

BLACK AND WHITE RACIAL IDENTITY

Theory, Research, and Practice

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An Overview of Black Racial Identity Theory

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Theories and models of Black racial identity began to appear in the counseling psychology and psychotherapy literature around the early 1970s in response to the Civil Rights Movement of the era. Ostensibly, theorists were attempting to present a framework by which practitioners could be more sensitive to the racial issues that were hypothesized to influence the therapy process. In actuality, one can find two major Black racial identity theoretical strands. The first strand might be called the Black client (or person)-as-problem (CAP) perspective; the second might be called the Nigrescence or racial identity development (NRID) perspective. Each of these perspectives seems to have had a different underlying purpose and, consequently, different implications for how Black racial identity was and continues to be conceptualized.

THE CLIENT-AS-PROBLEM PERSPECTIVE (CAP)

The CAP approach represented the first attempts at explaining intra- and inter-racial dynamics. As Black people began to demand recognition and social acceptance during the 1960s, many Whites and assimilated Blacks in society reacted with considerable anxiety and discomfort to this ostensibly sudden disruption of the status quo. Even though the well-publicized Black-initiated public protests made it difficult for Whites as well as Blacks to continue to ignore completely the injustices that characterized Black lives, American society was not accustomed to witnessing Black assertion and leadership on such a massive scale (cf. J.

Williams, 1987). Unfortunately, Whites seemingly equated Black assertion with aggression (cf. Cheek, 1976), militance, and property destruction or Black racial rioting (cf. Caplan, 1970). Therefore, this new type of Black visibility contributed to general impressions that Blacks were no longer predictable and that this unpredictability might manifest itself in violence and hostility in cross-racial interactions, in society in general and in counseling and psychotherapy relationships in particular.

In counseling and psychotherapy, much of the literature of the era played on (primarily) White fears that Blacks would act out their anger toward White society via passivity, mistrustfulness, and/or overt hostility. Additionally, since there were no psychological models available for explaining how it was possible for Black people to develop healthy non-vengeful personalities in spite of the racial discrimination to which they had been exposed, most of the psychological literature engaged in deficit-modeling or the enumeration of all the alleged deficiencies but none of the strengths in "the Black personality" (cf. Acosta, Yamamoto, & Evans, 1982; Gardner, 1971; E. Smith, 1980). Therapy interventions were proposed primarily for the purpose of helping the (usually White) therapist cope with the Black client's intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics, which were presumed to be unique to Black people (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; A. Jones & Seagull, 1977; Pinderhughes, 1973).

It was in such an atmosphere that the CAP models of racial identity development began to appear (Dizard, 1970; G. G. Jackson & Kirschner, 1973; Siegel, 1970; Vontress, 1971a, 1971b). In general, CAP models suggested that differences in overt behaviors (primarily racial self-designation) would allow counselors to decide which Black clients were likely to be most problematic for which race of counselors.

Vontress' (1971b) typology, which is summarized in Table 2.1, is the most sophisticated representative of this perspective. He proposed that there were three types of Black people, "Black," "Colored," and "Negro." Each type hypothetically demonstrated a different type of racial identity via their inter- and intra-racial thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For instance, it was assumed that clients who referred to themselves as "Black" would value their African physical characteristics, understand the suffering inflicted upon their racial group, and would be intolerant of Whites who attempted to interact with Blacks from a racist stance. Vontress described Negroes as integrationists who would accommodate Whites who were not blatantly racist. Coloreds were described as Black people who perceive and evaluate themselves as Whites do. In establishing counseling relationships, Vontress speculated that Negroes would actually be most amenable, Coloreds would *appear* to be, and Blacks would be least so.

What defines perspectives in client-as-problem models is their virtually exclusive focus on Black identity development as a consequence of so-

Table 2.1
Summary of Nigrescence Models of Racial Identity

Authors	Date	Model Type	Name	Components	Description
AKbar	1979	Typology	1. Alien-Self Disorders	1. Preoccupied with material values, deny race, racism, and oppression in identifying with European culture.	
			2. Anti-Self Disorders	2. Identifies with European culture and expresses overt and covert hostility toward anything African.	
			3. Self-Destructive Disorders	3. Identifies with neither cultural group, believes in survival at any cost.	
J. A. Banks	1981	Stage	1. Ethnic Psychological Captivity	1. Person internalizes society's negative view of his/her ethnic group.	
			2. Ethnic Encapsulation	2. Person participates primarily with own ethnic group which is idealized.	
			3. Ethnic Identity Clarification	3. Person learns to accept self.	
			4. Biethnicity	4. Person possesses healthy sense of ethnic identity and can function in ethnic and White culture.	
			5. Multiethnicity	5. Person is self-actualized and can function beyond superficial levels in many cultures.	

