We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know

White Teachers, Multiracial Schools

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CHAPTER 5

Mapping the Journey of White Identity Development

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I gave up childish ways. —I Corinthians 13:11

During my undergraduate years at Yale in the late 1960s, I became embroiled in the cross-currents of four simultaneous social movements: civil rights, anti-war, women’s liberation, and campus reform. Being deeply engaged with each of these paradigmatic shifts, I experienced considerable realignment of my previously held sentiments and beliefs. For me this was a tumultuous time for identity development. I lived in an inner-city neighborhood through three summers of riots, worked with Black youths in several inner-city programs, entered my first committed relationship with a woman, lived with her in a student-created halfway house for mental patients transitioning back into “the real world,” and started the first counterculture commune in New Haven. In addition, I experienced a crisis of conscience over the war in Vietnam and ultimately joined the movement to openly resist the draft. Through these years of personal dislocation and rapid social change, none of my patriotic beliefs or middle-class Christian values remained unexamined or unscathed. “Real” life seemed crazier than the delusions of my officially insane roommates in the halfway house, and I often felt adrift in a sea of vacuous identity.

It was in this context that I became fascinated with Erik Erikson’s work on the stages of identity development in children and adults. The conceptual framework he presented in Childhood and Society (1950/1963) described the unfolding story of my own life. In the midst of the intensity and free-floating anxiety I felt at that time, Erikson’s formulation provided a sense of comfort and stability. His stages of identity development anticipated many of my questions and embedded my struggle in a naturally unfolding process of growth and maturity. His theory named the stages of identity development and posed key questions for each transition in the life cycle.
It was helpful, for example, for me to realize that “identity versus identity confusion” was the central challenge facing me in the transition from adolescence to early adulthood. From the perspective of his work, it was natural that in my early twenties I should be challenging many of the assumptions and values I had acquired in my childhood. His analysis of early adulthood gave me confidence that my own emotions and experiences were legitimate and appropriate for that stage of my life. His work was growth-oriented rather than deficiency-oriented. It helped me see that my struggles were a natural part of the life-cycle transition into adulthood. Most important, his work gave meaning to my search for authentic identity by placing it in the context of a worthy and universal human drama.

Erikson’s theory of identity development has greatly influenced my work with White teachers in multicultural education over the past four decades. Inspired by his approach, I have found it helpful to acknowledge that the development of a positive White racial identity, like the movement toward mature adulthood, is a continually unfolding journey of discovery and growth. Remembering the vulnerability and inadequacy I experienced in my own early adulthood, I know that many White educators are similarly subjected to insecurities and personal dislocations when confronted with issues of race. The affirmation I received from Erikson’s non-judgmental descriptive approach has served as a constant reminder for me to employ similar positive regard when working with my colleagues on issues of race and Whiteness.

There are many variations in the story of White identity development. In this and the following chapter I will explore some of the universal themes that emerge from this lifelong process of growth. I will attempt to identify the significant landmarks that can guide our journey toward an authentic and healing engagement with White identity. Precisely because our social reality is so highly racialized (Allen, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1993; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000), it is important for each of us to understand our own position and level of awareness vis-a-vis the categories of race. If we are to be effective navigators for ourselves and others on the river of diversity, it is important that we become self-reflective regarding our White identity. Wherever each of us may be in our own journey, it is liberating to realize that we can continue to grow and deepen in our understanding of what it means to be White educators in a multicultural society.

THEORIES OF RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

None of us are born with an integrated sense of racial identity. In my own case, I didn’t become conscious of issues of race until I was 18 years old.
As we have seen from our discussion in previous chapters, race itself is a social construct, a learned category. Its meaning is communicated through interaction with our own and other racial groups. Many of us are inculcated with more negative images than positive regarding racial categories, necessitating considerable unlearning and reevaluation in the process of acquiring positive racial attitudes and identity.

Theories of racial identity development are well-established in the social science literature (Carter, 1995; Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1992, 2003). In these theories race is viewed as a socially and psychologically constructed process, not a fixed biological characteristic (Giroux, 1997b; Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1986). From the perspective of racial identity development theory, each individual demonstrates differing degrees, styles, or stages of identification with his or her particular racial group. Helms (1990) defines racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (p. 3). Theories of racial identity development are primarily concerned with the social, psychological, and political implications of our perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors regarding racial categories.

