Seven-Step Process

The seven phases of *white racial identity development* and their implications for White Americans are described in the following. We encourage Whites to use this information to explore themselves as racial/cultural beings and to think about their implications for work with culturally diverse clients.

1. *Naiveté phase :* This phase is relatively neutral with respect to racial/cultural differences. Its length is brief and is marked by a naive curiosity about race. As mentioned previously, racial awareness and burgeoning social meanings are absent or minimal, and the young child is generally innocent, open, and spontaneous regarding racial differences. Between the ages of three and five, however, the young White child begins to associate positive ethnocentric meanings to his or her own group and negative ones to others. The child is bombarded by misinformation through the educational channels, mass media, and significant others in his or her life, and a sense of the superiority of *Whiteness* and the inferiority of all other groups and their heritage is instilled. The following passage describes one of the insidious processes of socialization that leads to propelling the child into the conformity stage.

   It was a late summer afternoon. A group of White neighborhood mothers, obviously friends, had brought their four- and five-year-olds to the local McDonald's for a snack and to play on the swings and slides provided by the restaurant. They were all seated at a table watching their sons and daughters run about the play area. In one corner of the yard sat a small Black child pushing a red truck along the grass. One of the White girls from the group approached the Black boy and they started a conversation. During that instant, the mother of the girl exchanged quick glances with the other mothers, who nodded knowingly. She quickly rose from the table, walked over to the two, spoke to her daughter, and gently pulled her away to join her previous playmates. Within minutes, however, the girl again approached the Black boy and both began to play with the truck. At that point, all the mothers rose from the table and loudly exclaimed to their children, "It's time to go now!" (Taken from Sue, 2003, pp. 89–90)

2. *Conformity phase :* The White person's attitudes and beliefs in this phase are very ethnocentric. There is minimal awareness of the self as a racial being and a strong belief in the universality of values and norms governing behavior. The White person possesses limited accurate knowledge of other ethnic groups, but he or she is likely to rely on social stereotypes as the main source of information. Consciously or unconsciously, the White person believes that White culture is the most highly developed and that all others are primitive or inferior. The *conformity phase* is marked by contradictory and often compartmentalized attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. A person may believe simultaneously that he or she is not racist but that minority inferiority justifies discriminatory and inferior treatment, and that minority persons are different and deviant but that "people are people" and differences are unimportant. As with their marginalized counterparts at this phase, the primary mechanism operating here is one of denial and compartmentalization. For example, many Whites deny that they belong to a race that allows them to avoid personal responsibility for perpetuating a racist system. Like a fish in water, Whites either have difficulty seeing or are unable to see the invisible veil of cultural assumptions, biases, and prejudices that guide their perceptions and actions. They tend

to believe that White EuroAmerican culture is superior and that other cultures are primitive, inferior, less developed, or lower on the scale of evolution.

It is important to note that many Whites in this phase of development are unaware of these beliefs and operate as if they are universally shared by others. They believe that differences are unimportant and that "people are people," "we are all the same under the skin," "we should treat everyone the same," "problems wouldn't exist if minorities would only assimilate," and discrimination and prejudice are something that others do. The helping professional with this perspective professes color-blindness, views counseling/therapy theories as universally applicable, and does not question their relevance to other culturally different groups. The primary mechanism used in encapsulation is denial— denial that people are different, denial that discrimination exists, and denial of one's own prejudices. Instead, the locus of the problem is seen to reside in marginalized groups. Socially devalued groups would not encounter problems if they would only assimilate and acculturate (melting pot), value education, or work harder.

3. *Dissonance phase :* Movement into the *dissonance phase* occurs when the White person is forced to deal with the inconsistencies that have been compartmentalized or encounters information/experiences at odds with denial. In most cases, individuals are forced to acknowledge *Whiteness* at some level, to examine their own cultural values, and to see the conflict between upholding humanistic nonracist values and their contradictory behavior. For example, a person who may consciously believe that all people are created equal and that he or she treats everyone the same suddenly experiences reservations about having African Americans move next door or having one's son or daughter involved in an interracial relationship. These more personal experiences bring the individual face-to-face with his or her own prejudices and biases. In this situation, thoughts that "I am not prejudiced," "I treat everyone the same regardless of race, creed, or color," and "I do not discriminate" collide with the denial system. Additionally, some major event (e.g., the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.) may force the person to realize that racism is alive and well in the United States.

