Work in Progress

Racial Identity Development and Relational Theory: The Case of Black Women in White Communities

Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D.

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About the Author

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Abstract

This paper examines the connection between racial identity development theory (which describes the process of developing a positively affirmed sense of racial identity) and relational theory. The points of intersection between these two theoretical perspectives are used to understand the experiences of young Black women growing up in predominantly White communities. In the summary of the discussion which followed the paper presentation, the implications of racial identity development theory for the development of mutuality between Black and White women are considered.

The Stone Center Theory Group challenged themselves in the introduction to their book, *Women's Growth in Connection* (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey, 1991) to take on the task of better understanding the specifics of women's experience based on class, race, age, ethnicity, and gender. This paper is presented in the spirit of adding more specific understanding by providing information about a particular group of women—Black, middle-class, college-educated women—and their racial identity development, framed in relational terms.

Though we each have multiple identities based on our membership in various social groups, as Vicki Spelman, author of *Inessential Woman* (1988), has pointed out, these identities cannot be separated like pop beads. For instance, we Black women cannot isolate our Blackness from our femaleness. We are always both simultaneously. Yet little research is being done on the combination. There are, of course, some exceptions, among them the work of Wellesley College professor Alice Brown-Collins (1991). Such exceptions not withstanding, racial identity development theorists have done little to address gender. Relational theory has done little to address issues of race.

In this paper I want to talk about the connection between racial identity development theory (which essentially describes a process of moving from internalized racism to a position of empowerment based on a positively affirmed sense of racial identity) and relational theory. Specifically, it is an attempt to look at the points of intersection between the two theoretical perspectives in understanding the experiences of young Black women growing up in White communities. The examples I will use throughout the course of this discussion come from interviews I have done with young African-American

women who grew up in predominantly White communities.

If, as Stone Center theorists suggest, connectedness is the goal of development, and those connections which are growth-enhancing are mutually empathic and mutually empowering, how do Black women in White communities develop these growth-enhancing connections as they move outside the boundaries of their families? With whom? What role does racism play in this process?

If we understand racism to be a pervasive system of advantage based on race (Wellman, 1977), which has personal, cultural, and institutional implications for our daily lives, then we must acknowledge its daily impact on interpersonal relationships. If mutual empathy requires the interest and motivation to know the other, then everyday racism often, if not always, represents the failure of mutual empathy. As Judith Jordan writes, "in order to empathize one must have a well-differentiated sense of self *in addition to an appreciation of and sensitivity to the differentness as well as the sameness of another person* (Jordan, Surrey, and Kaplan, 1991, p.29, italics mine). Yet when a person discriminates or intentionally or unintentionally acts on perceptions based on racial stereotypes, the appreciation of sameness is violated. On the other hand, when a White friend denies the impact of racism in the friend of color's life, the recognition of difference in experience is denied. As Wendy Rosen (1992) pointed out in her discussion of heterosexism, so too in the case of racism, our culture almost guarantees empathic failures, experiences of disconnection. Given this context, what are the implications for young Black women in predominantly White communities? How does their growth in connection take place?

A model of racial identity development

Because many of you may not be familiar with racial identity development as conceptualized by Cross (1991), Helms (1990), and others, a brief overview may be helpful. Racial identity and racial identity development theory are defined by Helms (1990, p.3) 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 . . . racial identity development theory concerns the psychological

implications   of racial-group membership, that is, belief
systems that evolve in reaction to perceived
> differential group membership.

It is assumed that in a society where racial group membership is emphasized, the development of a racial identity will occur in some form in everyone. Given the dominant/subordinate relationship of Whites and people of color in this society, however, it is not surprising that this developmental process will unfold in different ways for the different racial groups. Because of our time limitations, my discussion will be limited to Cross's (1971, 1978, 1991) model of Black identity development. While the identity development of other people of color (Asian, Latino/a, Native American) is not included in this particular theoretical formulation, there is evidence to suggest that the process for these oppressed groups is similar to that described for African-Americans (Highlen, et al., 1988; Phinney, 1989).[*] In each case it is assumed that a positive sense of oneself as a member of one's group (which is not based on any assumed superiority) is important for psychological health.