Table 2.1 (continued)

Authors	Date	Model Type	Name	Components	Description	
Cross	1971	Stage	1. Preencounter	6. Globalism and Global Competency	6. Person can use universal ethnic knowledge to function within ethnic groups worldwide.	
					1. Identifies with White culture, rejects or denies membership in Black culture.	
					2. Rejects previous identification with White culture, seeks identification with Black culture.	
					3. Completely identifies with Black culture and denigrates White culture.	
					4. Internalizes Black culture, transcends racism.	
Dizard	1971	Typology	1. Assimilated	5. Internalization-Commitment	1. Except for White prejudice moves comfortably and easily into White culture.	
					2. Exhibits pathology as the predominant response to life's hardships.	
					3. Attempts to preserve a group identity and a sense of dignity.	
					4. Internalization	4. Internalizes Black culture, transcends racism.
					5. Internalization-Commitment	5. Internalizes Black culture, fights general cultural oppression.
Gibbs	1974	Typology	1. Withdrawal mode	3. Separation mode	1. Feelings of apathy, depression, depersonalization lead person to withdraw from conflictual racial situation.	
					2. Feelings of anger, hostility, conflicts in relationships expressed as rejection of Whites and White culture.	
					3. Social anxiety and desire for acceptance lead person to avoid Blacks and/or conceal racial-group membership.	
					4. Person accepts self, has a positive racial identity, high achievement motivation, and engages in autonomous self-actualizing behavior.	
Gay	1984	Stage	1. Preencounter	2. Encounter	1. Ethnic identity is subconscious or subliminal or dominated by Euro-American conceptions of ethnicity.	
					2. An experience or event shatters person's feelings about ethnic group or self and causes person to search for new foundations for an identity.	
					3. Person experiences and exudes inner security, self-confidence, and pride in one's ethnicity.	

Table 2.1 (continued)

Authors	Date	Model Type	Name	Components	Description
B. Jackson	1975	Stage	1. Passive/acceptance	1. Copes by imitating Whites.	
			2. Active resistance	2. Rejects White culture, militantly identifies with Black culture.	
			3. Redirection	3. Primary focus on Black identity and pride, little attention given to Whites.	
			4. Internalization	4. Fulfilled sense of self and cultural identity.	
Milliones	1980	Stage	1. Preconscious	1. Individuals who are not engaged in and are antagonistic to conversion to Blackness.	
			2. Confrontation	2. Person has begun converting to Black, expresses strong anti-White feelings and attitudes.	
			3. Internalization	3. Positive acceptance of Blackness rather than denigration of Whiteness is the theme.	
			4. Integration	4. Person internalizes positive Black consciousness and acts to eradicate oppression of humans.	
Thomas	1971	Stage	1. Negromachy	1. Poor sense of self-worth, depends on White society for self-definition.	
			2. Stage 1	2. Anger directed toward Whites.	
			3. Stage 2	3. Expresses pain associated with denying and becoming Black self.	
			4. Stage 3	4. Immerses self in Black/African culture.	
			5. Stage 4	5. Black identity emerges via social action.	
			6. Stage 5	6. Transcendence, person no longer uses culture cues to judge others.	
Toldson & Pasteur	1975	Stage	1. Separation from Nature.	1. Objectively views Black people's misery.	
			2. Submission into Personal Misery.	2. Person feels anger stemming from racism-based misery.	
			3. Identification with Oppressed People.	3. Person feels a sympathetic link with all oppressed people.	
			4. Extension of Self into the Past.	4. Person becomes aware of inhumanity toward and past glories of African people.	
			5. Careful Self Analysis	5. Abandons White definition of self.	
			6. Affirmation of Blackness	6. Develops realistic plans for affirming self.	
Vontress	1971	Typology	1. Coloreds	1. People of African descent who perceive and evaluate selves according to White standards.	

Table 2.1 (continued)

Authors	Date	Model Type	Name	Components	Description
			2. Negroes		2. Uncertain about how they feel about themselves, Blacks, or Whites.
			3. Blacks		3. Person is no longer ashamed of African racial characteristics, resists affronts to human dignity.

cial pressures and their linking of clients' other-directed negative reactions (e.g., anger, hostility, rage) and behaviors to Black rather than assimilated identities or personality types. Thus, the primary goal of such models seems to have been to diffuse counselor anxiety by making the occurrence of aversive Black behaviors more predictable. Nevertheless, the perspective did recognize that Black identity comes in many forms and it challenged the a priori assumption that cultural assimilation was necessarily the most healthy form of adjustment for the Black person.

NIGRESCENCE OR BLACK RACIAL IDENTITY MODELS (NRID)

Nigrescence can be defined as the developmental process by which a person "becomes Black" where Black is defined in terms of one's manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one's reference groups rather than in terms of skin color per se. The NRID models attempted to separate those aspects of Black identity development that occurred primarily in response to racial oppression (e.g., some forms of ascribed identities and reference-group orientations) from those aspects (e.g., personal identity) that occurred as a normal part of the human self-actualization process or the need to be the best Self that one can be (cf. Maslow, 1970). Thus, self-actualization was assumed to be expressed at the most sophisticated level or type of racial identity development whereas less sophisticated resolutions were assumed to represent various kinds of reactions to racial discrimination.

