Introduction

Ralph Ellison's classic novel *Invisible Man* examines the life of an unnamed black male protagonist to provide social commentary about the impact of racism in U.S. society. By depicting the title character as socially rather than physically invisible, Ellison pointedly critiques not only the mechanisms of racism that cast black Americans as stereotyped representations rather than fully developed, complex human beings but also the ways that blacks can become marginalized if they fail to fit the stereotyped depictions. Yet simultaneously, Ellison's narrator comes to observe and appreciate some of the benefits of invisibility. Thus, by using this metaphor, Ellison skillfully explores the multidimensional dynamics racial inequality creates for black men.

Ellison's novel is critically acclaimed largely because it accurately conveys the emotions and frustrations that many black Americans experience, particularly when they do not conform to broader stereotypes of race. Indeed, blacks who do not fit cultural representations of "blackness" are overlooked, dismissed, or otherwise rendered invisible in ways that reflect the processes Ellison describes. This is particularly true when it comes to black men, especially those whose images conflict with the two most common current cultural depictions of black masculinity.

On one hand, many media outlets, news reports, and other sources document the challenges and obstacles facing black men who are part of the "urban underclass." The *Washington Post*'s 2006 series *Being a Black Man* offers multiple narratives of black men trapped in the criminal justice system (at least one case a result of mistaken identity) or facing poverty, illness, and overall despair.[1] Sociological research tends to fall into this camp, with numerous studies having done their part to keep attention focused on these issues. Studies of black men typically examine their challenging experiences in the urban underclass, their low performance in the educational system, their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, or their general feelings of malaise and detachment from the broader society.[2] Often, these studies offer empirical validation of the stories that appear in the news media. Documenting the very real challenges and obstacles facing many black men in contemporary American society, they represent these men as marginalized, dispossessed, alienated from mainstream society, and underserved by most major social institutions.

On the other hand, contrasting representations of black men generally reflect the realities of those who are part of an elite group. These black men are highly educated and often extremely wealthy, and their success reveals, directly or indirectly, a path to upward mobility. President Barack Obama and Bill Cosby, for example, are emblematic of this alternative representation of black men in contemporary America. As a multimillionaire entertainer and philanthropist, Cosby represents an image that is diametrically opposed to the depictions of poverty, illness, joblessness, and crime. In contrast, Cosby embodies success, wealth, and power that seems to negate the existence of racial issues for black men and seems to suggest that those who work hard and adopt culturally appropriate values can achieve success. Indeed, in a 2004 speech at Howard University, at several subsequent speaking engagements, and in a 2007 book decrying black victimization, Cosby delivered this very message.[3]

Ultimately, these accounts suggest a very two-dimensional picture of black men's lives in the United States today. The casual observer may assume that nearly *all* black men are facing the dire threats of un- or underemployment, failing schools, and jail time. At the other end of the continuum, the high visibility of the extremely well-off minority serves to downplay the suggestion that structural issues persist in significantly

shaping life chances and social outcomes. To date, little media attention, research, or analysis has been focused on other aspects of black men's experiences.

The men who fall between these two poles are the "invisible men" examined in this book. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 25 percent of black men are employed in professional/managerial jobs.[4] However, black professional men's occupational experiences are very rarely the subject of sociological research and analysis. For these men, in contrast to their working-class or working-poor counterparts, issues of unemployment, marginalization from mainstream society, and an overzealous criminal justice system may not be their most pressing social problems. When it comes to employment and labor market opportunities, black professional men may assign more urgency to issues related to promotion, mobility, and the development of occupational networks. Additionally, these issues may be compounded—or at the very least affected—by the occupational composition of the jobs in which these men are most likely to be concentrated. Because jobs remain mostly sex segregated, men and women are concentrated in different occupations, with men in the majority as construction workers, architects, and correctional officers and women in the majority as nurses, teachers, and library staff.[5] The gendered composition of jobs may affect the types of issues that black professional men encounter at work.

The work experiences of black professional men are of sociological importance because they can help us gain insight into issues of power and inequality in the workplace. Black professional men inhabit an interesting location wherein they receive social and economic advantages by virtue of their gender and class but suffer disadvantages that result from racial inequality. As such, their experiences are qualitatively different from those of their black female counterparts, from those of white women, and from those of men of other racial groups. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins notes that studying how these categories intersect is more than an intellectual exercise; considering the intersections of race, gender, and class contributes to our understanding that the subtle machinations of power, domination, and subordination work in complex ways for various groups.[6] A focus on black professional men, then, helps to elucidate the particulars of how inequality affects men when they experience simultaneous privilege and disadvantage.