In terms of racial identity, it is important to point out that Whites, for the most part, are not accustomed to seeing ourselves as racial beings (Carter, 1995). As J. H. Katz and Ivey (1977) observe, “White people do not see themselves as being White” (p. 486). And as Helms (1990) notes, “if one is a White person in the United States, it is still possible to exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality” (p. 54). Even though the invisibility of Whiteness is gradually being eroded by the increasing racialization of public discourse and media images (Giroux, 1997b, 2000; Pence & Fields, 1999), it is still possible for Whites to exercise the privilege of choice regarding whether or not they will attend to their own identity as racial beings. The dynamics of dominance and the politics of difference, as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, continue to allow Whites in Western nations to exist in the ironic and contradictory state of being blind to our own racial identity, on the one hand, while asserting the inherent superiority of Whiteness, on the other. Helms (1990) has suggested that Whites can overcome this history of ignorance and superiority by attending to several key developmental issues:

The White person’s developmental tasks with regard to development of a healthy White identity . . . require the abandonment of individual racism as well as the recognition of and active opposition to institutional and cultural racism. Concurrently, the person must become aware of her or his Whiteness, learn to accept Whiteness as an important part of herself or him-
self, and to internalize a realistically positive view of what it means to be White. (p. 55)

My purpose in this chapter and the next is to explore how we as White educators can grow beyond the limits of dominance, how we can come to terms with the realities of Whiteness, and how we can learn to transform both our own racial identity and the institutions that have perpetuated White hegemony.

**Stages of Black Racial Identity Development**

Because theories of White racial identity development have been based on earlier research related to the stages of Black identity, it is important to briefly review this prior work. Cross (1971, 1978, 1991) established a five-stage theory of Black identity development, including preencounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. In the preencounter stage, African Americans tend to distance themselves from their own racial identity. There is an attempt to deny the importance of race, to contend that an individual can be judged on his or her own merits, irrespective of race. According to Tatum (1992), a Black person in this stage has “absorbed many of the beliefs that ‘White is right’ and ‘Black is wrong’” (p. 331). Although we are focusing here on Black identity development, the process is similar for people from other marginalized groups. An American Indian colleague, for example, describes her preencounter stage as “wearing the mask of Whiteness” (Almojuela, Narratives).

Transition to the next stage, encounter, is often stimulated by experiences or events that lift the mask of Whiteness and point out the significance of racial categories. An African American person, for example, may be subjected to personal vilification and/or racist comments in spite of his or her best efforts to conform to dominant-culture norms and expectations. An African American colleague, who is dean of the graduate school at a large urban university, recounted such an experience at a recent workshop. He told of driving his new BMW through a White neighborhood and being stopped by a White police officer who confronted him with the question, “Where did you get this car?” My friend responded, “I bought it, and you can buy one, too, if you have enough money.” To this the officer said, “Are you getting smart with me?” My colleague reflected

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2. In preparing the text for this and the following chapter, I asked several White teachers and colleagues of color to write personal narratives regarding their own experiences with Whiteness. Several quotations from these narratives are included here and are referenced in the text to the “Narratives.”
on this experience: “No matter how many academic degrees I may have, and no matter how prestigious my position in the university may be, in this confrontation with the police, I was just one more suspicious Black male driving a fancy car through a White neighborhood. This cop made his feelings clear that I didn’t belong in either that car or that neighborhood.” Similarly, Almojuela says of her transition to the encounter stage, “Negative experiences began to pound at me and caused my protective shell to chip away” (Narratives). In the encounter stage there is a realization that race alone, independent of other qualities of the individual, can lead to negative treatment.

Encounter experiences often lead to the next stage, immersion/emersion, which is characterized by anger toward Whites and avoidance of anything that rings of Whiteness. In this stage, according to Parham (1989), “Everything of value in life must be Black or related to Blackness. This stage is also characterized by a tendency to denigrate White people” (p. 190). An individual in the immersion/emersion stage is deeply committed to Blackness and invests much energy in exploring the roots of his or her Black culture, over and against that of Whites.