The increasing realization that one is biased and that EuroAmerican society does play a part in oppressing minority groups is an unpleasant one. Dissonance may result in feelings of guilt, shame, anger, and depression. Rationalizations may be used to exonerate one's own inactivity in combating perceived injustice or personal feelings of prejudice; for example, "I'm only one person—what can I do?" or "Everyone is prejudiced, even minorities." As these conflicts ensue, the White person may retreat into the protective confines of White culture (encapsulation of the *conformity phase*) or move progressively toward insight and revelation (*resistance and immersion phase*).

Whether a person regresses is related to the strength of positive forces pushing the individual forward (support for challenging racism) and negative forces pushing the person backward (fear of some loss) (Sue, 2011; Todd & Abrams, 2011). For example, challenging the prevailing beliefs of the times may mean risking ostracism from White relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Regardless of the choice, there are many uncomfortable feelings of guilt, shame, anger, and depression related to the realization of inconsistencies in one's belief systems. Guilt and shame are most likely related to the recognition of the White person's role in perpetuating racism in the past. Guilt may also result from the person's being afraid to speak out on the issues or to take responsibility for his or her part in a current situation. For example, the person may witness an act of racism, hear a racist comment, or be given preferential treatment over a minority person but decide not to say anything for fear of violating racist White norms. Many White people rationalize their behaviors by believing that they are powerless to make changes. Additionally, there is a tendency to retreat into White culture. If, however, others (which may include some family and friends) are more accepting, forward movement is more likely.

4. *Resistance and immersion phase :* The White person who progresses to this phase will begin to question and challenge his or her own racism. For the first time, the person begins to realize what racism is all about, and his or her eyes are suddenly open. Racism is seen everywhere (e.g., advertising, television, educational materials, interpersonal interactions). This phase of development is marked by a major questioning of one's own racism and that of others in society. In addition, increasing awareness of how racism operates and its pervasiveness in U.S. culture and institutions is the major hallmark of this level. It is as if the person awakens to the realities of oppression; sees how educational materials, the mass media, advertising, and other elements portray and perpetuate stereotypes; and recognizes how being White grants certain advantages denied to various minority groups.

There is likely to be considerable anger at family and friends, institutions, and larger societal values, which are seen as having sold him or her a false bill of goods (democratic ideals) that were never practiced. Guilt is also felt for having been a part of the oppressive system. Strangely enough, the person is likely to undergo a form of racial self-hatred at this phase. Negative feelings about being White are present, and the accompanying feelings of guilt, shame, and anger toward oneself and other Whites may develop. The White liberal syndrome may develop and be manifested in two complementary styles: the paternalistic protector role or the overidentification with another minority group (Helms, 1984; Ponterotto, 1988). In the former, the White person may devote his or her energies in an almost paternalistic attempt to protect minorities from abuse. In the latter, the person may actually want to identify with a particular minority group (e.g., Asian, Black) in order to escape his or her own *Whiteness.* The White person will soon discover, however, that these roles are not appreciated by minority groups and will experience rejection. Again, the person may

resolve this dilemma by moving back into the protective confines of White culture (*conformity phase*), again experience conflict (dissonance), or move directly to the *introspective phase*.

5. *Introspective phase :* This phase is most likely a compromise of having swung from an extreme of unconditional acceptance of White identity to a rejection of *Whiteness*. It is a state of relative quiescence, introspection, and reformulation of what it means to be White. The person realizes and no longer denies that he or she has participated in oppression and benefited from *White privilege* or that racism is an integral part of U.S. society. However, individuals at this phase become less motivated by guilt and defensiveness, accept their *Whiteness*, and seek to redefine their own identity and that of their social group. This acceptance, however, does not mean a less active role in combating oppression. The process may involve addressing the questions, "What does it mean to be White?" "Who am I in relation to my *Whiteness*?" and "Who am I as a racial/cultural being?"

