

SUMMARY OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY FRAMEWORKS OR MODELS

A number of researchers have explored the development of racial and ethnic identity. Below we have summarized the key concepts from the following frameworks or models:

- ✓ Perspective on American Indian Identity Development (Perry G. Horse, 2005)
- ✓ Asian American Identity Development Model (Jean Kim, 1981, 2001)
- ✓ Black American Racial Identity (William Cross, 1971, 1991, 2001)
- ✓ Latino Identity Orientations (Bernardo Ferdman and Plácida I. Gallegos, 2001)
- ✓ White Racial Identity Development Model (Janet Helms, 1995)
- ✓ Biracial Identity Development (W.S. Carlos Poston, 1990)

It is important to keep in mind that:

- Not every person will necessarily go through every stage in a framework or model.
- The context of an individual's life will affect their racial and ethnic identity development. A student's family and community serve as the significant ethnic and racial group models. As Kim (2001) explains, depending on the amount of ethnic expression in the household and/or community, positive or neutral attitudes and identities may be formed.
- For the stage models, the authors who developed them acknowledge that the stages might be cyclical, that people might revisit different stages at different points in their lives, and that some people may skip stages.
- Some of the frameworks **are not** stage models of development. Instead these models provide lenses or orientations through which to view racial and ethnic identities.
- The frameworks summarized here describe people who are situated in many different ways, but they do not describe all of the possibilities.

We believe the frameworks and models can serve as tools for self-reflection, for building empathy and understanding of students who are situated differently from yourself, and for transforming your classroom or library into settings that support the positive racial identity of youth of color and Native youth.

Perspective on American Indian Identity Development (Perry G. Horse, 2005) – Perry G. Horse proposes five influences that affect Native American “consciousness” which can provide a framework for understanding the development of Native American students. **Note: Horse does not refer to this idea as an identity model. This is not a linear stage model that youth will progress through in order.**

1. “the extent to which one is grounded in one’s Native American language and culture, one’s cultural identity”
2. “the validity of one’s American Indian genealogy”
3. “the extent to which one holds a traditional American Indian general philosophy or worldview (emphasizing balance and harmony and drawing on Indian spirituality)”
4. “one’s self-concept as an American Indian”
5. “one’s enrollment (or lack of it) in a tribe” (p. 65).



Perry G. Horse (Kiowa) serves as a leadership coach in the community college national reform movement known as Achieving the Dream.

Asian American Identity Development Model (Jean Kim, 1981, 2001) – This framework identifies a continuum that leads Asian Americans to form a positive racial identity.

1. **Ethnic Awareness Stage:** Starts in early childhood around age 3 or 4. At this stage the family serves as the significant ethnic group model and depending on the amount of ethnic expression in the household, positive or neutral attitudes are formed.
2. **White Identification Stage:** Begins once children enter school and peers and the school environment become powerful forces in conveying and reinforcing racial prejudice, which starts to negatively impact their self-esteem and identity. Becoming aware of their difference leads to wanting to identify with white society and distance themselves from their Asian heritage.
3. **Awakening to Social Political Consciousness Stage:** Means the adoption of a new perspective, usually associated with increased political awareness and an understanding of oppression and oppressed groups. The primary result is no longer wanting to identify with white society.
4. **The Redirection Stage:** Characterized by a reconnection and pride with one’s Asian American heritage and culture. This is often followed by a realization of white privilege and



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oppression as the reason for the negative experience of Asian communities. Anger about white racism may be a part of this stage.

5. **Incorporation Stage:** Represents the highest form of identity evolution. It includes a positive and comfortable identity as Asian American and a respect for other racial/cultural groups. The feelings of association for or against white culture are no longer an important issue.

Black American Racial Identity (William Cross, 1991, 1995) – *This framework identifies a continuum that leads Black Americans to form a positive racial identity.*

1. **Pre-encounter:** The individual absorbs many of beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, including the notion that “white is right” and “Black is wrong”. They often de-emphasize their own racial group membership and seek to assimilate and be accepted by whites. Stereotypes, omissions, and distortions, combined with an image of white superiority, to some degree socialize Black children to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty of white culture over those of their own cultural group. The individual may actively or passively distance themselves from other Blacks.
2. **Encounter:** This stage begins in adolescence (middle school or high school) when a teen or young adult is forced by an event or series of events to acknowledge the impact of racism in their life. For example, being followed around by security guards at the mall, or viewing media images of police brutality against Black men and women. As a result of this, the individual may reach the conclusion that many whites will not view them as an equal and to the reality that one cannot truly be white. The individual begins to focus on identity as a member of a group targeted by racism.
3. **Immersion/Emersion:** During this transitional point in the model, the individual simultaneously desires to surround themselves with visible symbols of their own racial identity and actively avoid symbols of whiteness. The individual begins to actively seek out opportunities to explore aspects their own history and culture with support of members from their own racial background.
4. **Internalization:** Secure in their own sense of racial identity, the individual becomes willing to establish meaningful relationships with whites who acknowledge and are respectful of their own self-definition. The individual is now ready to begin coalitions with members of other oppressed groups.
5. **Internalization-Commitment:** During this fifth stage, anchored in their positive sense of racial identity, individuals have found ways to translate their own personal sense of



Dr. William Cross Jr. is a leading theorist and researcher in the psychology and identity development of people of color. His book, “Shade of Black”, is considered a classic in the field of racial identity.