Furthermore, the NRID theorists attempted to define the direction of healthy Black identity development and argued that overidentification with Whiteness and White culture (i.e., assimilated identities) was a psychologically unhealthy resolution of the identity issues resulting from one's need to survive in a racist culture (cf. Akbar, 1979). This perspective ran contrary to the melting pot philosophy of healthy development that had prevailed in American society heretofore for most other racial/ethnic groups (Hale, 1980).

With the exceptions of Akbar's (1979) and Gibbs's (1974) typologies, the Nigrescence racial identity models were stage models in which theorists proposed that individuals could potentially move from least healthy, White-defined stages of identity, to most healthy, self-defined racial transcendence. As shown in Table 2.1, stage theorists differed in their manner of labeling the stages (e.g., "Alien-Self Disorders" versus "Ethnic Psychological Captivity"), somewhat in the amount of differentiation proposed within assimilated, Black, and transcendent identities (e.g., Thomas, 1971, proposes 1 or 2 stages of "White" or assimilated identification whereas B. Jackson, 1975, proposes 1), and in the sequence in which some of the stages were thought to occur.

In attempting to integrate the J. A. Banks (1981), Cross (1971), and Thomas (1971) models, Gay (1984) described the similarities among the models accordingly: "Each, in its own way, accounts for an ideological metamorphosis of ethnic [sic] identity, assumes that the transformation is a liberating process which symbolizes a psychologically healthier state of being, and uses the idea of developmental stages to account for movement of individuals from negativism to positivism in their self ethnic [sic] identities" (p. 44).

If one examines the summaries of the NRID models in Table 2.1, one cannot help but notice further striking similarities in stage content across the various models. If one were to be particularly investigative, one would also find that even though the models appeared in the literature around the same time, virtually none of the authors cross-referenced the others. Nor were any of the models developed in the same geographical location. Cross, Parham, and Helms (in press), in their historical overview of the Nigrescence literature, explain the multiplicity of models as follows:

Anyone who takes the time to interview some of the key actors will readily discover each was working independently of the other, and the similarity in their writings is not the product of a "copy-cat" phenomena, but the reflection of the fact that whether observed in Watts (Charles Thomas), Chicago (William Cross), Albany, New York (Bailey Jackson), New Orleans (Ivory Toldson and Albert Pasteur) or Pittsburgh (Jake Milliones), the dynamics of Black identity change were basically the same all across America. The similarity, then, is not so much with the models, but in the phenomena being observed. (pp. 4-5)

Cross et al. (in press) seem to be suggesting that by whatever particular NRID model one chooses to investigate Black racial identity development, one potentially contributes to the understanding of a significant common developmental process. Be that as it may, because the various models have been published in a variety of disparate outlets, it has been possible for the old models to exist and new models to accumulate unbeknownst to Black identity theorists and researchers, other than the originator and those fortunate enough to discover her or him.

Thus, though the first models to appear in the counseling (Parham & Helms, 1981) and psychotherapy (Butler, 1975; Milliones, 1980) literature were based on either the Cross (1971) model alone or combined with the Thomas (1971) model, the non-inclusion of the other models was probably more accidental than intentional. Parham and Helms, for instance, were only aware of the Cross and Thomas models at the time of their initial work and selected the former for empirical investigation because its propositions could be more readily operationalized.

Nevertheless, though the Cross (1971, 1978) model and modifications thereof are the theoretical foundations for the discussion of Black racial

identity in this book, this focus is not intended to imply that the other models were not worthy of such investigation. In fact, as more empirical investigation of the various models occurs, it is quite likely that all of the NRID models will eventually be integrated into a single framework, comprised of the assets of the various models.

Yet because the Cross (1971, 1978, 1986) model, in toto or in part, has been the primary means of investigating racial identity in the counseling and psychotherapy process as broadly defined, his model, as amended by Helms and her associates (e.g., Carter & Helms, 1987a; Helms, 1984b, 1986, 1987; Parham & Helms, 1981), will be presented here in some detail. Furthermore, because it seems that issues related to racial identity development occur daily in the popular media (but without a theoretical model by which to explain them), wherever possible, examples from such sources as well as the author's therapy experiences will be used to illustrate the usefulness of analyzing Black personality from a Nigrescence perspective.

STAGES OF BLACK RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Cross (1971, 1978) originally presented a four- or five-stage model of racial identity development in which each stage was characterized by self-concept issues concerning race as well as parallel attitudes about Blacks and Whites as reference groups. With respect to self-concept, he proposed that each stage had different implications for a person's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Where reference groups are concerned, his model implied that the individual, depending upon his or her stage of racial identity, makes complex choices as to whether Blacks and/or Whites will be treated as reference groups.

Helms (1986) amended Cross's model to suggest that each stage be considered a distinct "world view," by which she meant cognitive templates that people use to organize (especially racial) information about themselves, other people, and institutions. Additionally, Helms (1984b) suggested that an individual's stage or world view was the result of his or her cognitive maturation level in interaction with societal forces. In more recent writings, Helms (1989) has advised that it might be useful to think of each of the stages as bimodal, that is, as having two potentially distinguishable forms of expression. In this overview of the stages, bimodal descriptions of the stages will be presented, though it should be noted that in this instance as well as a few others, theoretical modification of Cross's model in particular or NRID theory in general has outstripped empirical investigation.

