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# Summary of Stages of Racial Identity Development

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The attached charts summarize several frameworks that have been developed to describe stages of racial and ethnic identity development. We found them mostly in the psychology and therapy literature. Some were developed as a way to expand on Erik Erickson's model of human development (which goes from infancy to old age), taking into account factors such as race, gender and sexuality. Some of the frameworks are used to help therapists understand their patients more fully. The models also have broader applications for understanding how individuals function in community, family and organizational settings.

Most of the framework carry the same few cautions. Not every person will necessarily go through every stage in a framework. Many of the authors specifically acknowledge that the stages might also be cyclical, that people might revisit different stages at different points in their lives.

The frameworks summarized here describe people who are situated in many different ways, but they do not describe all of the possibilities. We have listed a few different frameworks that focus on the experiences of people of color, biracial people and white people in the U.S. We think they can be useful tools for self reflection and for building empathy and understanding of people who are situated differently from ourselves.

## **People of Color**

- People of Color Racial Identity Model (William Cross, originally developed as the Nigrescence Model of African American Identity). This framework (referenced by Barbara Burke Tatum in the companion reading) focuses on the process by which African Americans come to understand their identity.
- Filipino American Identity Development, (Kevin Nadal). This framework focuses on Filipino Americans, highlighting the experience of cultural assimilation/acculturation of a distinct ethnic group.
- Ethnic Minority Identity Development (John W. Berry). This framework focuses on the experiences of ethnic minorities, particularly immigrants to the U.S.

## **Bi-racial People**

- Biracial Identity Development (W. S. Carlos Poston). Stages of identity development of biracial people.
- Continuum of Biracial Identity Model (Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy). Continuum rather than staged model.
- Resolutions of Biracial Identity Tensions (Maria P. P. Root). Description of possible positive resolutions of biracial identity tensions.

## **White People**

- White Racial Identity Model (Janet E. Helms, reference in Tatum article). This framework identifies a continuum that leads to developing an anti-racist identity.

## **Integrated Model (John and Joy Hoffman)**

- This framework begins and ends with stages that are thought to be the same for all people. In between, different stages are articulated for People of Color and White People.

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PEOPLE OF COLOR	BIRACIAL PEOPLE	WHITE PEOPLE
<p><u>Black American Racial Identity (William Cross)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>PRE-ENCOUNTER:</b> absorbed many beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the notion that “white is right” and “black is wrong”; de-emphasis on one’s racial group membership; largely unaware of race or racial implications</li> <li>2. <b>ENCOUNTER:</b> forced by event or series of events to acknowledge the impact of racism in one’s life and the reality that one cannot truly be white; forced to focus on identity as a member of a group targeted by racism</li> <li>3. <b>IMMERSION/EMERSION:</b> simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one’s racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of whiteness; actively seek out opportunities to explore aspects of one’s own history and culture with support of peers from one’s own racial background</li> <li>4. <b>INTERNALIZATION:</b> secure in one’s own sense of racial identity; pro-black attitudes become more expansive, open, and less defensive; willing to establish meaningful relationships with whites who acknowledge and are respectful of one’s self-definition</li> <li>5. <b>INTERNALIZATION-COMMITMENT:</b> found ways to translate one’s personal sense of blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment to concerns of blacks as a group, which is sustained over time; comfort with one’s own race and those around them</li> </ol>	<p><u>Biracial (Poston)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>PERSONAL IDENTITY:</b> sense of self unrelated to ethnic grouping; occurs during childhood</li> <li>2. <b>CHOICE OF GROUP:</b> as a result of multiple factors, individuals feel pressured to choose one racial or ethnic group identity over another</li> <li>3. <b>CATEGORIZATION:</b> choices influenced by status of the group, parental influence, cultural knowledge, appearance</li> <li>4. <b>ENMESHMENT/ DENIAL:</b> guilt and confusion about choosing an identity that isn’t fully expressive of all their cultural influences; denial of differences between the racial groupings; possible exploration of the identities that were not chosen in stages 2 and 3</li> <li>5. <b>APPRECIATION:</b> of multiple identities</li> <li>6. <b>INTEGRATION:</b> sense of wholeness, integrating multiple identities</li> </ol> <p><u>Continuum of Biracial Identity Model (Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy)</u></p> <p>Does not seek to categorize individuals into a single identity; acknowledges continuum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some people may choose to identify singularly with one of their identities;</li> <li>• Some may blend with a primary emphasis on one identity and a secondary emphasis on the other</li> <li>• Some may blend two (or more) identities with equal emphasis</li> </ul>	<p><u>White Racial Identity Model (Helms)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>CONTACT:</b> In the first stage of contact, the individual adheres to the “colorblind” motto. They see racial difference but do not find it salient and in fact may feel that racism is in fact propagated by the discussion and acknowledgement of race as an issue. In this stage, there is no conscious demonstration of racism here. This seemingly non-racist position can cover unconscious racist beliefs. If the individual is confronted with real-world experiences or knowledge that uncovers the privileges of White skin, they may move into the disintegration stage.</li> <li>2. <b>DISINTEGRATION:</b> In this stage, because the person has new experiences which confront his prior conception of the world and because this conception is now challenged by this new information or experience, the person is often plagued by feelings of guilt and shame. These emotions of guilt and shame can be modified when the person decides to channel these emotions in a positive way but when those emotions continue to dominate, the person may move into the reintegration stage.</li> <li>3. <b>REINTEGRATION:</b> This stage is marked by a “blame-the-victim” attitude that’s more intense than anything experienced in the contact stage. They may feel that although Whites do have privileges, it is probably</li> </ol>