Blackness into a plan of action or a general sense of commitment to concerns of Blacks as a group, which is sustained over time.

**Latino Identity Orientations
(Bernardo Ferdman and Plácida I. Gallegos, 2001)**

– Dr. Ferdman and Dr. Gallegos propose that Latinx individuals develop **orientations or lenses** through which they view their identity. Their orientation or lens depends on their experiences with social institutions including the family, education system, peer groups, and U.S. cultural racial constructs, etc.

Note: This is not a linear stage model that youth will progress through in order.

1. **Latino Integrated:** understanding of racial constructs and ability to challenge them
2. **Latino Identified:** acceptance of the races *Latino* and *white* and identification with Latino
3. **Subgroup Identified:** identification of multiple Latino races and identification with a regional subgroup
4. **Latino as Other:** identification as a generic Latino due to mixed heritage
5. **Undifferentiated:** colorblindness, adherence to dominant culture, and tendency to attribute failure to the individual rather than racial constructs and systems of oppression
6. **White Identified:** acceptance of white and Latino races and identification with white and rejection of Latino.



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Dr. Ferdman is professor of organizational psychology at the California School of Professional Psychology of Alliant International University. He conducts research on diversity and inclusion, multicultural leadership, Latino/Latina identity, and Latinos/Latinas in the workplace.

White Racial Identity Development Model (Janet Helms, 1995) - This framework identifies a continuum that leads to white individuals developing an anti-racist white identity.

1. **Contact:** In this stage, individuals adhere to the “colorblind” motto. They lack an understanding of racism and often have minimal experiences with people of color. Racial and cultural differences are considered to be unimportant and the individual often does not perceive themselves as belonging to the “dominant” group or having biases or prejudices. They may even believe that racism is propagated by the discussion and acknowledgement of race as an issue. In this stage, if an individual is confronted with real-world experiences or knowledge that uncovers the privileges of being white, they may move into the disintegration stage.
2. **Disintegration:** In this stage, the “colorblind” motto is challenged by new information and experiences. The individual becomes increasingly conscious of their whiteness and the privileges that it brings to them. They may experience feelings of guilt and shame. These emotions of guilt and shame can be modified if an individual decides to channel these emotions in a positive way but when those emotions continue to dominate, they may move into the reintegration stage.
3. **Reintegration:** This stage is characterized by a “blame-the-victim” attitude and a more conscious belief in white racial superiority. During this stage, individuals have a tendency to idealize their own racial group and to be intolerant of others. They may feel that if whites do have privileges, it is most likely because they deserve them and in are in some way superior to other racial groups. If the person is able to combat these feelings, they may be able to move on to the next stage.
4. **Pseudo-Independence:** During this stage which is the first stage of positive racial identification, individuals begin to understand white privilege, and the related issues of bias, prejudice, and discrimination on an intellectual level. At this stage, the individual does not feel that whites deserve privilege. While they validate the experiences of people of color and support their efforts to confront racism, they look to people of color, not themselves, to confront and uncover racism. Although this is positive white racial identity, the individual does not understand how they can be both white and non-racist together.
5. **Immersion/Emersion:** In this stage, individuals make a genuine attempt to connect to their 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 confronting issues of racism and oppression. This stage is marked by increasing experiential and affective understanding.
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.



Dr. Janet E. Helms is a research psychologist and educator who is well known for her white racial identity development theory and model.

Individuals at this stage are knowledgeable about racial, ethnic and cultural differences, value diversity, and accept their role in perpetuating racism.

Biracial Identity Development (W.S. Carlos Poston, 1990) – During his graduate work at the University of California at Santa Barbara, W.S. Carlos Poston proposed this theory of biracial identity development.

1. **Personal Identity:** sense of self unrelated to ethnic grouping; occurs during childhood
2. **Choice of Group:** as a result of multiple factors, individuals feel pressured to choose one racial or ethnic group identity over another
3. **Categorization:** choices influenced by status of the group, parental influence, cultural knowledge, appearance
4. **Enmeshment/Denial:** 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
5. **Appreciation:** of multiple identities
6. **Integration:** sense of wholeness, integrating multiple identities

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