Chapter 2

Self-Awareness, Critical Reflectivity, and Identity

The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity. . . . The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he [or she] prevents others from being so.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

While change begins within oneself, it does not occur in isolation. It can only occur in relation to others. As Bambara (1981) asserts in *The Bridge Called My Back,* "We have got to know each other better and teach each other our ways, our views, if we’re to remove the scales . . . and get the work done" (p. vii). The goal of self-reflection within a critical multicultural context involves the development of an awareness of one’s own identity, identity development in multiple dimensions, and increased awareness of economic and social structures of oppression as a foundation for activism.

Reflection facilitates the exploration of one’s values, attitudes, and personal history, which can encourage ownership of and deepen responsibility for learning. Examining one’s own biases and prejudicial attitudes, particularly when one is learning about and working with different identity groups, facilitates a process of change (Kondrat, 1999). A critical multicultural perspective enables one to evaluate how one’s own behavior, speech, attitudes, and ways of interacting may contribute to biases or discrimination against people from marginalized groups. The goal is to identify and correct behaviors and attitudes and to break the cycle of oppressive and biased behaviors.

It is possible to explore the meaning of one’s identity, examine the ways in which identity formation takes place, and understand the ways in which these identities influence how the world is experienced. Self-awareness is a necessary beginning. Being consciously and continuously aware of ourselves alters our relationships and is crucial when we are interacting with people whose backgrounds and lived experiences are markedly different from our own.

Our understanding of the self is ill defined and culturally based. It is difficult to engage in objective reflection about oneself. The very concept of self-awareness is socially constructed (Kondrat, 1999), which brings the process of attempting to engage in self-awareness full circle and illustrates the difficulty of grasping the concept. Kondrat identifies three types of self-reflection:
reflective self-awareness, reflexive self-awareness, and critical reflectivity. Through reflective self-awareness one examines oneself in order to become aware of personal biases and the interactive process of identity construction. Reflexive self-awareness is a process through which one becomes aware of how meaning is created through one’s interactions with others. Critical reflectivity allows one to acknowledge oneself as both affecting and being affected by society and requires analysis of social structures. Critical reflectivity allows one to move beyond reflective self-awareness and reflexive self-awareness to a deeper level of understanding of oneself and one’s assumptions, and how these interact with social structures (Kondrat, 1999).

The exercise in self-awareness developed by Elaine Pinderhughes (1989) asks people to think about race by reflecting on their life experiences (see box 2.1). This exercise facilitates a growth in self-awareness. It can help people recognize behaviors and attitudes that contribute to any “isms” (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism). Unfortunately, it can be difficult to recognize one’s own biases, though it may be easier to recognize biases in others. Failure to recognize personal biases or negative attitudes toward others results in resistance to owning the possibility that one may be racist, sexist, or heterosexist (Kondrat, 1999).

When a person examines her or his personal attitudes and behaviors in isolation from the larger social, political, and economic context, the structural barriers that impede the access to resources are not acknowledged. Neither the distortions of history nor the social construction of meaning is evaluated. This leads to racist acts and other oppressive practices. Individuals can fail to assess their own racist or biased thoughts and behaviors, as well as those of the community. Or they might acknowledge that biases do exist but feel that there is nothing they can do to change these situations (Kondrat, 1999).

**Box 2.1 Self-Awareness Exercise**

This assignment has two parts. First, respond to the questions below. Then, choose a family member or another significant person in your life who is either a generation older or younger than you. It is important that you do the self-interview first so that your interviewee’s responses do not influence your answers. If you wish to share your answers with the person you interview, do so after you’ve completed the interview to avoid influencing your interviewee.

1. What is your ethnic or racial background? What has it meant to belong to this group?
2. Where did you grow up and what other racial/ethnic groups resided there?
3. What was your first experience with feeling different?
4. Did your family see itself as similar to or different from other ethnic groups?
5. What are the values of your racial/ethnic group?
6. What is your earliest memory of race or color?
7. What emotion did you experience?
8. With whom did you discuss this experience?
9. What are your feelings about being white or a person of color?
10. For people who are white: How do you think people of color feel about their color identity?
11. For people of color: How do you think people who are white feel about their color identity?
12. How have you experienced a sense of power or lack of power in relation to your racial/ethnic identity, family, class identity, gender, sexual orientation, and professional identity?