    The feelings or affective elements may be existential in nature and involve feelings of disconnectedness, isolation, confusion, and loss. In other words, the person knows that he or she will never fully understand the minority experience but feels disconnected from the EuroAmerican group as well. In some ways, the *introspective phase* is similar in dynamics to the *dissonance phase*, in that both represent a transition from one perspective to another. The process used to answer the previous questions and to deal with the ensuing feelings may involve a searching, observing, and questioning attitude. Answers to these questions involve dialoging and observing one's own social group and actively creating and experiencing interactions with various minority group members as well.

6. *Integrative awareness phase :* Reaching this level of development is most characterized as (a) understanding the self as a racial/cultural being, (b) being aware of sociopolitical influences regarding racism, (c) appreciating racial/cultural diversity, and (d) becoming more committed toward eradicating oppression. A nonracist White EuroAmerican identity is formed, emerges, and becomes internalized. The person values multiculturalism, is comfortable around members of culturally different groups, and feels a strong connectedness with members of many groups. Most important, perhaps, is the inner sense of security and strength that needs to develop and that is needed to function in a society that is only marginally accepting of integrative, aware White persons.

7. *Commitment to antiracist action phase :* Someone once stated that the ultimate *White privilege* is the ability to acknowledge it but do nothing about it. This phase is most characterized by social action. There is likely to be a consequent change in behavior and an increased commitment toward eradicating oppression. Seeing "wrong" and actively working to "right" it requires moral fortitude and direct action. Objecting to racist jokes; trying to educate family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers about racial issues; and taking direct action to eradicate racism in the schools and workplace and in social policy (often in direct conflict with other Whites) are examples of actions taken by

individuals who achieve this status. Movement into this phase can be a lonely journey for Whites because they are oftentimes isolated by family, friends, and colleagues who do not understand their changed worldview. Strong pressures in society to not rock the boat, threats by family members that they will be disowned, avoidance by colleagues, threats of being labeled a troublemaker or not being promoted at work are all possible pressures for the White person to move back to an earlier phase of development. To maintain a nonracist identity requires Whites to become increasingly immunized to social pressures for conformance and to begin forming alliances with persons of color or other liberated Whites who become a second family to them. As can be seen, the struggle against individual, institutional, and societal racism is a monumental task in this society.

Developing a Nonracist and Antiracist White Identity

I sometimes visualize the ongoing cycle of racism as a moving walkway at the airport. Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt. The person engaged in active racist behavior has identified with the ideology of White supremacy *and is moving with it. Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking. Some of the bystanders may feel the motion of the conveyor belt, see the active racists ahead of them, and choose to turn around, unwilling to go to the same destination as the White supremacists. But unless they are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt – unless they are actively antiracist – they will find themselves carried along with the others. (Tatum, 1997, pp 11–12)*

What does this metaphor of racism tell about the difference between active and passive racism? What is the "destination" of the walkway? If it represents our society, can you describe what that destination looks like? What does the conveyor belt symbolize? Are you on the conveyor belt? Which direction are you traveling? Do you even feel the movement of the belt? What would it take for you to reverse directions? More importantly, how can you stop the movement of the conveyor belt? What changes would need to occur for you at the individual level to reverse directions? What changes would need to happen at the institutional and societal levels to stop or reverse the direction of the conveyor belt?

As repeatedly emphasized in earlier chapters, *White supremacy* must be seen through a larger prism of individual, institutional, and societal racism. All these elements conspire in such a manner as to avoid making the "invisible" visible, and thus directly or indirectly discourage honest racial dialogue and self-exploration. Let us briefly return to the "walkway" metaphor provided by Tatum (1997) in her classic book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

First, the walkway metaphor is a strong and powerful statement of the continuous and insidious nature of racism; it is ever-present, dynamic, and oftentimes invisible as it takes us on a journey to White supremacist notions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The visible actions of White supremacists moving quickly on the belt represent the overt racism that we're aware of; these forms we consciously condemn. The conveyor belt represents the invisible forces of society or the biased

institutional policies, practices, and structures that control our everyday lives. From the moment of birth, we are placed on the conveyor belt, culturally conditioned, and socialized to believe that we are headed in "the right direction." For many White people, the movement of the belt is barely noticeable, and its movement remains hidden from conscious awareness. This allows White people to remain naïve and innocent about the harm their inaction imparts on people of color.