The stages, as originally conceptualized by Cross (1971, 1978) were Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization/Commitment, though the last stage has received less at-

tion because of the measurement difficulty in differentiating it from the other stages.

Preencounter

Thomas's (1971) writings suggest that a person enters the first stage, Preencounter, from a state of "Negromachy," which if one liberally translates his construct, seems to be the absence of a self-concept or internally derived identity except as defined and approved of by Whites at a given moment. The general theme of the Preencounter stage is idealization of the dominant traditional White world view and, consequently, denigration of a Black world view. Because the dominant White world view in the United States considers Whiteness and White culture as superior to Blackness and Black culture, the Black person who espouses the Preencounter perspective must find some way to separate himself or herself from the devalued reference group in order to minimize the psychological discomfort that arises when one's cognitions are incompatible (see Festinger, 1957, chapter 4). In general, this disassociating occurs by artificially inflating one's personal identity, abandoning Blacks as a reference group while accepting Whites as such, and denying one's ascribed Black identity.

In attempting to explain how "ethnic" groups can tolerate their disadvantaged status, D. M. Taylor and McKirnan (1978; cited in D. M. Taylor, 1980) described ethnic identity development in terms of attribution theory (E. E. Jones & K. E. Davis, 1965). Attributions are typically considered to be either "external" or "internal," though presumably they actually vary along a continuum with these two dimensions anchoring the opposite extremes. Attribution theory roughly pertains to a person's beliefs concerning the reasons for one's own and other people's (perhaps including one's reference group's) rewards and punishments. Internal attribution means that the person believes that he or she (or, more generally, each individual) controls his or her own rewards and punishments; external attribution implies that the person believes that external forces such as luck, destiny, or fate control one's (or others') rewards and punishments.

Although the constructs underlying attribution theory are typically used to refer to individual personality characteristics, they may also be useful for describing how an individual relates to potential racial reference groups. As applied to one's racial reference groups, internal attribution might mean that the person believes that her or his racial group causes or is responsible for its own outcomes whereas external attribution means that she or he believes that external factors such as another racial group cause outcomes.

In D. M. Taylor and McKirnan's (1978) first stage, called "stable hi-

erarchically organized intergroup relations," which seems to be approximately equivalent to the Preencounter stage of Black NRID theory, they suggest that the individual's personal identity and reference-group identity are internal. That is, the individual, in this instance, assumes that her or his own status as well as that of other Blacks and Whites is due to personal effort and ability or lack thereof. Consequently, if the individual achieves much in society, it is because he or she is a meritorious human being; if he or she achieves nothing, then it is because he or she is deficient in some way. Whites are assumed to hold advantaged status due to extraordinary effort and Blacks are assumed to occupy disadvantaged status because they have not expended equivalent effort. The person either does not acknowledge an ascribed racial identity or identifies with Whites. For the Preencounter person, exceptionality or deficiency is defined according to how well or poorly one fits into White culture and demonstrates those traits that the person *believes* typify White culture.

D. M. Taylor (1980) argues that a Stage 1 mentality can be maintained as long as the dominant racial group (read Whites) allows a few conforming "ethnic group" members (read Blacks) to be relatively successful. But the Preencounter person can then continue to believe that it is possible for her or him to be "just a person" (i.e., to have no ascribed identity) and not be deleteriously affected by her or his racial-group membership.

Recent empirical evidence (cf. Cross et al., in press) supports the existence of two forms of Preencounter, active (Mode 1) or passive (Mode 2). Nowadays one can find many examples of behavior representative of each kind of Preencounter. Passive Preencounter seems to be associated with healthier personal identity than active Preencounter.

Active. Active Preencounter was originally described by Cross (1971, 1978). In this form of Preencounter, the person deliberately idealizes Whiteness and White culture and denigrates Blacks and Black culture through behaviors as well as attitudes. In active Preencounter, the separation of personal identity from the other aspects of Self is quite evident.

The following paraphrased and disguised excerpt from a therapy interaction between the author (Therapist) and a Black female client (Gloria) illustrates the active and apparently automatic assumption in Mode 1 that what one perceives to be "bad" is somehow due to the person's Blackness and anything "good" is due to her or his ability to be other than Black and/or the individual's *personal* attributes.

Therapist: "Well, Gloria, it looks like you have a lot of complaints about your husband. Could you tell me about some of them?"

Gloria: "He's not like us."

Therapist: "How do you mean?"

Gloria: "He's loud. When he gets excited about something or when he gets angry about something, he raises his voice and you can tell how he feels just by listening to him. He's not calm and logical like us."

Therapist: "Where does your idea come from that it's bad to show your emotion in your voice?"

Gloria: "I don't know. I just learned it. That's how those ghetto Blacks behave on television. If you want to get ahead in this world, you have to be calm, cool, and totally in control of yourself."