After transcribing the interviews, write a reflection paper about the interviews. Consider the following questions: How might your personal values, history, and experiences influence the way in which you view others? What are some of the similarities and differences you encountered between your answers and your interviewee’s answers? In what ways might your interviewee’s views influence your thinking? Has this exercise raised questions for you concerning your readiness to work with people from different cultures?


An approach that encompasses both oneself and the sociopolitical context breaks this gridlock. Advocates of critical reflectivity start with the supposition that all people and institutions somehow contribute to the oppressive behaviors and practices that perpetuate inequality (Kondrat, 1999). This suggests that one’s daily interactions with others, whether conscious or unconscious, intentional or not, have broad and profound ramifications regarding racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. Because one cannot wholly escape societal influences, one’s conscious anti-racist convictions, attitudes, and behaviors do not exclude one from participation in the perpetuation of inequality. Racist and other oppressive acts are often perceived as overt actions, but inaction can produce the same results. What we do not know or are not conscious of can have unintended negative consequences for marginalized people.

When we consider the possibility that there may be alternative interpretations of reality, we allow ourselves to explore the significance and impact of our interactions with others. Assessing how we perceive and interact with people who are different from ourselves is a meaningful way to identify unconscious biases. The following questions reflect the spirit of critical reflectivity.

1. What do I do on a day-to-day basis that might contribute to inequality?
2. What have I learned about how to perceive or how to relate to members of my own group or other groups, and what is the source of that learning?
3. What do I know about how to relate to and interpret the behavior of others who occupy social locations (i.e., class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion) that are similar to, as well as different from, my own?

4. What have I learned about how to interpret the behavior of people whose race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, or religion is different from my own? What if I add class and gender/sex to the equation?

5. What do I know about my conscious intentions when I interact with a client who is African American, Latino/Latina, Native American, Asian American, biracial or multiracial, or European American; refugees and other immigrants; people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or intersex; and people with disabilities?

6. Why do the consequences or outcomes of my actions not fit with or match my good intentions? (Kondrat, 1999)

These questions facilitate a process of reflection that allows for critical self-reflectivity. Box 2.2 provides an example of a situation in which this reflection was useful to a social work intern in her work.

**Box 2.2 Reflections of a Social Work Intern**

Carrie, a white social work intern in her mid-twenties, is completing her practicum in a community-based social service agency. She has been assigned several cases throughout the academic year. As she approaches her final two months of field work, she is asked to reflect on her experiences in preparation for the end-of-term field evaluation. Carrie was eager to start her internship and chose to work in an urban agency that had a diverse client population. Having been raised in a family that believed that all people should be treated equally, and having lived most of her life in a small rural all-white community, Carrie was looking forward to the challenges of an urban experience.

Carrie's agency is located in an active urban community that is home to a growing number of racial/ethnic groups. At this community service organization, clients can find a diverse range of services all under one roof. The rapid growth of the community, however, has required changes within the agency, which is now often short staffed. Although clients from various racial/ethnic groups are served, the agency staff is primarily composed of white middle-class women. Carrie looks to her colleagues and supervisor to understand agency protocol in this rapidly changing environment.

Carrie has demonstrated her willingness to actively engage in reflective practice through the use of supervision, journal writing, and field seminar discussions. Her weekly meetings with her supervisor have been very task focused, and she has received positive feedback about her performance. While reviewing her cases thus far, however,
Carrie and her supervisor noticed a pattern in some of her closed cases. Clients of other racial and/or ethnic groups have had less favorable outcomes than white clients. Carrie was concerned with this revelation. She is committed to the field of social work and believes in treating all people equally.

Carrie reviewed her cases and asked herself Kondrat’s questions. As she evaluated her daily behavior, how she related to and interpreted the behavior of others, her intentions, and the consequences of her actions, she came to realize that in spite of her commitment to equal treatment, she inadvertently disregarded the history, culture, and value differences that significantly influence the way in which racial/ethnic identity affects an individual’s experience of the world.