Second, as indicated by Tatum (1997), one need not be actively racist in order to be racist. The pace by which one walks with the flow of the conveyor belt determines the degree to which one consciously or unconsciously harbors White supremacist notions: (a) "active racists" who are aware and deliberate in beliefs and actions move quickly, (b) those slowly strolling may be unintentional racists, unaware of their biases and the direction they are taking, and (c) "passive racists" may choose not to walk at all. Despite choosing not to walk in the direction of the walkway, passive racists are, nevertheless, being moved in a direction that allows for racism to thrive. On a personal level, despite beliefs of justice, equity, and fairness, inaction on the walkway ultimately means that these individuals are also responsible for the oppression of others.

Third, most people of color are desperately trying to move or run in the opposite direction. The voices of people of color are filled with attempts to make well-intentioned Whites aware of the direction they are taking and aware of the harm they are inflicting on people of color. But they are hindered by many obstacles; well-intentioned White Americans who tell them they are going the wrong way and don't believe them; institutional policies and practices that put obstacles in their retreating path (institutional racism); and punishment from society for "not obeying the traffic rules"—a one-way street of bias and bigotry.

Fourth, despite limited success in battling the constant forces of racism, people of color are also slowly but surely being swept in a dangerous direction that has multiple implications for their psychological health, physical well-being, and standard of living. Walking at a fast pace or running in the opposite direction are never-ending activities that are exhausting and energy depleting for people of color. Worse yet, they are being trampled by the large numbers of well-intentioned White Americans moving in the opposite direction. Giving up or ultimately being swept to the end of the walkway means a life of oppression and subordination.

Last, the questions being posed to trainees are challenging. How do we motivate White Americans to (a) notice the subtle movement of the walkway (making the invisible visible), (b) discern the ominous direction it is taking (White racial supremacy), (c) take action by moving in the opposite direction (antiracism), and (d) stop the conveyor belt and/or reverse its direction (institutional and societal change)?

As indicated in the *White racial identity development* sections, becoming *nonracist* means soul searching, individual change, and working on the self; becoming *antiracist*, however, means taking personal action to end external racism that

exists systemically and in the action of others. The invisibility of *White privilege* and *Whiteness* allow for denying the pain and suffering experienced by people of color, but more importantly, it absolves White Americans of personal responsibility for perpetuating injustice, and allows them to remain passive and inactive.

Principles of Prejudice Reduction

Although *White racial identity development* models tell us much about the characteristics most likely to be exhibited by individuals as they progress through these phases, they are very weak in giving guidance about how to develop a *nonracist White identity*(Helms, 2015). Possible answers seem to lie in the social-psychological literature about the basic principles or conditions needed to reduce prejudice through intergroup contact first formulated by Gordon Allport (1954) in his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice.*His work has been refined and expanded by other researchers and scholars (Aboud, 1988; Amir, 1969; Cook, 1962; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994; Jones, 1997). Sue (2003) has summarized these findings into the basic principles of prejudice reduction: (1) having intimate and close contact with others, (2) cooperation rather than competition on common tasks, (3) sharing mutual goals, (4) exchanging accurate information rather than stereotypes, (5) sharing an equal status relationship, (6) support for prejudice reduction by authorities and leaders, and (7) feeling a sense of connection and belonging with one another. To this we might add the contributions of *White racial identity development* theorists, who have indicated the importance of understanding oneself as a racial/cultural being. It has been found, for example, that a person's level of White racial awareness is predictive of his or her level of racism (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Wang et al., 2003); the less aware that participants in research projects were of their White racial identity, the more likely they exhibited increased levels of racism.

The seven basic principles outlined above arose primarily through studies of how to reduce intergroup conflict and hostility, but several seem consistent with reducing personal prejudice through experiential learning and the acquisition of accurate information about other groups. Translating these principles into roles and activities for personal development has come from recommendations put forth by the American Psychological Association, Presidential Task Force on Preventing Discrimination and Promoting Diversity (2012), from the President's Initiative on Race (1998, 1999), from educators and trainers (Ponterotto et al., 2006; Young & Davis-Russell, 2002), and from studies on difficult racial dialogues (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Sue, Rivera, Capodilupo, Lin, & Torino, 2010).