The next stage, internalization, begins when the “pro-black attitude becomes more expansive, open, and less defensive” (Cross, 1971, p. 24). Internalization is characterized by a greater willingness to interact with members of other groups, including Whites. A transition to the fifth stage, internalization-commitment, is evidenced by the individual’s willingness to proactively engage in work that supports and strengthens the Black community. Individuals in this final stage are firmly and securely rooted in their own Black identity but also able to participate effectively in a broader multicultural context. West (1993b) writes:

Mature Black identity results from an acknowledgement of the specific Black responses to White supremacist abuses and a moral assessment of these responses such that the humanity of Black people does not rest on deifying or demonizing others. (p. 28)

Stages of White Racial Identity Development

Building on previous research on Black identity, most of the early work exploring White racial identity formation was related to the issue of racism (Gaertner, 1976; Ganter, 1977; Jones, 1972; Kovel, 1970). These theorists assumed that White identity in Western nations was inherently tied to racism, and they attempted to describe the process whereby individual White people could learn to acknowledge and overcome their own racism. Later
works by Hardiman (1979), Helms (1984, 1990, 1994, 1996), Carter (1995), and Leach, Behrens, and LaFleur (2002), explore the additional dimension of Whites’ attempts to define a positive, as well as nonracist, sense of White cultural identity. These later works acknowledge that White identity must be defined not only in terms of racism but also in relation to an authentic sense of racial identity for White people. Consistent with this perspective, any comprehensive theory of White racial identity must explore the following three developmental tasks:

1. Acknowledging the reality of White racism in its individual, institutional, and cultural manifestations
2. Abandoning racism and engaging in active resistance to its many forms
3. Developing a positive, nonracist, and authentic connection to White racial and cultural identity

Because Helms’s work is based on extensive empirical investigation that meets each of these three criteria, I have chosen to explore her approach in greater detail in this section.

Helms (1994, 1996) and Helms and Piper (1994) describe six stages in the development of White racial identity. The six stages are divided into two phases as follows:

PHASE I: ABANDONMENT OF A RACIST IDENTITY
- Contact
- Disintegration
- Reintegration

PHASE II: ESTABLISHMENT OF A NONRACIST WHITE IDENTITY
- Pseudo-Independence
- Immersion-Emersion
- Autonomy

In my review of each of the above stages, I will draw on previous descriptive summaries provided by Helms (1990), Tatum (1992), and Carter (1995).

Contact. Through encounter with the “other,” White people are initiated into the process of racial identity development. Contact may occur personally, through meeting a friend or co-worker of a different race, or it may occur vicariously, through the media or other channels. Prior to this experience, we are in a precontact condition in which Whiteness is either
invisible to us or denied as a significant element of our identity (Kivel, 1996). Griffin (1995) writes: “By ourselves, we weren’t racial at all. We were just people. Uncolored” (p. 28). Never having met a person who wasn’t White, I was in the precontact stage for the first 18 years of my life. In the contact stage we are usually uncomfortable and unsophisticated in our initial relationships with people of color. We are timid and naively curious. This was my experience on my first interracial date in high school, as described in Chapter 1. In the contact stage we often unconsciously exhibit stereotypical racist attitudes and behaviors, as I did in worrying about my safety in going into “her neighborhood” for a date.

Some White people in the contact stage espouse the theory of color-blindness (Neville, et al, 2000; Schofield, 2000) and make comments that appear to be racist to people of color, such as, “I don’t recognize what race a person is” (Helms, 1990, p. 57). In the contact stage we do not see ourselves as being White, and we are unaware that people from other racial groups see us in particular ways because of our Whiteness. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson, one of my Aboriginal colleagues in Australia points out, “White people are often shocked to discover that Indigenous women think critically and have opinions about them” (Narratives). Likewise, Finefrock (Narratives) was surprised to learn that she was viewed as either “a narc, a prostitute, or a drug pusher” when she moved into a Black neighborhood as a single White woman. In the same vein, McKenna states, “I understood that one of the unearned privileges I enjoyed as a White man in our society included rarely, if ever, being forced to be aware of my race” (Narratives).

Whites in the contact stage are ignorant of White privilege and unaware of the benefits that come to us because of institutional and cultural racism. Following our initial encounters with people of color, we may feel pressure from our White peers to discontinue such relationships. When we do form a positive friendship with a person of color, we tend to see this person as an exception to our negative stereotypes about other members of that group. We may say to our friend, “You’re not like the others” or “You’re a credit to your race.”