**Reflection**

Engaging in critical reflectivity offers an opportunity for the assessment of personal beliefs, intentions, and attitudes. The process highlights areas in which assumptions and interactions between oneself and others result in behaviors that perpetuate the marginalization of people who have been oppressed. This process reveals how power and privilege are understood or misunderstood, and how assumptions make a difference in determining whether interactions are productive, hurtful, or destructive. Categorical differences such as class, socioeconomic position, ability, sexual orientation, gender, and sex influence the interactions between members of privileged groups and people who are from historically oppressed populations. Critical reflectivity allows people to begin to understand how their experience of themselves is embedded in their interactions with others and how shared meanings are created (Kondrat, 1999). The focus is on examining the ways things can be changed, not on what could or should have happened. Moving beyond guilt, shame, or anger to critical reflection facilitates growth and the development of a new social consciousness (Schmitz et al., 2001). Misinformation that was received in the past can be corrected, and behavior modified in the future.

Understanding oneself in context allows one to search for new explanations for one’s behavior and intentions (Schmitz et al., 2001). In this process, personal biases and cultural stereotypes, societal prejudices and oppression, and the experiences of all racial/ethnic groups in modern society are examined. It is within the context of our own experiences, relationships, family, community, and culture that we interpret our daily interactions. Understanding ourselves involves examining the norms, values, and skills arising from our own racial/ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, ability, and sexual orientation history and identification.

As we engage in the process, we come to recognize the disparities in power and authority between ourselves and others, and we begin to understand that
our actions may have unintended consequences for others (Kondrat, 1999). Indi-
viduals who are white may recognize that they are members of a group that has
historically oppressed people from other racial/ethnic groups, and that they are
perceived as such by others. Collective knowledge of race relations and personal
experience with racism may make people of color reticent to accept the
actions of white individuals and groups. Similarly, white individuals and groups
may feel the guilt and shame of racism, which can interfere with their interac-
tions with others. Likewise, interactions between members of different popula-
tions of color are also influenced by assumptions, biases, and prejudices.
Through dialogue it is possible to build bridges across difference.

One of the hidden phenomena of membership in a privileged group is the
assumption of normality, according to which others are not normal. Assump-
tions are too often built on mythology and assumptions of one’s own normality.
For instance, the assumption that growing up in a multiracial family or a family
with lesbian or gay parents can harm children is not based on data. People’s in-
teractions with others are influenced by myths like these. The consequences are
destructive in social workers’ work with children and families. With guidance,
the experience of difference can lead to the development not only of a strong
sense of self but also empathy, compassion, and understanding. Unexamined be-
lief systems and ways of knowing are not adequate preparation for engaging in
relationships in a multicultural environment. Racism, heterosexism and homo-
phobia, sexism, transphobia, and ableism are pervasive in our society; even a per-
son who sees her- or himself as unprejudiced can be guilty of these prejudices
(Tatum, 1994). This realization can cause a broad range of emotions—including
frustration, upset, shame, fault, and guilt (Schmitz et al., 2001). These uncom-
fortable feelings can create barriers to learning. Learning to recognize privileges
that result from oppressive systems creates opportunities for creating change.

Examination of the learning process illuminates ways in which belief sys-
tems are shaped (see figure 2.1). We enter this world lacking assumptions.
Through socialization by family, friends, and other people we respect and trust,
we learn stereotypes, misinformation, myths, and partial histories that glorify
some, vilify others, and erase people and events by making no mention of them
at all. Misinformation acquired through early learning is reinforced by institu-
tional and cultural structures such as the media, schools, religion, and govern-
mental and legal systems, as well as traditions and customs. At each stage of
learning we consciously, or unconsciously, accept what we have been taught.
These truths, as we come to know them, shape how we see ourselves and how
we view others. Our self-identity can be bolstered or deflated depending on the
social strata we occupy. The sense of ourselves as racist, sexist, homophobic be-
ings brings up a variety of emotions ranging from a false sense of superiority to
a false sense of inferiority. Once new learning is internalized, the potential for
making informed choices exists. We can decide to pass on the misinformation
and act in ways that continue to marginalize people, or we can break the cycle
and become allies with marginalized groups by acting responsibly.
Identity Development

Identity development models are one tool for exploring similarities and differences between people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds, gender and sexual orientation, and ability status. There are also models that explore the development of people's identities in terms of gender, sex, sexual orientation, and ability status.

