Very often the relationship issues presented by African American men masquerade as being no different from those of other men and, therefore, risk being misinterpreted as manifestations of conventional interpersonal concerns. This view is simplistic since black men believe, and often deeply feel, that they are targeted by racism and thus treated differently from other men (Hutchinson, 1994; Kunjufu, 1983; Terkel, 1992). The extent of underlying shared experiences makes the belief in unfair treatment a powerful psychological context differentiating their reality and consequent behavior from others. An understanding of such a perspective is necessary in order to sort out the issues underlying friendships among African American men and ways in which therapeutic interventions might enhance them.

In their friendships, African American men confront scrutiny of their ability to handle the response of others to their race and gender. They must represent how they confront the daily slights and indignities reserved for black men as well as deal with the larger issues of their social marginalization and psychological invisibility.

Restructuring friendships and achieving genuine intimacy between African American men are the goals of a therapeutic support group focused on coping with black male daily life. Although issues of friendship appear as similar to those of other men, black men's experiences are differentiated by their circumstances of social marginalization and psychological invisibility. An all-black male support group is presented as an effective means for lessening stress and tension as well as learning new fraternal interpersonal skills.
Invisibility (Franklin, 1993; Monroe & Goldman, 1988). Invisibility is defined as feeling that one's genuine persona is not seen, respected, or considered of value given the frequency of perceived racial slights and indignities experienced in daily life.

Complicating the bond formed by this shared adverse experience for African American men, however, is the pull to assimilate into the larger society, which often conflicts with the expectations of racial group identity. The individual's effort to declare his personal identity frequently forces choices towards emphasizing race or gender, or some merging of the two (Hooks, 1990; Jones, 1991).

Uncertainty about self, and unreliability in commitment, is seen as a troublesome byproduct inherent in the identification process and forms an impetus for African American men to seek stability in their friendships. This makes trust an essential factor in African American male relationships. Trust, however, is also problematic in that it is vulnerable to manipulation by the idiosyncratic need of an individual for recognition and acceptance as a man, an African American, and an American—a need that is frequently distorted by the limitations and invisibility imposed by racism. Friendships among black men reflect emotional struggles with racial identity, self-respect, and dignity. Black male friends must allow the individual to feel complete as "a man," within his chosen way of identifying as African American.

Male friendship ties must be experienced as supportive as well as empowering in a manner that is consistent with the ascribed group's designation of gender appropriate behavior (Levant, 1995; Pasick, 1990). In the process of achieving credibility for their behavior, friendships and expectations about membership into a "brotherhood" is formed and rites of passage created. The rites of passage exercising trust, power, and control in black male friendship have given rise to distinct codes of conduct, language, and style (Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Sexton, 1995). They must be exemplified in a manner that supports personal comfort and wins endorsement for affiliation within the diverse African American constituencies defining manhood.

Many African American men subscribe to the "cool," unflappable, suave, down to earth, impenetrable imprimatur of black males (Anderson, 1990; De La Cancela, 1994; Majors & Billson, 1992). While this conveys closeness and intimacy, it also denotes an underlying emotional distance and inaccessibility. Attachments African American men form with each other—ranging from best friend partners to acquaintances—contain conflicts over trust, power and control issues which interfere with their achieving genuine and constructive interpersonal intimacy.