

# Exploring Racial Identity



Interaction Institute  
for Social Change

## Sample agenda

*Note: This agenda was developed for an ongoing racial justice working group of 12-15 people, where relationships are already formed.*

### Pre-Work

Read the Summary of Stages of Racial Identity Development (see below) and come prepared to share where you are on your identity development journey.

### Purpose

To appreciate more about each others' backgrounds and support each other in our learning journeys

### Desired Outcomes

By the end of this meeting, we will have developed:

- A deepened understanding of our racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds
- A shared understanding of some frameworks for thinking about stages of racial identity development
- An understanding of our learning edges and challenges

### Agenda

Time	Topic	Process
(10')	<b>Start Ups</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Welcome</li><li>2. Desired Outcomes</li><li>3. Agenda</li><li>4. Ground Rules/Norms</li></ol>	Present Check for understanding Check for agreement
(55')	<b>Cultural Sharing Circle</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Share the meaning of your name and/or a story about how you got it.</li><li>2. How do you identify racially, ethnically and/or culturally?</li><li>3. What was the first time you noticed racial difference? What meaning did you make of those differences?</li><li>4. What are some of the early messages you got from your family and community about racial differences? How did those messages make you feel?</li></ol>	Series of Round Robins (as many as we can do in the time allotted)
(50')	<b>Stages of Racial Identity Development</b>  Overview of Tatum article and other frameworks and questions for clarification (10')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present frameworks</li><li>• Full group open dialogue</li></ul>

Time	Topic	Process
	<p data-bbox="344 254 756 289"><u>In race-based affinity groups: (30')</u></p> <ol data-bbox="344 432 1114 667" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="344 432 1114 506">1. How would you describe your current stage of racial identity development?</li> <li data-bbox="344 636 1114 667">2. What is a challenge or question you are wrestling with?</li> </ol>	<p data-bbox="1180 254 1438 359">Propose affinity groups and/or let the group self organize</p> <ol data-bbox="1180 401 1438 590" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1180 401 1438 548">1. Constructivist listening using round robin (See details below.)</li> <li data-bbox="1180 558 1438 590">2. Open dialogue</li> </ol>
	<p data-bbox="344 709 553 741">In full group (10')</p> <ul data-bbox="393 747 1114 898" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="393 747 1114 814">• What insights emerged for you personally in the affinity groups (no sharing of others' stories)?</li> <li data-bbox="393 825 1114 898">• What would you like to share with members of the other affinity groups?</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="1180 747 1422 779">Popcorn brainstorm</p>
(55')	<p data-bbox="344 940 509 972"><b>Closing Circle</b></p> <ol data-bbox="344 978 1114 1083" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="344 978 1114 1010">3. What insights come up for you as a result of this experience?</li> <li data-bbox="344 1020 1114 1083">4. What is your current learning and unlearning edge relating to issues of racial identity and racism?</li> </ol>	<p data-bbox="1180 940 1438 1003">Large group – two rounds or popcorn??</p>
(10')	<p data-bbox="344 1129 570 1161"><b>Close the Meeting</b></p> <p data-bbox="393 1167 521 1188">Evaluation</p> <p data-bbox="393 1199 634 1230">One word check out</p>	<p data-bbox="1180 1129 1406 1161">Written evaluation</p>

## Summary – 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.

PEOPLE OF COLOR	BIRACIAL PEOPLE	WHITE PEOPLE
<p><u>Black American Racial Identity (William Cross)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><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><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><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><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><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>Filipino American (Nadal)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>ETHNIC AWARENESS:</b> neutral or positive feelings</li> </ol>	<p><u>Biracial (Poston)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>PERSONAL IDENTITY:</b> sense of self unrelated to ethnic grouping; occurs during childhood</li> <li><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><b>CATEGORIZATION:</b> choices influenced by status of the group, parental influence, cultural knowledge, appearance</li> <li><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><b>APPRECIATION:</b> of multiple identities</li> <li><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><b>Does not seek to categorize individuals into a single identity; acknowledges continuum:</b></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>Resolutions of Biracial Identity Tensions (Maria P.P. Root)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Acceptance of the identity society assigns:</b></li> </ol>	<p><u>White Racial Identity Model (Helms)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><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><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><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 because they deserve them and in are in some way superior to minority groups. If</li> </ol>