Race per se does not determine the quality of interactions between members of different racial groups. Racial identity development is a more salient fac-

**FIGURE 2.1** Learning and Unlearning Assumptions of Hierarchical Social Orders

- We are empty of assumptions.
- We learn misinformation, myths, or nothing at all from family, friends, and others we respect and trust.
- Misinformation and myths are reinforced through institutional and cultural structures.
- We consciously or unconsciously accept what we are taught.
- We become allies.
- We continue oppressive practices.
Racial identity development is not just something people who are white need to understand; populations that have historically been oppressed and marginalized because of their race must understand the process as well. Helms’s (1993a) study of racial dyads highlights important implications for all people’s understanding of racial identity development. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral issues are likely to influence different mechanisms that people use for coping with racial issues. The overlap between models of African American identity development and the model of white racial identity development further elucidates issues of identity, race, and racism. Tatum (2003) points out that all groups of color in the United States face issues regarding racism and as a result grapple with many of the identity development issues discussed by Helms (1993c), such as balancing the issues of assimilation into the dominate culture with the need to retain identification with one’s own culture and community.

Racial identity development is neither static nor linear. Not everyone starts at the same place, nor does everyone progress in a step-by-step manner. The manner in which one’s racial identity is integrated into her or his personality depends on several sociocultural factors, such as parents, family, peers, schools, religious organizations, and the media; systemic factors, such as socioeconomic class, discrimination, and quality of interracial interactions; and physical and personal attributes (Helms, 1993a).

### African American Racial Identity Model

Theories of visible racial/ethnic identity in populations of color have been a topic of interest for several decades. William E. Cross and Janet Helms are among the leaders in this field of study. The model of racial identity development for people who are African American was first introduced by Cross (1978, 1980, 1991) and was later expanded by Helms (1984, 1993c, 1994). This model outlines the path that people who are African American may take in developing a healthy racial identity. Helms’s (1993c) amended model, which focuses on one’s worldview, delineates the five stages of racial identity formation: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization/commitment.

During the pre-encounter stage, people who are African American idealize the worldview of the dominant white culture and denigrate blackness and black culture. It is assumed that people who are white hold their advantaged status because of their extraordinary efforts, and that people who are African American are disadvantaged because they have not exercised enough effort. The person denies her or his racial identity and identifies with people who are white. During this stage the person attributes her or his success or failure to how well she or he imitates the traits associated with whiteness (Helms, 1993b).

During the encounter stage, the person becomes aware that race is the delineator that determines or influences one’s life options. A single event or an
accumulation of events may lead to the realization that the Eurocentric worldview is no longer viable, and that another identity must be found. During the struggle to realize a new identity, she or he vacillates between shedding the pre-encounter identity and assuming a not yet clearly articulated African American identity. This phase is wrought with mixed emotions, ranging from confusion in the earlier stages to euphoria experienced at a later stage.

The immersion/emersion stage consists of two parts. First is the acceptance of a positive authentic African American identity and a black or Afrocentric worldview. The individual adopts an African American identity and abandons her or his previously constructed personal identity. The person might also overtly express a blackness that conforms to white stereotypes of blackness. During this stage African Americans may express anger toward people who are white, because they see them as the oppressors, and toward other African Americans who don’t share their new perception of themselves. The individual experiences emotional ups and downs in trying to come to terms with a new identity and worldview. Immersion is a process of self-exploration, while emersion is a process of joining the community of identity to expand one’s development. Emersion offers the possibility of escape from immersion. During emersion the person withdraws into a supportive African American community and engages in cathartic experiences. During this stage a person may engage in a range of social or political activities that allows exploration of African American and African cultural issues. The emersion into African American culture allows the person to develop a nonstereotypical Afro-American worldview.

The internalization stage marks the point at which one is able to positively internalize the unique elements of her or his personal identity blended with her or his African American identity. The person can now face the world from a position of strength and identifies with the African American group. The person rejects racism and other forms of oppression but can have positive relationships with supportive people who are white. Finally, internalization/commitment describes the continuation and nurturing of one’s positive African American identity and involvement in social and civic activities that combat all forms of racism and oppression.

**White Racial Identity Development**

Far and away the most troublesome consequence of race obliviousness for many people is the failure to recognize the privileges our society confers on them because they have white skin. The privilege of white skin is a birthright, a set of advantages one receives simply by being born with features that society values (Dalton, 2002).

White people who fail to see themselves as racialized (that is, they tend not to think of themselves in racial terms) also fail to see the ways in which they are privileged. Peggy McIntosh (1990) wrote a landmark article about her own examination of her white privilege, in which she identified the many ways in
which white people experience privilege. People who are white know that they are white, but this is often translated as being just American. They do not have any experience understanding race and how it shapes our lives. They typically don’t think about their whiteness, nor do they think about the privilege bestowed on them because of their race.