Perhaps the bifurcation of identity, which occurs when one possesses an active Preencounter identity, is maintained by the person's ability to project his or her anger or feelings of rejection by particular Blacks or Whites onto Blacks in general and accounts for why Blacks might not be used as a reference group or source of ascribed identity except by exclusion. Thus, it is not unusual to hear "successful" Blacks argue that they reject other Blacks as a reference group because their values or behaviors are so different. Very often these differences are described, perhaps unwittingly, in language saturated with racial stereotypes (e.g., "They didn't like *me* because I couldn't dance as well as they could," or "I can't help it if I'm smarter than them."). Existing empirical evidence (e.g., Parham & Helms, 1985a; 1985b; Taylor, 1986) suggests that active Preencounter, relative to some of the subsequent stages, is associated with poor self-concept, low self-esteem, and high anxiety and depression. These findings seem to indicate at least some interrelationship between personal identity and racial identity and suggest that psychosocial adjustment may be least healthy when one is in the earlier phase of Preencounter.

Passive. Persons whose racial identity resolution is passive Preencounter are often hard to recognize because their world views so clearly mirror that which is dominant in White society. Consequently, behavior that may not be healthy for themselves in the long run is reinforced by the dominant society as well as racial peers who are at the same stage of racial identity.

This second type of Preencounter person, sometimes called passive or assimilating (cf. Helms, 1989), because of advantaged status in their own racial group, comes to believe that personal effort guarantees "passage" into White culture. Such persons are highly motivated to be accepted by Whites and lead their lives in ways that they think will earn them such acceptance. On the other hand, the person in the passive mode of the Preencounter stage also accepts the negative stereotypes of Blacks and the positive stereotypes of Whites as promulgated by White society and institutions, though the fact that one is stereotyping may be outside of conscious awareness. In actuality, the person may engage in massive denial in order to maintain a fiction of racial equality. A con-

versation illustrative of the second mode of the Preencounter stage might go as follows:

Black Man: "You know, you're different from the women I usually go out with."

Black Woman: "How do you mean?"

Black Man: "Well, I prefer women with blue eyes and long hair."

Black Woman: "So, you're saying you prefer White women?"

Black Man: "Naw, naw, it's not like that. I just happen to like blue eyes and if I happened to meet a Black woman with blue eyes who met my other qualifications, I'd go out with her."

Even if the passive Preencounter person does not always believe in stereotypes, he or she dare not risk questioning them for fear of losing his or her actual or hoped-for acceptance by Whites and the anticipated advantages that accompany this status. Consequently, the person adopts an inflexible belief in internal causation, individualism, and a just world even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, denial of Blacks as a reference group and source of ascribed identity is present. To persons who have progressed to more advanced stages of racial identity development, the person in Mode 2 of the Preencounter stage seems quite naive, since Mode 2 persons can apparently assert with great credulity that neither other Blacks nor their race have had any influence or significance in their lives.

This selection from *New York* magazine illustrates the manner in which rejection of a Black ascribed identity often contributes to the apparent naivete and/or self-centeredness of people in the second mode of the Preencounter stage.

[Black surgeon]: *I'm not sure what they [other Blacks mean] when they say he has an elitist attitude. I have an elitist attitude toward what I do for people, that's true. Sometimes, I'll be told that so-and-so wants to know, "why aren't you in Harlem practicing in a storefront office, taking care of Medicare patients?" Now, that's nonsense. I grew up in Great Neck—Harlem isn't my background. Why should I be there? I'm always surprised and dismayed to find that when I finally reached the ivory tower, there was not unanimous acceptance [italics added].* (Hopkins, 1987, p. 23)

Although the persons portrayed in the selected passages seem to be of at least middle class, it is fair to say that equivalent examples can be found in the other socioeconomic classes as well (cf. Carter & Helms, 1988). To remain comfortable in the second mode of the Preencounter stage, the person must maintain the fiction that race and racial indoctrination have nothing to do with how he or she lives life. Additionally, one must continue to believe that social mobility is determined primarily by personal ability and effort.

It is probably the case that the Preencounter person is bombarded on a regular basis with information indicating that he or she cannot really be a member of the "in" racial group, but relies on denial to selectively screen such information from awareness. However, one of the ironies of American society is that the more successful Blacks and/or particular Black persons become, according to White standards of success, the easier it is for Whites and Blacks to point out how different that person is from other Blacks as well as Whites. Statements such as "I wouldn't mind living next door to you" clearly denote that the speaker considers himself or herself to have the right to make such decisions whereas the person addressed does not, believes that the person addressed is somehow different from and inferior to the speaker, and is willing to treat the person addressed as though he or she is superior to and different from the group from which the addressee is perceived to originate.

Similarly, statements such as "You talk like you're White" imply that the speaker has the right to judge what constitutes Black speech whereas the person addressed does not and, at the same time, that the person does not measure up to Black behavioral standards in some important way. In short, the Preencounter person comes to perceive that he or she does not really "fit" into either group unconditionally. The conscious acknowledgment of this devaluation of the person's Self accompanied by feelings of alienation initiates her or his movement into the Encounter stage.