**Disintegration.** We enter the stage of disintegration when we acknowledge our Whiteness and begin to question what we have been socialized to believe about race. Gallagher (Narratives) writes: “My first year of teaching sent me down the road of questioning my attitudes and childhood tapes about those different from me.” Through our growing awareness of racial inequality, we begin to recognize certain moral dilemmas regarding race and the democratic ideals we espouse (Dennis, 1981; Howard, 2002; Parker, 2003). Our belief in the American principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, for example, come into conflict with our growing
awareness of the unfair and unequal treatment afforded Blacks and other people of color. Our values regarding fair treatment of people as individuals collide with our new awareness that racial minorities are often treated negatively and unfairly merely because of their group membership.

In the disintegration stage we experience considerable dissonance regarding our Whiteness. We feel anxiety, guilt, or shame regarding the discrepancies between our expressed values and the realities of racial discrimination. Linton (Narratives), for example, felt shocked and guilty when she realized that the anger of Black youth toward Whites in the 1960s was also directed toward her as a White community worker, even though she was trying to help ease the tensions in their riot-torn neighborhood. Similarly, McKenna (Narratives) describes his confusion in the disintegration stage when he discovered as a high school student that racism related to housing existed in his own neighborhood. He writes in his narrative: “Race and racism were no longer things I talked about in the abstract. . . . The struggles Anne [his Black neighbor] talked about were very real. I failed to see them until they came knocking literally at my door. For quite awhile I felt broken, confused, guilty.”

Confronted with the difficult emotions of the disintegration stage, we may begin to reevaluate our previous attitudes and values, or we may blame racial others for our confusion and become angry with them. We may also feel alienated from our White peers, friends, and families, who often respond negatively to us when we challenge or destroy White norms about race. Sweaney (Narratives) discovered this rejection by her fellow Whites when she and her husband became advocates for Aboriginal students in their small Australian country town. She writes: “As we began to publicly articulate what was happening in both the school and the town, we, too, became outsiders to the non-Aboriginal community.”

In addition to feelings of rejection, alienation, and dissonance during the disintegration stage, we may also experience a sense of excitement, stimulation, and discovery because of our newfound learnings about racial differences. Our attempts to navigate the swirling emotional currents of the disintegration stage often cause us to seek out one of several alternative ways to calm the rough waters. Some Whites may choose to withdraw from future contact with people of color, thus eliminating one source of the dissonant input. Others may attempt to convince White friends that people of color aren’t really as bad as we may have been taught. Still others may recruit support from both Whites and people of color to create the illusion that racism is not really as destructive as it may appear.

**Reintegration.** For some Whites, however, the dissonance and the dilemmas of the disintegration stage are resolved through regression to pre-
viously held prejudices and the reassertion of racist beliefs. This is called the reintegration stage, wherein individuals consciously embrace the notion of White superiority. From this perspective, racism and inequality are rationalized as the natural result of the inherent inferiority of people of color. The guilt and anxiety of the previous stage are repressed and redirected as fear or anger toward other racial groups. These emotions can be passively expressed by avoiding people of color and relating only to like-minded Whites, or they can be more actively asserted in the form of hostility and/or violence. Militias, the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, and other White supremacist groups are fixated in the reintegration stage. Members of these groups are conscious of their Whiteness, they espouse and rationalize their racial superiority, and they actively support attitudes and behaviors that denigrate people of color.

Reintegration behaviors, however, are not always based on the obvious ignorance of these blatantly racist groups. For example, the supremacist passions that fired the imaginations of *The Bell Curve* authors (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) and the more subtle paternalism espoused by those who penned *No Excuses* (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003), clearly demonstrates the “higher-level racism” that is sometimes evident within the academic community. Similar reintegration behaviors were exposed in the corporate boardroom at Texaco in 1997, where high-level executives using derogatory racist language were tape-recorded in a private meeting. Also, the university-educated parents who attacked the REACH multicultural program (Chapter 4) espoused a Western supremacist ideology that was different in style, but identical in substance, to that of their more blatantly racist compatriots in the Klan.