This inability or unwillingness to think of oneself in racial terms has decidedly negative consequences. For one thing, it produces huge blind spots. It leaves people who are white baffled by the amount of energy many African Americans and other people of color pour into questions of racial identity. It makes it difficult for white people to understand why many people of color have a sense of group consciousness that influences the choices they make as individuals. It blinds them to the fact that their lives are shaped by race just as much as the lives of people of color. How white people view life’s possibilities, whom they regard as heroes, the extent to which they feel the country is theirs, and the extent to which that belief is reinforced by society—all of this, and more, is a function of race. The internalized assumption of normality prevents them from imagining other possibilities.

Skin color is a complex social indicator that promotes differential power and privilege between people who are seen as white and people of color (Pinderhughes, 1989). One’s perception of reality is seldom questioned, except when one stumbles upon others who are different and have opposing worldviews. This conflict offers people who are white the opportunity to develop knowledge and awareness of themselves as racial beings. People who are white are generally unaware of ways to develop a racial identity and have few opportunities to understand what it means to be white until they choose to embrace nonracist perspectives (Carter, 1995). White racial identity theory explains the developmental process that people who are white need to engage in to gain a better understanding of themselves and the environments in which they live. Exercises such as McIntosh’s (1990) “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” a list of advantages that people with white skin experience in their daily lives and take for granted, can help individuals identify the ways in which they experience white privilege. These benefits range from being confident that one will not be discriminated against because of skin color in a job interview or when one tries to rent an apartment to seeing people of one’s own race represented on television. This exercise (which is available online) can advance racial identity awareness, but her work also has implications for understanding how various marginalized groups are disadvantaged. If one substitutes “people of my own sexual orientation” or “others with a disability” for “people of my race” and “people of my racial group” in most of the situations described by McIntosh (for example, “I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time” or “I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group”), then one can see how unearned privilege benefits those who are heterosexual or able-bodied and disadvantages people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or people who have a disability.
Helms’s (1993d) white racial identity development theory, called the abandonment of racism, runs parallel to the black racial identity development model and consists of six stages that occur in two phases (see figure 2.2). The process begins with the abandonment-of-racism phase, which has three stages: contact, disintegration, and reintegration. This is followed by the defining-a-nonracist-white-identity phase, which also involves three stages: pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy.

In the contact stage, people who are white develop a vague awareness of the presence of people of color. During this stage, people who are white may approach people of color with a tentative curiosity and may have only a vague or superficial awareness of their own whiteness. At this stage they still use their own whiteness as the norm against which they compare people of color, unaware that there are multiple ways to evaluate others. They pass judgment without understanding that whiteness is the norm against which they evaluate all others in terms of physical appearance, customs, values, behavior, and the like. Their interactions with people of color in social and occupational settings are limited, which means they have little opportunity to test their assumptions about people of color.

During the disintegration stage, whites start to develop a consciousness of whiteness. They begin what is sometimes a painful process of questioning what they have been taught and what they believe to be true. It is at this point that people who are white recognize that there are inequalities based on race and that social structures perpetuate oppression. They realize as well that their assumptions about whiteness and people of color are incorrect. Accepting that one is misinformed may also cause one to call into question one’s ability to interact with people of color.

**FIGURE 2.2** Stages and Phases of White Racial Identity Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1 Abandonment of Racism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
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<td>Disintegration</td>
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<td>Reintegration</td>
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**Phase 2 Defining a Nonracist White Identity**

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<th>Pseudo-independent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Immersion/Emersion</td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
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During reintegration, the third stage of phase 1, people have acknowledged their white identity but assume that the social structures that privilege them and disadvantage others are part of a natural order. During this stage, people selectively process or reinterpret the world around them to align with the social mores that encourage stereotypes of people. They often minimize or deny similarities that they observe between people who are white and people of color.