According to Cross's (1971, 1978, 1991) model of Black racial identity development, there are five stages in the process, identified as Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization/Commitment. In the first stage of 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 her conscious awareness, the individual seeks to assimilate and be accepted by Whites and may actively or passively distance herself from other Blacks.

In order to maintain psychological comfort at this stage of development,
> the person must maintain the fiction that race
> and racial indoctrination have nothing to do
> with how he or she lives life. It is probably
the   case that the Preencounter person is
> bombarded on a regular basis with
> information that he or she cannot
really be a

[*] While other similar models of racial identity development exist, Cross and Helms are referenced here because they are among the most frequently cited writers on Black racial identity development and White racial identity development, respectively. For a discussion of the commonalities between these and other identity development models, see Phinney (1989) and Helms (1990).

member of the "in" racial group, but relies on denial to selectively screen such information from awareness. (Helms, 1990, p. 23)

Movement into the Encounter phase is typically precipitated by an event or series of events that force the individual to acknowledge the impact of racism in one's life. For example, instances of social rejection by White friends or colleagues may lead the individual to the conclusion that many Whites will not view her as an equal. Faced with the reality that she cannot truly be White, the individual is forced to focus on her identity as a member of a group targeted by racism.

The Immersion/Emersion 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 Parham (1989, p.190) 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 . . . "

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 backgrounds. Typically White-focused anger dissipates during this phase because so much of the person's energy is directed toward her own group- and self-exploration. The result of this exploration is an emerging security in a newly defined and affirmed sense of self.

The emergence from this stage marks the beginning of Internalization. In general, "pro-Black attitudes become more expansive, open, and less defensive" (Cross, 1971, p. 24). 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 her self-definition. The individual is also ready to build coalitions with members of other oppressed groups.

Cross suggests that there are few psychological differences between the fourth stage, Internalization, and the fifth stage, Internalization-Commitment. However, 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, to both proactively perceive and transcend race. Blackness becomes "the point of departure for discovering the universe of ideas, cultures and experiences beyond blackness in place of mistaking blackness as the universe itself" (Cross, Parham, and Helms, 1991, p. 330).

Though the process of racial identity development has been presented here in linear form, in fact it is probably more accurate to think of it in a spiral form. Often a person may move from one stage to the next only to revisit an earlier stage as the result of new Encounter experiences (Parham, 1989), though the experience of the stage may be different than it was the first time. The image that I find helpful in understanding this concept of recycling through the stages is that of a spiral staircase. As a person ascends a spiral staircase, she may stop and look down at a spot below. When she reaches the next level, she may look down and see the same spot, but the vantage point is not exactly the same.

A relational perspective on racial identity development

Though this process is not discussed explicitly in relational terms, in fact, movement through these stages does occur in emotional connection with others. In the context of the experiences of Black women growing up in White communities, the identification with the dominant society occurs in relationship with White friends and teachers. For example, one young woman I interviewed described the love she felt for her kindergarten teacher and her childhood wish that her mother could also be White. Most of my interviewees felt connected to their communities in elementary school and had mostly White friends. Jean Baker Miller, in her paper "The Development of Women's Sense of Self," (1991) describes girls in childhood as intensely involved in relationships, and there is nothing to suggest that these young Black women were any different. Though many had experienced instances of name-calling and had sometimes been aware of lowered teacher expectations, these experiences might be considered what Miller has called "minor disconnections" (Miller, 1988). I refer to them as minor not because they were unimportant experiences (years later they were significant enough to be recalled in an interview with little prompting), rather they are called minor because they were typically balanced by positive experiences of connection at home and at school.

The kind of social rejection that precipitates movement into the Encounter stage of racial identity development typically begins to occur in adolescence. During adolescence, Miller (1991) writes that "the girl picks up the strong message that her own perceptions about her bodily and sexual feelings are not acceptable" (p.20). Black girls in White communities may be getting the even more loaded message that their actual bodies are not acceptable. For example, one young woman described an interaction she had with a White girlfriend in junior high school. She said,

> [She] introduced me to somebody and her friend gave her a look like "I can't believe you have a Black friend." And I remember that one friend saying, "She's not really Black, she just went to Florida and got a really dark tan." And that upset me incredibly because it was like, "What? Yes, I am, wait a second here."