Both the raw bigotry of the streets and the refined racism of the ivory tower thrive during the reintegration stage. Racism is more conscious and intentional here than during the precontact, contact, or disintegration stages. Reintegration, which might better be termed “retrenchment,” occurs as Whites retreat from the dissonance of disintegration and consciously choose racism and White superiority as their means of dealing with diversity. Much of the conservative political response that has been characterized in the popular press as “White male backlash” can be attributed to the dynamics of the reintegration stage. Whites in reintegration often feel “besieged” or “victimized” by people from other racial groups, whom they perceive as directing “reverse” racial discrimination against Whites (Giroux, 1997b, pp. 287–288). At this point in the developmental cycle, Whiteness is no longer invisible but is consciously acknowledged and actively defended against perceived outsiders. Whether their racism is covert or overt, it often requires powerful experiential influences to dislodge individuals who become fixated in the reintegration stage (Helms, 1990).
**Pseudo-independence.** Fortunately, there is an alternative to reintegration, which occurs when a White person “begins to question her or his previous definition of Whiteness and the justifiability of racism in any of its forms” (Helms, 1990, p. 61). The pseudo-independence stage begins when we acknowledge White responsibility for racism and confront the fact that White people have intentionally or unintentionally benefitted from it. Our attempts to abandon racism in this stage are usually characterized by a desire to “help” people from other racial groups rather than to systematically change the dynamics of dominance. The missionary zeal of the pseudo-independence stage often grows from a conviction that Whites really do have the answers for other people. This stage was typified for me in my early work in the Black community in New Haven, where I saw myself as “helping Black kids survive the struggles of life in the ghetto.” Because of a continuing belief in White moral superiority, individuals in the pseudo-independence stage are often viewed suspiciously by members of other racial groups.

In the pseudo-independence stage we are attempting to give up our negative feelings about Whiteness, but we have not yet established an authentic White racial and cultural identity. We have not discovered role models who demonstrate how we can be both White and nonracist. Some of us at this stage may seek to disavow our own Whiteness and become judgmental of other Whites who are not aware of their racism. This was my stage of growth when I worked in the church (Chapter 1). I wanted to convince members of my White congregation that they were racist and unaware. Needless to say, pseudo-independent Whites often feel alienated from other White people.

Whereas Blacks in the immersion/emersion stage sometimes seek to prove they are “Blacker-than-thou” relative to other African Americans, Whites in the pseudo-independence stage often try to demonstrate that we are “less-White-than-thou” relative to our White peers, thus distancing ourselves from other members of our own collective group. The confusion and struggle of the pseudo-independence stage are evidence that our growth toward a positive sense of Whiteness remains tentative and unfocused at this point in the developmental cycle. Most of our reexamination of Whiteness at this stage is occurring at the intellectual level, with the deeper emotional issues left unresolved.

**Immersion/emersion.** The transition into the immersion/emersion stage is marked by a movement away from paternalistic efforts to help other groups and toward an internalized desire to change oneself and one’s fellow Whites in a positive way. For me, this stage marked the end of my “missionary period” in the Black community and the beginning

Whites in the immersion/emersion stage are on a quest for images and aspects of ourselves that are positive and unrelated to racism. We may join White consciousness-raising groups and seek out White role models who are antiracist allies. We want to associate with Whites who are on a similar journey, and we seek more authentic and proactive ways of being White. Much of the work at this stage is being done at the emotional level, sorting out and working through issues that were repressed, denied, or avoided in the earlier stages.

**Autonomy.** When a new and positive definition of Whiteness has been emotionally and intellectually internalized, we begin to enter the stage of autonomous racial identity. In this stage, according to Helms’s model, race is no longer a threat to us. We have acknowledged the reality of personal, cultural, and institutional racism, and we are engaged in activities to resist the many manifestations of oppression (Howard, 2004; Tatum, 2003). Tatum (1992) writes:

> Alliances with people of color can be more easily forged at this stage of development than previously because the person’s antiracist behaviors and attitudes will be more consistently expressed. (p. 339)

In the autonomy stage we begin to draw correlations and connections between racism and other forms of inequality and dominance, including sexism, heterosexism, classism, and ageism. We become clearer in our understanding that oppression in all of its forms ought to be the target of our social change initiatives. We actively seek opportunities to learn from other groups, and we are able to engage in authentic personal interactions across the boundaries of difference. It was from the position of autonomous White identity that Bob Conners (Narratives), as a White male professor, was able to honestly and effectively teach a class on racism and oppression in American society to a student population that was primarily Black.

