

INTRODUCTION TO THEORIES OF RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

“Racial identity, which is one’s psychological orientation to one’s racial group membership, allows us a more complex way to grapple with racial issues. It does that because it includes all groups on equal terms, and accounts for both group and individual complexity. Racial identity is the manner or quality of an individual’s psychological identification with a racial group. That is how one views or understands members of their own racial group, and understands members of other racial groups. It includes consideration of domains of difference, such as gender, social class, ethnicity, etc., because those characteristics are subsumed under one’s racial group membership. Racial identity development is a lifelong process that begins during childhood, and requires resolutions throughout one’s life...one’s racial identity and resolution is a part of your personality.” –Robert Carter

RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN PEOPLE OF COLOR

PRE-ENCOUNTER

Children are soaking up society’s messages about race. Unless parents or teachers intentionally critique these messages, children in general will not critically evaluate them.

ENCOUNTER

Usually in early adolescence, an event or series of events begins to make clear the impact of race on one’s personal life. The individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a marginalized group based on racial identity.

IMMERSION/EMERSION

An individual begins surrounding oneself with symbols of one’s racial or ethnic identity. Learning about one’s history and culture. Associating with one’s racial or ethnic group.

INTERNALIZATION

One emerges from Immersion/Emersion with a sense of security about one’s racial or ethnic identity.

INTERNALIZATION /COMMITMENT

This sense of security translates into activism about the concern of ones racial group. With security about self-identity, one moves with comfort in multicultural environments and builds cross-cultural collaborations.

RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN PEOPLE WITH WHITE IDENTITY

CONTACT OR PRE-ENCOUNTER

People with White identity internalize the messages of the dominant society. They learn that being white is “normal” and makes one superior to people in other racial groups.

DISINTEGRATION (ENCOUNTER)

Events and/or relationships begin to make children, adolescents, or adults with white identity aware of the reality of racial identity. Race and racial bias becomes visible. This often brings discomfort.

REINTEGRATION

The pressure to conform to the norms of the society is strong. Acting against the racial norms may have costs. There is a tendency to slip backwards, often blaming the victims of racial discrimination for their circumstances.

PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE

Beginning to understand institutional and cultural discrimination based on race or ethnicity, but not yet sure about what to do about it or how to be an effective ally to People of Color in the struggle for justice. Individuals may also attempt to distance themselves from the white collective saying “But I am an individual. I don’t do those things!” They may choose to identify with some other marginalized group.

IMMERSION/EMERSION

Engages in cultural exploration, surrounding oneself with people, symbols, and experiences that deepen learning about white identity and history from a perspective of race, ethnicity, and social justice.

AUTONOMY

Separating from the values of dominant culture that maintain racial, ethnic hierarchy. Capable of self-evaluation, group evaluation, and willing to engage in collaboration with People of Color and other People with White identity who are committed to justice and equity in a multicultural community.