A White male friend also began to feel peer pressure in junior high school to deny his connection to this Black girl. She explains,

> It eventually got very difficult for him to deal. And so it was easier for him to call me a nigger and tell me, "You're lips are too big. I don't want to see you. I won't be your friend anymore." than to say like he used to, "Oh, you're so pretty."

For other young women, the message was less directly communicated but was discerned from the acts of omission which were a part of their experiences, for example, not being asked to dance at parties or not being introduced to the brothers or male friends of their White girlfriends.

Though these might be considered Encounter experiences in the model of racial identity development theory just presented, the withdrawal from the dominant group did not occur in high school. For young Black women to sever ties with their White friends in communities where there are few other choices available would mean certain isolation. Miller (1988) writes,

> when children and adults feel the threat of condemned isolation, they try to make connection with those closest to them in any way that appears possible . . . . In essence, the child or adult tries to construct some kind of an image of herself and others, and of the relationships between herself and others, which will allow her entry into relationships with the people available. This is a

complicated process. In order to twist herself into a person acceptable in "unaccepting" relationships, she will have to *move away from and redefine* a large part of her experience— those parts of experience that she has determined are not allowed.

This may mean denying those aspects of herself which are perceived as culturally different from the majority, or denying her own perceptions of racism. When, as quoted earlier, Janet Helms (1990) writes that "the Preencounter person is bombarded on a regular basis with information that he or she cannot really be in a member of the 'in' racial group, but relies on denial to selectively screen such information from awareness," she is describing a process that allows the person of color to remain in connection with those who are conveying the message of exclusion.

Describing this process in her own words, one young Black woman said,

> I really didn't see my Blackness in high school at all. I mean I was aware of how I was treated differently, but for so long my mom was always saying, "You think you're White. You think you're White. You think you're White." [Her reply:] "No Mom, we don't see color here. Everyone is friends and they treat me the same." I couldn't see then what she was trying to point out to me.

The cost of this denial of experience is internalized oppression, blaming oneself for the relational disconnection. This young woman found herself engaged in a process in high school that continued into college. She said,

> I knew my high school experience was just very weird, just by the way the Whites treated me. But my self-esteem has gone down the toilet since I've been here . . . Being made to feel that you're never quite good enough, never quite pretty enough, never quite smart enough, or even if you're all of those things, just being made to feel that you're different, something's not quite right.

Now approaching her college graduation, this young woman has decided to go to graduate school at an historically Black institution. Her desire to enter a predominantly Black community is part of what has been described in terms of racial identity development as the Immersion stage. In relational terms, we can also see this decision as an attempt to disengage from destructive nonmutual relationships and to find an

environment which may be more conducive to the development of mutually empathic and empowering relationships.

Though the young woman just described had to deny aspects of her experience to remain in connection, is it possible for young Black women in predominantly white communities to maintain relational authenticity (an empowered stance) in response to other's lack of empathy (i.e., their racism)? The answer is yes, but it seems encouraged by the availability of mutually empowering relationships in other settings. For example, one young woman described an interaction she had with White friends in high school which she found offensive. She said,

> When it was time to apply to schools, people were like, "Oh, you don't have to worry; you're a minority. Everyone needs minorities." You're like,"Wait. I've been going to school with you for the past seven years. I've been going to class like you have. I don't think I've been sitting in my room everyday going, 'Oh when it's time to apply to college, it's not going to matter anyway. I'll go whether I can read or can't read, whether I can add or can't add.'" I was very pissed off . . . I told them how pissed off I was at them.

In this instance she was able to express her anger authentically rather than internalize self-doubts about her academic qualifications. The fact that she had a supportive network of family and friends outside of school probably contributed to her ability to challenge her classmates' comments without fear of "condemned isolation."

The healing power of mutual relationships

The opportunity to connect with peers from one's own racial group during the Immersion stage of racial identity development is a corrective relational experience for many young Black women. The validation of one's own experience by others who have shared aspects of that experience is empowering and contributes to the positive redefinition of racial identity that is occurring at the Immersion stage. For many Black women growing up in predominantly White communities, the opportunities to develop such relationships with other Black women are extremely limited. Though parents can play a role in actively working to construct such opportunities by intentionally building Black social networks for their children (attending a Black church, for example), not

all Black parents have acknowledged this developmental need (Tatum, 1987). Most of the young women I have interviewed did not move into the Immersion stage until they went away to college.