During pseudo-independence, the first stage of the second phase, the individual begins the formation of a positive white identity, engaging in an intellectual process in an effort to make sense of what she or he has learned. Assumptions, including notions of superiority and inferiority based on race, are questioned in earnest. The person begins to acknowledge that she or he has a responsibility to help dismantle the system of oppression of people of color. Yet people at this stage may still behave in ways that inadvertently maintain the status quo. They may now see people of color as victims but may also believe that the solution to the problem is to help people of color adopt the culture of the white dominant society. They do not yet see racial differences as viable alternative ways of being. They still measure all people against the white ideal. During this stage, the motives of individuals who are earnest about developing a positive white racial identity may be questioned by the racial groups they are trying to champion and may be viewed with suspicion by family members or other people they know who are white. Those who are encouraged to continue the campaign against race-based social injustice are well on their way to developing a racial identity that no longer privileges whiteness and marginalizes people of color.

Immersion/emersion is the period during which people develop a strong commitment to the development of a positive white racial identity, and to replacing myths and stereotypes about whiteness and people of color with accurate information. The questions that are asked at this stage are “Who am I racially?” “Who do I want to be?” and “Who are you really?” People often facilitate this journey by reading about others who are white who have engaged in racial identity struggles or by participating in white consciousness-raising groups that are committed to addressing racial injustice. At this stage, individuals no longer see people of color as needing to be fixed. They fully accept the need for people who are white to play an integral role in the change process.

Autonomy, the final stage, describes the internalization of a new definition of whiteness and a commitment to nurture this identity. The person is now committed to eliminating oppressive behaviors; she or he no longer vilifies or pays tribute to others based on their group membership. While developing an autonomous racial identity, the person also seeks out opportunities to engage with members of other racial and cultural groups. This final stage of white racial identity does not represent the end of racial identity development, but a new beginning that must be nurtured, encouraged, and respected. This stage marks the individual’s acceptance that this is an ongoing process requiring openness to new information and different worldviews. Tatum (1994) describes the final
Alternative Models of Identity Development

Helms’s models of racial identity development for African Americans and whites are conceptualized in stages that focus on actions rather than outcomes. The stages describe a series of experiences that force us to ask who we are and to question our identity. Since the appearance of racial identity development models in the literature, the concepts described in these models have been used to describe the experiences of other cultural groups, which suggests comparable processes and experiences among marginalized groups (Sue, Carter, Casas, Fouas, Ivey, Jensen, et al., 1998). The experiences of people who are from non-Western cultures may be different and the process of identity development that they go through may be different as well, and some people have argued that Helms’s model does not represent their own experiences. Sue and Sue (1993), for instance, present a model of identity development for Asian Americans that focuses on historical, familial, and cultural issues. This does not mean that Helms’s model should be discarded. In fact, Tatum (2003), in support of the Helms model, identifies some issues regarding identity development in racist environments that affect all communities of color. Stage models and other models for understanding different ways of being and knowing can be used in parallel with each other, as each is a legitimate way of explaining the identity development process. Examining other models minimizes hierarchal ordering and allows one to embrace and honor all ways of knowing.

Wilson (1996) believes that indigenous Americans’ embrace of the interconnectedness between the person and her or his multiple environments is a useful alternative to the singularly focused racial/ethnic identity model proposed by Helms, which does not account for simultaneous experiences of difference. Intersecting and simultaneous oppressions must be assessed, as they change the context and content of an individual’s experience and may also change how one’s identity is understood.

The experiences of Native Americans are often conveyed through storytelling, a method that has not been commonly used in Western research. Storytelling and narratives, however, are an integral part of indigenous knowledge building and research. Stories can be powerful and can contribute to a collective story in which the experiences of every indigenous person can be heard (Smith, 1999). Horse (2001) uses story and history to present a model of identity development for Native Americans. He presents a model that crosses the individual and group, incorporating history, language and culture, traditions, and spirituality. In the end, personal and cultural identities remain intertwined.
Like Native Americans, Asian Americans may experience different identity development pathways. Few models of identity development have been constructed with an Asian identity development in mind (Yeh & Huang, 1996). Sodowsky, Kwan, and Pannu (1995) proposed a model of Asian ethnic identity that considers the complex interactions between the individual and the context in which she or he is placed. This model is nonlinear and bidirectional, which means that it views an individual’s ethnic identity orientation as situational and changing over time (Chae, 2001/2002). The extent and degree of one’s acculturation into the dominant cultural can have a direct influence on one’s ethnic identity. The nonlinear ethnic identity process “does not arise out of labiality or stability, rather it arises out of the ethnic individual’s adaptive principles of flexibility and openness to possibilities” (Sodowsky et al., 1995, p. 145).