Sue (2003) outlines five basic learning situations and activities, or principles, most likely to enhance change in developing a *nonracist White identity*.

Principle 1: Learn about People of Color from Sources within the Group

- You must experience and learn from as many sources as possible (not just the media or what your neighbor may say) in order to check out the validity of your assumptions and understanding.

- If you want to understand racism, White people may not be the most insightful or accurate sources. Acquiring information from persons of color allows you to understand the thoughts, hopes, fears, and aspirations from the perspective of people of color. It also acts as a counterbalance to the worldview expressed by White society about minority groups.

Principle 2: Learn from Healthy and Strong People of the Culture

- A balanced picture of racial/ethnic groups requires that you spend time with healthy and strong people of that culture. The mass media and our educational texts (written from the perspectives of EuroAmericans) frequently portray minority groups as uncivilized or pathological, or as criminals or delinquents.

- You must make an effort to fight such negative conditioning and ask yourself what are the desirable aspects of the culture, the history, and the people. This can come about only if you have contact with healthy representatives of that group.

- Since you seldom spend much intimate time with persons of color, you are likely to believe the societal projection of minorities as being law breakers and unintelligent, prone to violence, unmotivated, and uninterested in relating to the larger society.

- Frequent minority-owned businesses, and get to know the proprietors.

- Attend services at a variety of churches, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship to learn about different faiths and to meet religious leaders.

- Invite colleagues, coworkers, neighbors, or students of color to your home for dinner or a holiday.

- Live in an integrated or culturally diverse neighborhood, and attend neighborhood organizational meetings and attend/throw block parties.

- Form a community organization on valuing diversity, and invite local artists, authors, entertainers, politicians, and leaders of color to address your group.

- Attend street fairs, educational forums, and events put on by the community.

Principle 3: Learn from Experiential Reality

- Although listening to readings, attending theater, and going to museums are helpful to increase understanding, you must supplement your factual understanding with the experiential reality of the groups you hope to understand. These experiences, however, must be something carefully planned to be successful.

- It may be helpful to identify a cultural guide: someone from the culture who is willing to help you understand his or her group; someone willing to introduce you to new experiences; someone willing to help you process your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This allows you to more easily obtain valid information on issues of race and racism.

Principle 4: Learn from Constant Vigilance of Your Biases and Fears

- Your life must become a "have to" in being constantly vigilant to manifestations of bias in both yourself and the people around you.

- Learn how to ask sensitive racial questions of your minority friends, associates, and acquaintances. Persons subjected to racism seldom get a chance to talk about it with a non-defensive and nonguilty person from the majority group.
- Most minority individuals are more than willing to respond, to enlighten, and to share *if they sense that your questions and concerns are sincere and motivated by a desire to learn and serve the group.*

Principle 5: Learn from Being Committed to Personal Action against Racism

- Dealing with racism means a personal commitment to action. It means interrupting other White Americans when they make racist remarks, tell racist jokes, or engage in racist actions, even if this is embarrassing or frightening.

- It means noticing the possibility for direct action against bias and discrimination in your everyday life: in the family, at work, and in the community.

- It means taking initiative to make sure that minority candidates are fairly considered in your place of employment, advocating to your children's teachers to include multicultural material in the curriculum, volunteering in community organizations to have them consider multicultural issues, and contributing to and working for campaigns of political candidates who will advocate for social justice.

- The journey to developing a White nonracist identity is not an easy path to travel. Remember, racial identity and cultural competence are intimately linked to one another. Becoming a culturally competent helping professional involves more than "book learning"; it requires both experiential learning and taking personal action. Are you ready for the challenge?

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Where do you see yourself in the phases of white racial development?

2. What would make it difficult for you to personally implement these suggestions? What barriers stand in the way? For example, what would make it difficult for you to interrupt a stranger or even a family member when a racist or sexist joke is made?

3. Have you ever been in a situation where you were the only White person in an activity or event full of Black, Asian, or Latino/a people? What feelings did you have? How did you think? Were you uncomfortable or fearful?

4. What would you need in the way of support or personal moral courage to move toward developing a White nonracist identity?