Encounter

Although there is considerable controversy (e.g., Cross et al., in press; Ponterotto & Wise, 1987) concerning whether the Encounter stage is in fact a full-blown stage, autobiographical accounts (e.g., Malcolm X, 1973; McClain, 1983; Wilkins, 1982) indicate that experiences consistent with an Encounter stage can be quite long-lasting and that individuals recall them as such. Be that as it may, in a racist society it stands to reason that every Black person is bombarded with racial affronts and indignities regardless of whether or not she or he is involved in actual interaction with Whites. After all, racism may be either direct (e.g., verbal and/or physical abuse) or indirect (e.g., the virtual absence of African history prior to slavery in "American history" textbooks while European history during the relevant periods is covered extensively), and individual-, other-, or group-focused. What is more relevant here is that during the Preencounter stage, the person expends considerable mental energy in rationalizing such occurrences and/or pretending that they have no implications for the well-being of Black people in general and/or herself or himself in particular; that is, attributions of responsibility and caus-

ation are internal, as required for membership in White American society (cf. D. W. Sue, 1980).

Nevertheless, for many people, at some point in their lives, it becomes impossible to deny the reality that they cannot become an accepted part of "the White world." Usually this awareness seems to be aroused by an event(s) in the environment that touches the person's inner core and makes salient the contradiction that no matter how well he or she personally or other Black individuals conform to White standards, most Whites will always perceive him or her as Black and therefore inferior.

The conscious awareness that the old Euro-American or White world view is not viable and that one must find another identity constitutes the first phase of Encounter. Lemita McClain (1983), the first Black editorial writer for *The Chicago Tribune*, describes a series of what appear to be her Encounter events as they occurred during the successful campaign and election of a Black mayor in Chicago:

A jubilant [Black] scream went up. . . . We had a feeling, and above all we had power. . . . So many whites unconsciously had never considered that blacks could do much of anything, least of all get a black candidate this close to being mayor of Chicago. My [primarily White] colleagues looked up and realized, perhaps for the first time, that I was one of "them." I was suddenly threatening. (p. C1)

As the person struggles to "discover" a new identity, she or he oscillates between the recently abandoned Preencounter identity and an as yet unformed Black identity. The struggle that follows constitutes the second phase of Encounter and is comprised of a mixture of feelings including confusion, hopelessness, anxiety, depression, and eventually anger and euphoria. McClain (1983) describes the struggle as follows: "In one day my mind has sped from the naive thought that everything would be all right in the world if people would just intermarry, to the naive thought that we should establish a black homeland where we would never have to see a white face again" (p. C1).

Although in many ways the Encounter stage appears to be so fleeting and complex as to be immeasurable (cf. Cross et al., in press; Helms, 1989) existing evidence suggests that it may be related in a variety of ways to personal identity, reference-group orientation, and perhaps ascribed identity variables. In investigating personal identity correlates, McCaine (1986) found that Encounter attitudes were related to high trait anxiety, but Parham and Helms (1985a, 1985b) found that they were related to high self-esteem, low anxiety, and positive self-regard. Perhaps whether or not healthy personal identity variables are positively related to Encounter depends on whether respondents are in the earlier or latter phase. Euphoria, that is, the latter phase, is probably related positively to personal identity variables. Studies pertaining to reference-

group orientation have shown that Encounter attitudes are not related to desire to affiliate with people of unspecified race (McCaine, 1986), but they are positively related to affiliative behaviors with other Blacks in various roles (e.g., Denton, 1986; Parham & Helms, 1981), and to acceptance of Whites who are sensitive to Black cultural issues (e.g., Pomales, Claiborn, & LaFromboise, 1986). Each of these affiliative tendencies may typify second-phase orientations.

Taken together, empirical evidence suggests that the Encounter stage may have implications for the personal identity and reference-group orientation components of adjustment. In particular, emotionality and sentiment might be most evident during this stage. Entry into Encounter may also represent the person's first deliberate acknowledgment of a Black ascribed identity.

In case it is not obvious, it should be noted that the encounter events that trigger movement into the Encounter stage are idiosyncratic to the individual. That is, one does not automatically assume that one common set of experiences leads every individual to the Encounter stage. Rather it is the common *psychological* experience of confronting "an identity-shattering something" that links individuals to this stage. However, the something varies according to the person's life circumstances.

The person's abandonment of the previous world view leaves her or him virtually "identity-less," a condition that is more uncomfortable than it is comfortable. One needs some cognitive framework for making sense of one's own emotions, the world, and one's place in it. Consequently, the person begins an active search for a Black identity, a search that Helms (1984b) describes as akin to a religious rebirth. Cross (1978) says of the search: "the proposed new identity is highly attractive, the person throws caution to the wind and begins a frantic, determined, extremely obsessive, motivated search for Black identity. At the end of the encounter stage the person is not Black yet, but he/she has made the decision to become Black" (p. 85).