Sue and Sue (1993) examine the impact of Asian cultural values and cultural and legal racism on the identity development of Asian Americans. In Asian cultures, loyalty to one’s family and community has a higher value than autonomy and independence. Restraint of emotion is valued. These values conflict with many of the dominant culture values in the United States. Kim (2001) looks at how Asian Americans resolve these conflicts. She presents an Asian American identity development theory that consists of five stages: ethnic awareness, white identification, awakening to social political consciousness, redirection to an Asian American consciousness, and incorporation of a positive identity as Asian American. Similar to Helms’s model of racial identity development for African Americans, Kim’s theory involves a movement from idealization of whiteness to an increased appreciation of one’s own culture and an increased social and political consciousness.

Models of identity development for Latinos and Latinas are complex since commonly used racial categories do not fit, as a person can be both Latino/Latina and a member of any of the other racial groups (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). The complexity is intensified by the diversity of cultures and cultural identification. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) identify five starting points for Latino/Latina identity development that are linked to self-identification as a Latino/Latina: Latin-integrated, Latino-identified, subgroup-identified, Latino as other, undifferentiated/denial, and white-identified. Torres and Baxter (2004) explore models of identity development for Latino and Latina college students with a focus on the impact of education on image development. They have found that exposure to a learning environment in which individuals can explore their ethnic/cultural environment and reconstruct their view of the world allows them to appreciate its complexity. This has a positive effect on identity development. Models of identity development for multiracial people are growing in complexity as people refuse to accept simplistic categorization. Kich (1992) and Poston (1990) have developed stage models of multiracial identity development; however, these models have been criticized as inadequate for encompassing the complexities of multiracial people (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). The
factor model of multiracial identity considers eight factors that affect the choices of multiracial people: racial ancestry, cultural attachment, early experience and socialization, political awareness and orientation, spirituality, other social identities, social and historical context, and physical appearance (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Models exploring gender and sexual orientation identity development both overlap and differ. The development of gender roles and gender identity is commonly contested and open to debate. The role of biology in gender is only vaguely understood. Current research with transgender and intersex individuals both clarifies and clouds our knowledge of gender and gender identity. As we come to understand transgender identity, it has become obvious that linear models cannot explain all paths to identity development (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). What is clear is that if there are biological components to the development of gender, they do little more than establish predispositions and tendencies. “Gender, like race, does become a social construction when it is treated as a categorical, fixed difference and then used to deny opportunity and equality to women” (Healey, 2003, p. 24). In exploring the relationship between feminist identity development and gender roles and well-being, Saunders and Kashubeck-West (2006) have found that feminist identity correlates positively with psychological well-being. Downing and Roush (1985) present a model of feminist identity development derived from Cross’s model of racial identity development. Moradi (2005), who has examined the literature on womanist identity development, proposes the womanist identity development model as one that facilitates the simultaneous exploration of gender, race, and ethnicity. The little research that has been done shows correlations between feminist and racial identity development. Likewise, Hoffman (2006) found correlations between gender and ethnic identity and self-acceptance.

Many of the gender identity and sexual orientation developmental models are linear, though recent research incorporates knowledge development in the biological arena. Hunter (2005) thoroughly reviews the professional literature on the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities. Most models of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity are stage models that describe a linear progression across stages. The models are dated and simplistic in many respects (Hunter, 2005). While many look at these characteristics in isolation, some are more holistic, taking into consideration the impact of race and ethnicity on sexual orientation identity (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Parks, Hughes, and Matthews (2004), who explored racial and ethnic differences within sexual orientation, found support for a model of development in which timing and spacing of the phases are not rigid and fixed. They found that African American women and Latinas experienced similar processes, while white women were older when they first decided to explore their sexual orientation, faster in making decisions about their orientation, and quicker to disclose to others. White lesbians were more likely than lesbians of color, who must integrate their development as women of color with their sexual orientation development, to disclose their sexual orientation to people outside their
families. Parks, Hughes, and Matthews hypothesize that their development as members of one historically oppressed group may help prepare lesbians of color for developing a healthy identity as members of a group that is oppressed because of sexual orientation; white women do not have that experience upon which to draw. Cramer and Gilson (1999) have found similarities between the identity development models for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals and for individuals with disabilities. They propose the use of a fluid model that recognizes the biopsychosocial-cultural context and the impact of language and multiple identities.

