

Black Racial Identity Development Model

Preencounter

The African American has absorbed many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the notion that “White is right” and “Black is wrong.” Though the internalization of negative Black Stereotypes may be outside of his or her conscious awareness, the individual seeks to assimilate and be accepted by Whites, and actively or passively distances him/herself from other Blacks.

Encounter

This phase is typically precipitated by an event or series of events that forces the individual to acknowledge the impact of racism in one’s life. For example, instances of social rejection by White friends or colleagues (or reading new personally relevant information about racism) may lead the individual to the conclusion that many Whites will not view him or her as an equal. Faced with the reality that he or she cannot truly be White, the individual is forced to focus on his or her identity as a member of a group targeted by racism.

Immersion/Emersion

This stage is characterized by the simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one’s racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness. As Thomas Parham describes, “At this stage, everything of value in life must be Black or relevant to Blackness. This stage is also characterized by a tendency to denigrate white people, simultaneously glorifying Black people...” (1989, p. 190). As individuals enter the Immersion stage, they actively seek out opportunities to explore aspects of their own history and culture with the support of peers from their own racial background. Typically, White-focused anger dissipates during this phase because so much of the person’s energy is directed toward his or her own group and self exploration. The result of this exploration is an emerging security in a newly defined and affirmed sense of self.

Internalization

While still maintaining his or her connections with Black peers, the internalized individual is willing to establish meaningful relationships with Whites who acknowledge and are respectful of his or her self-definition. The individual is also ready to build coalitions with members of other oppressed groups.

Internalization-Commitment

Those at the fifth stage have found ways to translate their “personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment” to the concerns of Blacks as a group, which is sustained over time (Cross, 1991, p. 220). Whether at the fourth or fifth stage, the process of Internalization allows the individual, **anchored in a positive sense of racial identity, both to perceive and transcend race proactively.**

Cross (1971, 1978, 1991) from Talking about Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom by Beverly Daniel Tatum in Geismar, K. & Nicoleau, G. (1993), Teaching for Change. Harvard Educational Review. Cambridge, MA.