



STAGES OF WHITE RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT **Janet Helms summarized by Beverly Daniel Tatum and Ali Michael**

Abandonment of Racism

CONTACT – Unaware of own racial identity; does not think of oneself as “white” but as “normal.” Tendency to view racism as “individual acts of meanness” rather than as an institutionalized system, and typically does not recognize or acknowledge “white privilege.” Naïve curiosity or fear of people of color, usually based on stereotypes.

- Generally believes the world is fair and everyone has equal opportunities.
- Unaware of their whiteness, and believes it is a universal way of being that everyone should ascribe to.
- Tries not to see race- “I’m colorblind.”
- Messages of internalized superiority go unchallenged.

DISINTEGRATION – Awareness of racism and white privilege increase as a result of personal experiences. Common emotional responses to this new information include shame, guilt, denial, anger, depression, and withdrawal. May attempt to persuade others to abandon racist thinking.

- Conscious but conflicted acknowledgement of whiteness
- Feels caught between racial realities.

REINTEGRATION – May feel pressured by others to “not notice” racism. Feelings of guilt and denial are transformed into fear and anger toward people of color; common response is to “blame the victim.” Chooses to avoid the issue of racism, if possible, rather than struggling to define a non-racist identity.

- Guilt and anxiety transformed into hostility and anger.
- Feels like there are no right answers- to be white is to be wrong.
- Selective attention to stereotype confirming information.
- Percentage wise many white people live in the reintegration stage because the disintegration stage is the most painful and difficult to navigate.

Teaching While White

Defining a Non-Racist White Identity

PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE – Individual is abandoning beliefs in white superiority. Has an intellectual understanding of the unfairness of white privilege and recognizes personal responsibility for dismantling racism. May choose to distance oneself from other whites, and actively seek out people of color to help him/her better understand racism.

- Still thinks about racial issues rather than feeling.
- Depends on people of color to define racial identity
- Sees racism but may still believe that if people of color worked harder, racism wouldn't affect them.
- Compares oppression: "my people suffered too."
- Continues to exhibit a sense of internalized superiority.

IMMERSION/EMERSION – Actively seeking to redefine whiteness. Asking self-questions such as "Who am I racially?" "What does it really mean to be white in the U.S.?" Needs support from other anti-racist whites who have asked similar questions. Focus is on developing a positive white identity not based on assumed superiority. Takes pride in active anti-racist stance.

- Takes more responsibility for racism and privilege
- Move from trying to change people of color to trying to change racism and self.
- May try to immerse themselves in communities of color
- Critical of themselves and others

AUTONOMY – Has internalized a positive white racial identity. Actively anti-racist within own sphere of influence. Development of racial identity is not static, continues to be open to new information and ongoing self-examination. Able to work effectively in multiracial setting in "beloved community."

- A conscious use of privilege and willingness to take action
- Values true diversity and difference, not just in skin color, but cultural styles, dialect, approaches to time, etc.
- Seeking and accepting feedback from colleagues of color
- Understand that racism is systemic and historically rooted.



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PEOPLE OF COLOR

PRE-ENCOUNTER

Individual absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the idea that it is “better” to be white. May value role models, life-styles, value systems of the dominant group more highly than those of one’s own culture. Often seeks to assimilate and be accepted by whites. Tends to minimize the personal/social significance of race/ethnicity.

ENCOUNTER

Transition to this stage is typically precipitated by an event or series of events that forces the individual to acknowledge the personal impact of racism. Anger, confusion, and alienation are common emotions. Aware of rejection by whites, the individual begins to grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism. Initial attempts to define one’s racial/ethnic identity may be based on internalized stereotypes about own group. Process often begins in early adolescence.

IMMERSION/EMERSION

Characterized by the desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one’s racial identity, and an active avoidance of symbols of whiteness. At the beginning of this stage, there is a tendency to categorically reject whites and glorify one’s own group. Individual actively seeks out opportunities to learn about his/her own history and culture with the support of same-group peers. Anger may subside because focus is on group and self-exploration. Results in a newly defined and affirmed sense of self.

INTERNALIZATION

Characterized by a sense of security in one’s own racial/ethnic identity. Able to view his/her own group more objectively, as well as other racial/ethnic groups. Willing to establish meaningful relationships with whites who acknowledge and are respectful of his/her self-definition, and is also ready to build coalitions with members of other oppressed groups.

Teaching
While
White