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### Filipino American (Nadal)

1. **ETHNIC AWARENESS:** neutral or positive feelings about all ethnic groups, including one's own; little exposure to prejudice
2. **ASSIMILATION TO DOMINANT CULTURE:** views only whites as positive, negative toward other ethnicities
3. **SOCIAL POLITICAL AWAKENING:** negative views toward whites, positive toward other ethnicities
4. **PAN-ETHNIC ASIAN AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS:** partiality toward Asian Americans
5. **ETHNOCENTRIC REALIZATION:** views oneself and other communities of color as empowering
6. **INCORPORATION**

### Ethnic Minority (Berry)

1. **ASSIMILATION:** valuing the majority culture over one's own culture
2. **SEPARATION:** preserving one's culture while withdrawing from the majority culture
3. **MARGINALIZATION:** losing cultural contact and identification with one's culture as well as the majority culture
4. **INTEGRATION:** valuing and integrating one's culture as well as the majority culture

### Resolutions of Biracial Identity Tensions (Maria P.P. Root)

1. **Acceptance of the identity society assigns:** identifying with the group into which others assume the biracial individual most belongs, usually with family support
2. **Identification with both racial groups:** Identify with both (or all) heritage groups, depending on social and personal support
3. **Identification with a single racial group:** Choosing one group, independent of social pressure, to identify himself or herself in a particular way
4. **Identification as a new racial group:** Move fluidly among racial groups but identifies most strongly with other biracial people, regardless of specific heritage backgrounds

because they deserve them and in are in some way superior to minority groups. If the person is able to combat these feelings, they maybe able to move on to the pseudo-independence stage

4. **PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE:** This is the first stage of positive racial identification. Although an individual in this stage does not feel that Whites deserve privilege, they look to people of color, not themselves, to confront and uncover racism. They approve of these efforts and comfort the person as these efforts validate this person's desire to be non-racist. Although this is positive White racial identity, the person does not have a sense of how they can be both White and non-racist together.
5. **IMMERSION/EMERSION:** In this stage, the person makes a genuine attempt to connect to his/her own White identity and to be anti-racist. This stage is usually accompanied by deep concern with understanding and connecting to other Whites who are or have been dealing with issues of racism.
6. **AUTONOMY:** The last stage is reached when an individual has a clear understanding of and positive connection to their White racial identity while also actively pursuing social justice. Helms' stages are as much about finding a positive racial identification with being White and becoming an active anti-racist.

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## Integrated Model (John and Joy Hoffman)

**CONFORMITY** (Whites and People of Color): In the first stage of conformity, people of color and Whites feel that they are just “regular Americans.” Unconsciously, members of both groups strive to emulate Whiteness in actions, speech, dress, beliefs and attitudes because Whiteness is perceived as positive.



### People of Color

**DISSONANCE:** Dissonance for people of color occurs when they want to get along and be Americans but discover that their race or gender may preclude them from the benefits that Whites or males get. They start to feel confused about the beliefs they held about America and themselves as they begin to see that racism and sexism may be impacting them.



**IMMERSION:** These questions and disillusionment can lead to the immersion stage where women and persons of color feel angry about racism and sexism. They feel that most White people and males are racists and sexists and thus part of the problem. What might people of color do with this anger?



**EMERSION:** The fourth stage for people of color is emersion where their anger about racism directed towards Whites leads them to feel that they can only belong with others in their own racial group which understands them. They avoid, as much as possible, contacts with Whites and seek out people of their own race or gender.



**INTERNALIZATION:** Internalization occurs when they realize that there are negative qualities among their own people and that all White people are not the enemy. They see racism and sexism as the enemy and as something that they can fight against. They also manifest the desire to have more control over who they want to be. They are more than just a person of color or a woman



**INTEGRATIVE AWARENESS** (both): In the last stage of integrative awareness, Hoffman asserts that Whites and people of color both come to the conclusion that there is much more to them than their race or gender. Both groups are able to positively identify with their own racial group while also acknowledging that other aspects of their identity (their gender, their talents and abilities, their unique experiences) contribute to their personhood.

### White People

**ACCEPTANCE:** In this stage, Whites can still dismiss or diminish comments or actions that indicate that racism is alive. They express the view that that everyone has struggles and people should just accept the way things are and try to be American. They expect of color to “get over it” and go forward as Americans which really means be more like White people.



**RESISTANCE:** Whites move from their acceptance stage to the resistance stage where they profess that racism is a thing of the past. Whites often express their belief that there is a new racism and that is the racism that they perceive is against Whites. This is popularly referred to as “reverse racism.”



**RETREAT:** If their assumptions about people of color and their own lack of privilege are proven false, they may enter the retreat stage. They may feel guilty and ashamed by how hard life has been and still is for people of color. They are also frustrated by, annoyed, and impatient with other Whites who don’t get it.



**EMERGENCE:** After feeling guilty and ashamed, Whites may move into the emergence stage where they start to understand their privilege and how it has and continue to benefit them. They also now begin to take control over the type of White person they want to be like.

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## Sources for the descriptions in the grids above:

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W.S. Carlos Poston

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