Therefore, in the latter phase of Encounter, the person acts as though an externally defined Black identity exists if only one could find it. However, the person's recognition that a Black identity must be developed rather than found signals the entry into Cross's (1971, 1977) third stage, Immersion/Emersion.

Immersion/Emersion

Cross (1971, 1978) originally described the Immersion stage in two phases, Immersion and Emersion, respectively. Thus, the subsequent descriptions do not differ markedly from his original formulations.

Immersion. In Immersion, the person psychologically and physically, if possible, withdraws into Blackness and a Black world. He or she thinks,

feels, and acts the way he or she believes "authentic" Blacks are supposed to, and judges and evaluates other Blacks on the basis of their conformance to these "idealistic" racial standards. Thus, a Black ascribed identity and a Black reference-group orientation dominate the person's personality often at the cost of one's personal identity. Furthermore, because until this point the person's primary descriptions of what it means to be Black have been defined by White society, the person often "acts" Black in very stereotypic ways. In other words, the person's Black reference-group orientation is externally defined.

Generalized anger is one affect or personal identity variable that appears to characterize Immersion. The person is angry at Whites because of their role in racial oppression, herself or himself for having been a party to such a system for however long, and at other Blacks whose eyes have not been properly opened yet. Thus, one's acknowledgment of Blackness is high though it is not internalized; the person seems to be conforming to a preconceived notion of Black identity. Some research comparing characteristics of Preencounter and Immersion (Parham & Helms, 1985a; 1985b) suggests that they are similar in that they both appear to be reactions to environmental circumstances, but dissimilar in that hostility seems to be measurably associated with Immersion/Emersion.

Cross (1978) postulated that "either/or thinking" (i.e., dichotomous thinking) characterized the cognitive development of persons in Immersion, in that such persons typically idealize Blackness and African heritage, but denigrate everything thought to be White and of White Western heritage. He described their emotional functioning as follows: "Euphoria, rage, inordinate amounts of artistic and/or political energy, perturbation, effrontery, high risk taking, a destructive mood in constant tension with dreams of revitalization and an intense sense of intimacy toward Black life also characterize behavior in this stage" (p. 85).

Coping strategies that seemingly correspond to the Immersion phase appear to occur quite often among Black adolescents who find themselves adrift in White educational settings. Latimer (1986) decried Black students' avoidance of certain academic endeavors in which they were obviously talented (e.g., journalism, sailing, etc.) in favor of "hanging out" because the latter was accepted as "Black" behavior whereas the former were not.

Anson (1987) describes the demise of a Harlem youth (Eddie) following his attendance at an elite predominately White prep school in the East. In retrospect, one can virtually trace the youth's progression from Encounter to Immersion. Consider, for example, his comments following the deaths of Martin Luther King and John and Robert Kennedy as reported by his mother: "Mama, white people are the Devil . . . because they kill all the people who are trying to help us" (p. 37). Or his junior

year abroad in Spain, which he described as the only place he had ever been where he was not being judged as a Black person. Or his frustrating nonromance with a White classmate. Could these events have comprised his Encounter?

After a period of apparent euphoria (typical of the last phase of Encounter), Anson (1987) describes a series of events that seem to reflect Eddie's movement into Immersion: (a) teachers noted a "growing ferocity," hostility, belligerence, and anger in demeanor; (b) he reportedly denounced the (Black) nonviolent civil rights movement as "accommodating white racism" and chastised his classmates via angry speeches; (c) he began to act like "a slick, fast-talking, uncompromising ghetto resident, a real hustler" (p. 41), though by all accounts such traits were the antithesis of his personality formerly. Taken together, Anson's description of Eddie appears to portray a youth who was mired in Immersion at the time of his early death.

Emersion

Though Eddie was seemingly fixated at the Immersion phase, Cross's (1971) model offers Emersion as a possible escape from Immersion. Entry into Emersion requires the opportunity to withdraw into Black community and to engage in catharsis within a supportive environment. During Emersion, one often finds individuals engaging in "rap" sessions, political action groups, exploration of Black and African culture, discussions of racial issues with Black elders whose experiences were formerly ignored, "hanging out" with other Blacks in a spirit of kinship, and so forth.

However one's experience of positive Black/African culture occurs, participation in the Emersion phase allows the person to develop a positive nonstereotypic Afro-American perspective on the world. Involvement in cathartic as well as educative activities allows the person's emotions, particularly anger, to level off and her or his cognitive strategies to become more flexible. Total acceptance of Blackness as defined by others is no longer necessary for the person to feel self-worth, and he or she begins to sort out the strengths and weaknesses of Black culture and being Black. As the person begins to feel greater control over herself or himself, he or she moves into the Internalization stage.