<p>about all ethnic groups, including one's own; little exposure to prejudice</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>ASSIMILATION TO DOMINANT CULTURE:</b> views only whites as positive, negative toward other ethnicities</li> <li>3. <b>SOCIAL POLITICAL AWAKENING:</b> negative views toward whites, positive toward other ethnicities</li> <li>4. <b>PAN-ETHNIC ASIAN AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS:</b> partiality toward Asian Americans</li> <li>5. <b>ETHNOCENTRIC REALIZATION:</b> views oneself and other communities of color as empowering</li> <li>6. <b>INCORPORATION</b></li> </ol> <p><u>Ethnic Minority (Berry)</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>ASSIMILATION:</b> valuing the majority culture over one's own culture</li> <li>2. <b>SEPARATION:</b> preserving one's culture while withdrawing from the majority culture</li> <li>3. <b>MARGINALIZATION:</b> losing cultural contact and identification with one's culture as well as the majority culture</li> <li>4. <b>INTEGRATION:</b> valuing and integrating one's culture as well as the majority culture</li> </ol>	<p>identifying with the group into which others assume the biracial individual most belongs, usually with family support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>Identification with both racial groups:</b> Identify with both (or all) heritage groups, depending on social and personal support</li> <li>3. <b>Identification with a single racial group:</b> Choosing one group, independent of social pressure, to identify himself or herself in a particular way</li> <li>4. <b>Identification as a new racial group:</b> Move fluidly among racial groups but identifies most strongly with other biracial people, regardless of specific heritage backgrounds</li> </ol>	<p>the person is able to combat these feelings, they maybe able to move on to the pseudo-independence stage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. <b>PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE:</b> 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.</li> <li>5. <b>IMMERSION/EMERSION:</b> 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.</li> <li>6. <b>AUTONOMY:</b> 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.</li> </ol>
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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

**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.



**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.

## Sources for the descriptions in the grids above:

<http://www.innovationscns.com/biracial-identity-development-and-recommendations-in-therapy/>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_E.\\_Cross,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_E._Cross,_Jr.)

<http://www.thecolorsoftherainbow.com/Cultural%20Identity%20Phinney.ppt>

<https://www.msu.edu/~renn/RennNewDirectionsMR2008.pdf>

accessed 7-15-11

## Additional readings:

John W. Berry

Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 697-712.

Sam, D.L. & Berry, J.W. (Eds)(2006). **Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

William E. Cross, Jr.

Cross, W. (1991). *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Cross, W.E., Jr. (1971). The Negro-to-Black conversion experience: Toward a psychology of Black liberation. *Black World*, 20, 13-27.

Helms, J.E. *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being A White Person or Understanding the White Persons in your life*. Microtraining Associates.

Kevin Nadal

Nadal, K. L. (2011). *Filipino American psychology: A Handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Nadal, K. L. (2010) (Ed.). *Filipino American psychology: A Collection of personal narratives*. Bloomington, IN: Author House Publishing.

Nadal, K. L. (2009). *Filipino American psychology: A Handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice*. Bloomington, IN: Author House Publishing.

**W.S. Carlos Poston**

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ424084&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ424084](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ424084&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ424084)

**Kerry Ann Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy. Raising Biracial Children. Lanham, MD, Altamira Press, 2005.**

Maria P. P. Root and Kelley, M. (Eds.) (2003). *The Multiracial Child Resource Book*. Seattle, WA: Mavin Foundation

Compiled by Interaction Institute for Social Change.

# Introduction to Constructivist Listening



NATIONAL  
EQUITY  
PROJECT

There are many forms of dialogues between individuals. Among these are conversational, informative, and give - and - take discussions. Based on our assumptions about people, there is another form of communication that needs to occur – one where people can construct understandings and deal with their feelings. This form, called constructivist listening, can take place in a dyad, support group, or personal experience panel.

It is necessary to create relationships safe enough so that people can be listened to about their deepest feelings – a place where no one will be criticized or ridiculed for showing his or her feelings. To develop our own thinking it is important that we have a place where we can find others who can listen without judgment while we explore these ideas.

## Structures in Support of Constructivist Listening

**Dyads:** The simplest structure is a dyad, which is the exchange of constructivist listening between two people.

*I agree to listen to and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for you doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit so I do not ask questions for my information.*

**Support Groups:** A facilitator is responsible for seeing that the guidelines are followed and for asking questions when necessary. The leader often suggests a topic for the support group, but the choice of what to talk about is up to the talker. Support groups are useful in building a sense of community, helping people learn how to listen, and providing safety to begin to look at an issue that will be worked on more in a dyad.

**Personal Experience Panels:** A small number (3 – 5) of people have a limited amount of time (4 – 6 minutes) to share their experiences related to a topic (for example, gender bias, leadership, teaching in diverse classrooms) with a larger group of people.

## Guidelines for all Support Structures

- Each person is given equal time to talk. *Everyone deserves attention.*
- The listener(s) does not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice or break in with a personal story. *People are capable of solving their own problems.*
- Confidentiality is maintained. (The listener doesn't talk about what the talker has said to anyone else or bring it up to the talker afterwards.) *A person needs to be assured of confidentiality in order to be authentic. Also one's feelings at any moment are not representative of one's rational thinking (or perhaps even of one's feelings) five minutes later.*
- The talker(s) do not criticize or complain about the listener(s) or about mutual colleagues during their time to talk. A person cannot listen well when he/she is feeling attacked or defensive. Problems are to be addressed in a different structure, based in dialogue.