In the Helms model, autonomy does not represent an end-point in the cycle of growth. It is not necessarily a transcendence of race, but rather a state of being continually open to new information and growth. In the autonomy stage, which I refer to in my work as the stage of authenticity, we acquire a new and positive connection to our Whiteness and a deep
commitment to resist oppression. As one of Tatum’s (1992) White students stated at the end of an intense term-long exploration of racial identity, “It was not being White that I was disavowing, but being racist” (p. 340).

CAUTIONARY NOTES

Helms’s description of stages in the development of White racial identity, like any theoretical construct, is merely an approximation of actual experience. The chronology of growth implied by her model can be helpful as a guide and as an educative tool but may not be accurate or appropriate for everyone. In my own developmental process, for example, the reintegration stage was never a reality, and none of the White teachers who shared their stories in the Narratives seem to have entered this phase. Reintegration behaviors are certainly real, as discussed above, but it would be erroneous to assume that all White people necessarily pass through this stage.

Also, some White people share personal accounts in which they appear to have “skipped” several of the earlier stages of identity development, apparently having been acculturated into autonomous multicultural identity from early infancy. Wellman (1999), for example, tells of being raised by Communist parents in Detroit in the 1950s, where Black friends and house guests were more common than White ones. He grew up with the disparaging appellation of “red” rather than White, and felt much safer in the racially diverse milieu of his parents’ political activism than he did in predominantly White settings. He writes, “The White teachers treated me no differently than my Black classmates: suspiciously, and sometimes with contempt. Whatever privileges Whiteness conferred were cancelled by my redness” (p. 79). Wellman’s story exudes images of immersion/emersion and autonomy/authenticity but lacks references to the earlier stages. His narrative is a reminder that we should avoid being either too literal or too linear in our application of racial identity theories.

It is also important to note that research related to White racial identity is a relatively recent phenomenon, gaining momentum only in the 1990s. Even though Whiteness has become a major topic of study in recent years (Allen, 1999; C. Clark & O’Donnell, 1999; Howard, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Leach et al., 2002; Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000; Weiss & Fine, 2003; Wise, 2003) it should be acknowledged that our understanding of the process of White identity development is still tentative and exploratory. Some researchers claimed even by the late 1990s that enough had already been written about Whiteness. They worried that “understanding Whiteness could surface as the new intellectual fetish, leaving questions of power,
privilege, and race/ethnic political minorities behind as an intellectual ‘fad’ of the past” (Fine et al., 1997, p. xii).

I find it encouraging, rather than worrisome, that more researchers have begun to examine Whiteness and that White educators are now sharing their narratives regarding the personal struggles related to racial identity development. I feel we need to deepen and expand our work on Whiteness rather than terminate it in its initial stages. The examination of Whiteness is an essential, and formerly neglected, part of the broader multicultural and social justice agenda. As I have argued throughout this book, we cannot begin to dismantle the legacy of dominance without first engaging Whites in a deep analysis of our own role in perpetuating injustice. We need to decode White dominance and also provide ourselves and our White colleagues with positive visions for engaging in the process of change (Giroux, 1997a). To this end, the current discussion of White racial identity are only now beginning to manifest their potential contribution. We need more work in this arena, not less.

In spite of these cautions and concerns, however, the value of a positive developmental approach to White racial identity lies in its emphasis on growth and the possibility of change. By establishing racial identity as a process of development, rather than a fixed and immutable attribute, these theories offer hope for the process of social healing. As White educators working in multicultural settings, we are indebted to Helms, Tatum, Carter, Sleeter, and other theorists who have initiated work in the field of White racial identity development. Although they do not answer all our questions regarding the dilemmas and confusions of White racial identity, their emerging conceptual frameworks certainly help us map the major steps along the way. Just as Erikson’s life-cycle formulations were comforting for me during my identity turmoil in the 1960s, so the stages of White racial identity development can lend legitimacy and worthiness to the challenges and frustrations we inevitably face in our growth toward an authentic and transformationist White identity, a process I will explore in more depth in the following chapter.