cultural communication model in that he acknowledges the positioning of outsiders within organizations. In addition, Weick's (1995) work on identifying seven properties of sense making—identity construction, retrospect, enactment, social, ongoing, extracted cues, and plausibility—offers one perspective for adding clarity to the dynamic process by which co-cultural practices are enacted transactionally with others (Spradlin, 1995). Within this vein, the existing literature on interaction goals (e.g., Benoit, 1990) can add further insight into the process that co-cultural group members experience in negotiating multiple goals. S. Wilson and Putnam's (1990) typology of goals (instrumental, relational, identity) and levels of abstraction (global, regional, and local)

appear especially useful as one point of exploration into the complex process by which co-cultural group members negotiate multiple goals at various levels.

In addition to the heuristic value that an outsider within perspective to organizational communication contains for researchers and theorists, this perspective has direct application for practitioners as well. In addition to affecting the diversity climate of an organization, the increased presence of outsiders within mainstream organizations has a great impact on the organization's overall effectiveness (Cox, 1994). The conceptual model of the impact of diversity offered by Cox (1994) is an important step in recognizing the ways that a more diverse workforce is manifested at a number of levels within an organization. A deeper understanding of the complexity of issues inherent when traditionally marginalized members of society enter dominant organizations is needed to maximize advantages that diverse organizations have over homogeneous ones (Cox, 1994).

One potential criticism of the model presented here, like other existing work grounded in standpoint theory, is that it tends to universalize and essentialize experiences across diverse groups (Hallstein, 1997). In essence, it has privileged commonality over diversity and returned back to the very same problematic position that initially prompted this research. It is my contention, however, that the insight included in an outsider within perspective to organizational communication is valuable in that it reveals the commonalities of diverse standpoints while simultaneously giving attention to the ways in which lived realities differ within and between co-cultural groups. The model offers an inclusive, albeit quite general, framework that contributes to the existing knowledge base on communication, diversity, and organizations. Ideally, this can serve as an impetus toward guiding institutional change in the ways that diversity is managed in organizations.

In conclusion, Collins (1990), in her writings on Black feminist thought, suggests that "all groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system" (p. 178). The information discussed in this article promotes an increased understanding as to the ways that all organizational members

function as targets and vehicles of a system that renders certain members outsiders (Foucault, 1979). Revealing the similar ways that co-cultural groups respond to oppressive practices (and, ideally, increase the understanding of these practices between co-cultural groups), an outsider within perspective to organizational communication can also assist dominant group members in drawing from experiences of feeling like outsiders in an attempt to better understand the experiences of co-cultural group members. Because of the nature of power differentials in organizations, some might suggest that the vast majority of organizational stakeholders—regardless of co-cultural group membership—occupy an outsider within positioning and assume one or more communication orientations at some point in their organizational experiences. It is important to note, however, that the pervasiveness of certain cultural elements in our society (i.e., race/ethnicity, sex, disability) render the experiences of co-cultural group members drastically different than those of people who might experience some temporary positioning as outsider (Cox, 1994; Dace, 1994). In addition, Lakoff (1995) reminds us that “however identical communication strategies appear to superficial inspection, in fact they have different meanings because of the power bases from which the strategies are enacted” (p. 46).

Based on the descriptions of lived experiences of my co-researchers, it became strikingly clear that co-cultural group members negotiate their positioning as outsiders within mainstream organizations on a highly conscious level throughout their organizational lives. Their cultural positioning remains a potential source of difference to which attention is always implicitly or explicitly being given by self or others. In essence, this line of research makes a strong case for examining the experiences of those on the margins of organizations; it is this group that has a vantage point close to, yet removed from, organizational practices (Frankenberg, 1993). The consciousness from which co-cultural group members function within mainstream organizations represents a valuable source of perspicacity for the ways that all organizational members may adopt various communication orientations. Given the model presented here, it appears that the process of adopting orientations is

accessed most effectively through the experiences of outsiders within. In this regard, a strong case is made for exploring the experiences of underrepresented group members within organizations as they potentially reveal communication issues common to all organizational stakeholders.⁵ Both theorists and practitioners alike can use an outsider within perspective as a basis in understanding the complex relationship between culture, power, and communication within organizations.

NOTES

1. For this reason, the author has opted to use *co-cultural group member* (instead of *muted group member*). This shift in terminology is important in acknowledging that those traditionally marginalized in societal structures can and do overcome attempts to render their voices inarticulate.

2. In addition, the insight generated in this article represents an extension of Collins's (1986) work on Black feminist thought. Although Collins's work primarily was used to describe the experiences of African American women in academia generally and sociology more specifically, an outsider within perspective to organizational communication represents an opportunity to extend her work to apply more generally to the experiences of co-cultural group members in mainstream organizations.

3. It is also important to recognize that these behaviors are considered as nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive as defined from the perspective of co-cultural group members who enacted the behavior. This method of description is consistent with other efforts to offer an outsider within perspective to organizational communication and is especially crucial because existing research (Buzzanell, 1994; Kochman, 1990) indicates that what constitutes nonassertive, assertive, and aggressive behavior differs among dominant and co-cultural groups.

4. Cox (1994) uses the term *phenotype identity groups* to describe those cultural groups whose appearance is visually different than that of the dominant group.

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