Internalization

The main theme of the Internalization stage is the internalization of a positive personally relevant Black identity. That is, one blends one's personal identity (i.e., what makes one unique) with a Black ascribed identity (i.e., acknowledgment that one's Blackness influences who one

is). Furthermore, Blacks become the primary reference group to which one belongs, though the quality of one's belongingness is no longer externally determined. However, because in developing a stable Black identity the individual can face the world from a position of personal strength, it now becomes possible to renegotiate one's positions with respect to Whites and White society. Thus, although the Internalizing person rejects racism and similar forms of oppression, he or she is able to reestablish relationships with individual White associates who merit such relationships, and to analyze Whiteness and White culture for its strengths and weaknesses as well.

Cross (1971, 1978) originally suggested that a fifth stage, Internalization/Commitment, followed Internalization. The primary distinction between the two stages was that Internalization/Commitment reflected a behavioral style characterized by social activism and Internalization reflected one's level of cognitive development. However, subsequent theorists (e.g., Helms, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1985b) have recommended that Internalization/Commitment be considered the second mode or phase of the Internalization stage because of the difficulty in distinguishing motivation from behavior. With this latter view in mind, Internalization behavior may involve participation in social and political activities designed specifically to eliminate racism and/or oppression regardless of the race of the perpetrators and victims. However, it may also involve performance of everyday activities according to one's Black perspective. In either case, the limited available evidence does seem to suggest that an activist orientation may be associated with Internalization attitudes (cf. Carter & Helms, 1987). One can find many examples of the former type of activism in Civil Rights literature. For instance, Martin Luther King's focus on the economy and the Viet Nam war during the latter years of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s seems to illustrate the Internalization/Commitment Stage (cf. J. Williams, 1987).

Ordinary everyday experiences do not frequently capture media attention, and the individual who attempts to make sense of such experiences from an Internalizing perspective risks misinterpretation and rejection by individuals who do not, cannot, or will not understand the Internalizing person's frame of reference. Consider, for instance, this exchange in which a Black male transracial adoptee and a social worker attempt to explain to a television audience and other panel members the importance of a Black reference-group orientation to Black children's racial identity development.

[Adoptee:] ... I agree with you that there needs to come a time, and there will come a time, when black children will be able to interact with whoever it is, whoever they're living with, but the reality is ... for most of the people that I know ... who were interracially adopted ... and I was, too, the reality is

Table 2.2
Summary of General Characteristics of the Black Racial Identity Stages

Stages	General Theme	Emotional Themes	Personal Identity	Identity Components Reference Group Orientation	Ascribed Identity
Preencounter					
Active	idealization of Whiteness	anxiety, poor self-esteem	negative	White/Euro-American	White
Passive	denigration of Blackness	defensiveness	idealized positive	White/Euro-American	none (non-Black)
Encounter					
events	consciousness of race	bitterness, hurt, anger	positive	White/Euro-American	none
experience		euphoria	transitional	Black	Black
Immersion/					
	idealization of Blackness	rage, self-destructiveness	none	Black	Black
Emersion					
	denigration of Whiteness	impulsivity; euphoric	positive	Black	Black
Internalization/racial transcendence					
		self-controlled calm, secure	positive	bicultural	Black
Commitment					
		activistic	positive	pluralistic	Black/pan-African

that when you're in it, it's a blissful experience, when you're in it it's fantastic. *It's not until you evolve out of it and are able to look back on it, that you realize . . . [what you missed].* The kind of camaraderie that you miss in a family situation where you have black sisters and black brothers who understand everything that you're going through . . . [italics added].

[Panelist:] "But that's nonsense."

[Researcher:] "That's not so, that's not so."

[Social Worker:] "There are some experiences that black children have that white folks do not have, have not had experience in, and cannot pass on lessons to them, and—"

[Panelist:] "You mean, like being called a nigger?"

[Social Worker:] "Well, like being called a nigger."

[Researcher:] "Every ethnic group in this society has been called names, it isn't unique." ("Oprah Winfrey Show," July 9, 1987, p. 12)

In identifying the Internalization stage, it is important to recognize that *what* the person feels, believes, or thinks is not as important as *how* he or she believes. In other words, though two Internalizing individuals may not share the same point of view on a particular issue, they should be similar in that each maintains a positive Black racial identity, that is, does not deny the merit of her or his Blackness as he or she confronts the issue. Moreover, in the Internalization stage one will find a variety of individuals expressing themselves in a variety of ways. Internalization frees the person to be.

Furthermore, persons in Internalization no longer need judge people by their cultural group memberships (e.g., race, gender, nationality). Rather they are concerned with common peoplehood. Consequently, the Internalizing person can find value in people who do not look like her or him. One might say that Internalization also frees the person to let other people be as long as by so doing one does not encourage oppression and victimization.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, then, four distinct stages of Black racial identity have been proposed. In general, these stages are proposed to differ in emotional, behavioral, and cognitive expression. Within each stage, personal identity, reference-group orientation, and ascribed identity are thought to vary. Table 2.2 summarizes the stages with respect to these components as previously outlined. Theoretically, each person can potentially progress from the least developed stage (and phase) to the most devel-

oped. However, recent theorists (Parham, 1989) have begun to speculate that every person may not enter the developmental cycle at the same place and that recycling through the stages may occur as the person moves through the lifespan.