Finally, Chestang’s (1972, 1984) theory on character development in a hostile environment focuses on the impact of social injustice and social inequality on personal and racial identity development. The struggle against abuse, forbearance, and the need to persevere affect the development of racial identity and group identification. According to Chestang’s theory of the depreciated or transcendent character, the combined impact of social injustice and inconsistency results in a feeling of personal impotence and inadequacy. Although all individuals who have been oppressed have developed both a depreciated character and a transcendent character, one becomes dominant. The depreciated character generally accepts what is and does not seek change; she or he accepts and navigates the oppressive system. She or he assimilates. On the other hand, the transcendent character forces change, finding innovative ways to change society’s inconsistencies while advocating social justice and empowerment. Hope and optimism become the driving force to develop an equitable system for all. Transcendent characters are change agents.

Models for understanding identity development are useful tools because they provide a framework and structure that can help us formulate questions about who we are in relation to our interactions with others. Using these frameworks as blueprints, however, can lead to stereotyping and essentializing. Using models as the sole mechanism for understanding complex behaviors can cause one to disregard the complex interactions that can take place between different characteristics such as race/ethnicity, sex and gender, and sexual orientation.

Multidimensional Identity Development

Models of identity development are often unidimensional and therefore fail to acknowledge the interactions that occur between race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability. Consequently, they often do not validate multiple layers of oppression (and privilege). Privilege may go unrecognized, regardless of its source, and those with privilege may continue to oppress others. For instance, heterosexuals and able-bodied people, regardless of class, race, and gender, may perpetrate or reinforce oppressive and biased acts against those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex and people with disabilities. Each individual in a multicultural society must be attuned to her or his own attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Table 2.1 shows a stage model
### TABLE 2.1  Stages of Identity Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Perceptions of difference</th>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Results of privilege</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-encounter</td>
<td>Unawareness of one’s own whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, or able-bodiedness</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Obliviousness to one’s own racial identity, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness; differential privilege; and the existence of gender beyond the male-female dichotomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Consciousness of race, gender diversity, sexual orientation, and disability</td>
<td>Disintegration</td>
<td>First acknowledgment of white identity, gender diversity, heterosexual identity, and able-bodiedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reintegration</td>
<td>Idealization of whites, males, heterosexuals, and able-bodied individuals; denigration of blacks, transsexual and intersexual individuals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and people with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersions/Emersion</td>
<td>Idealization of own race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability status</td>
<td>Pseudo-independence</td>
<td>Intellectual acceptance of one’s own and others’ race from the white perspective, of gender and of sexual identity from the dominant perspective, and of disability from a perspective of able-bodiedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Transcendence of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability status</td>
<td>Immersion/Emersion</td>
<td>Honest appraisal of racism and the significance of whiteness in the maintenance of oppression; sexism in the maintenance of male privilege and the marginalization of transsexual and intersex people; heterosexism and the significance and the roles of heterosexism and homophobia in the oppression of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals; ableism and the significance of able-bodiedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Internalization of a multicultural non-racist non-sexist, non-heterosexual, and non-ableist identity; commitment to work toward the alleviation of racism, sexism, and toward other necessary changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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of identity development for members of marginalized groups. This stage model depicts the overlap between two models of identity development and attempts to move the application beyond race to other sources of identity. As people who are marginalized because of gender and sex, sexual orientation, or ability develop awareness of themselves and of others, they experience stages similar to those depicted in the model. As one moves from the pre-encounter stage to the encounter stage, awareness grows. Consciousness expands through self-reflection and involvement with one’s communities of identity. Internalization and commitment follow. As we grow in the areas of life where we experience oppression, we must also grow in the areas where we experience privilege. This model can be adapted to types of privilege beyond those created by race, which helps individuals recognize the assumptions of normality that they have internalized.

Investigating one’s self-identity and how it interferes with the ability to understand multiple worldviews creates opportunity for change. Start by examining your relationships and the patterns they follow. Who is in your family and your social and community circles? With whom do you socialize? What activities do you attend, and who else attends? How do you behave and interact with people from different cultures and communities? How can you create opportunities to form supportive and meaningful relationships with people from other cultures and communities? Becoming an agent for equality in a multicultural society requires one to accept this as a journey, not a destination. It also requires us to live with vulnerability as we navigate new paths and grow to understand, if not accept, other ways of knowing and being.