Black men who work in predominantly white male professional environments are likely to encounter specific challenges and opportunities that differ from not only those facing black men who are members of the underclass but also those facing black women who are in professional jobs. But little research has examined what these issues may be or how they are manifested. Research on black professionals suggests that they can encounter difficulties developing the necessary social ties that facilitate advancement, but are these obstacles exacerbated or minimized for black men who work primarily with other men? Studies of black women professionals indicate that intersections of race and gender subject them to specific stereotypes that hinder their occupational success, but what images and representations impact black men in the professional workplace? To what extent do they feel hindered or constrained by these depictions? What general challenges do black men encounter in these work environments, and how are these issues shaped by the status of being black men working in a white male–dominated, professional setting?

No More Invisible Man attempts to address these and other questions. Drawing from several sociological theories, I assess how black professional men describe the challenges, opportunities, interactions, and other issues that characterize their work in white male–dominated jobs. I consider how intersections of race and gender affect black men's lives in the occupational arena and highlight the ways these overlapping factors shape their experiences with tokenization. Thus, this book provides a sociological view of how tokenism varies depending on the ways that race and gender intersect for social actors, the occupational challenges that persist in the workplace, and, more broadly, the frequently overlooked issues that affect black men.

In Chapter 1, I discuss and review the theoretical arguments that guide this study. The chapter details the theory of tokenism, how it has developed over the years, and the areas where additional research is still needed.[7] In Chapter 1, I also review the concept of gendered organizations and its theoretical contributions to this book.[8] Finally, I highlight the literature on black professionals that reveals some of the issues black men face and the failure of this literature to contextualize the issues in terms of the concept of gendered occupations or intersections of race and gender. I draw from the literature to introduce the concept of

partial tokenization—the theoretical paradigm guiding this book—arguing that intersections of race, class, and gender, coupled with work in a gendered occupation, put black professional men in a position of partial tokenization.

In subsequent chapters, I flesh out the concept of partial tokenization. Chapter 2 outlines the broad challenges facing these men and the challenges that are reflective of being black in predominantly white occupations. I discuss the men's descriptions of the general obstacles, issues, and problems they encounter in their jobs, and I examine the ways in which these challenges reflect the concept of partial tokenization.[9]

Chapter 3 focuses on black men's descriptions of their interactions with women in the workplace. Black men in white male–dominated jobs hold an interesting position relative to their female coworkers. Black men are in the racial minority in these occupations, but white women are in the gender minority. Black women and other women of color, in contrast, face challenges that accrue from disadvantages related to both race and gender. Thus, in Chapter 3, I consider black men's descriptions of their interactions and relationships with both groups of women. I examine how black men engage with other numerical minorities and explore the ways these interactions are shaped by the process of partial tokenism.

Chapter 4 assesses how black men interact with other men in their jobs. The theory of tokenization I discuss analyzes how those in the minority interact with one another as a result of the behaviors enacted by the dominant group. I use partial tokenization to offer a more precise interpretation of black men's interactions with other men. This theoretical development helps to explain not only the relationships of these men with other black men but also the nuanced interactions that they forge and maintain with white male colleagues and supervisors. I find that, as with women, black men's interactions with other men are more complex than the theory of tokenism allows.

In Chapter 5, I build on some of the ideas advanced in the preceding two chapters to examine how the men in this study construct performances of masculinity. Here, I review the literature on masculinity, how masculinity is performed in occupational contexts, and how it reflects the concept of gendered occupations. I argue that partial tokenization informs the stereotyped informal roles to which these men are

subjected and that intersections of race and gender inform the types of marginalized masculinities they construct as a result.

Chapter 6 tackles the question of emotional labor within gendered occupations and how it is performed when a worker experiences racial tokenization. This chapter draws on both the concept of emotional labor and resulting studies that consider the performance of emotion work in gendered occupations, such as litigation, police work, and sales.[10] I build on these studies to examine how partial tokenization complicates the performance of the emotion work black professional men do to navigate the largely white male–dominated work worlds they inhabit.

Finally, the Conclusion reviews the key arguments and central points offered, shows how the arguments presented contribute to and further develop the existing research, and proposes future research and policy implications.