One young woman who struggled with a lot of internalized oppression as a result of her growing-up experiences described the impact of meeting an African-American woman in college who was obviously proud of her own racial identity.

> One of my best friends on this campus is Black and she's very aware of her Black identity. And it's been a great help for me because it makes me look at it and be just as proud as she is of my Black heritage, of my Black identity, and be vocal about it. Whereas I was never vocal, but now I can be.

Though her friend was not from a predominantly White community herself, she shared the common experience of being devalued as an African-American woman in U.S. society. Yet her friend had been able to resist the internalization of that oppression and was able to model another way of being Black and female. The exchange of information and survival strategies that occurs at the Immersion stage occurs in the context of mutual relationships in which one feels heard, seen, and understood.

Must this process take place in the context of same-race relationships? While it is possible for a White person to support and encourage this process (e.g., a White teacher could encourage a Black student to get involved in a Black student organization), the impact of racism on interracial relationships makes the required mutuality more difficult to achieve. In her paper, "The Meaning of Mutuality," Judith Jordan describes how one is positively affected by mutual interaction but also describes the potential threat of mutual interaction. She writes, "Growth occurs because as I stretch to match or understand your experience, something new is acknowledged or grows in me" (Jordan, 1991a, p.89). However if in stretching to understand a Black woman's experience, a White woman learns something new about herself and doesn't like that new thing (e.g., I have White privilege, or racism has affected me in ways I didn't expect), is she tempted to *not* understand, to keep out that information? My own experience teaching White students about the psychology of racism suggests that the temptation to keep out race-related information is often great (Tatum, 1992). If a White person is unable or unwilling to hear and try to understand the

experience of a Black woman, mutuality is not possible.

Jordan (1991b) writes in her paper, "The Movement of Mutuality and Power," that real safety and growth in relationships for adults depend on the ability to engage in mutually empathic and mutually empowering relationships as well as on the ability to recognize nonmutual relationships and to disengage from them. It is ironic then that the attempts of Black women to seek each other out for mutually empowering connections, particularly in the context of predominantly White settings, are often seen as problematic by Whites. "Why are they sitting together in the dining hall?" is the often-asked question on campuses around the country. We might ask the question differently. Why is the fact that they are sitting together so often seen as threatening by White students and administrators? Why is it not seen as a healthy response to frequently experienced nonmutuality? In fact, the opportunity for same-race relationships which are growth-enhancing ultimately lead to the Internalization stage of racial identity development.

As African-American women in predominantly White settings move toward the empowerment that comes with internalization of a positive sense of racial identity, the question posed by Miller (1991, p.24) becomes very salient: "How to be the kind of self she wants to be, a being-in-relationship, now able to value the very valuable parts of herself, along with her own perceptions and desires—and to find others who will be with her in that way." For the young woman in the Internalization stage, the range of relationship choices may widen beyond her own racial group. However, her choice of relationships will be predicated upon her perception that those with whom she is interacting are respectful of her self-definition and the range of her experiences.

Those of us who would work with young Black women in a mutually empathic relational mode must ask ourselves if we are prepared to hear, see, and understand their authentically told experience. Unless the answer is "yes," we will not be able to help facilitate the empowerment of these young women as they move through the process of racial identity development.

Discussion Summary

After each colloquium presentation a discussion is held. Selected portions are summarized here. At this session,

Drs. Alice Brown-Collins and Robin Cook-Nobles joined Dr. Tatum in leading the discussion.

Question: Do you ever find Black women who have stopped at the first or second stage of racial identity, or is it generally a continuous thing?

Tatum: It is possible to get stuck. I think there's a lot that concerned adults—therapists, counselors, teachers—who have an understanding of racial identity development can do to help people move along. If we assume that this is a process of healthy growth and development, there are ways to facilitate it.

For example, I think it's very common for adolescents to be in the Encounter stage, which is often a stage of feeling very angry about the race-related experiences that you're having. Often it's a very anti-White stage because you're expressing that anger at Whites. But it's also a stage at which your own sense of identity has been largely shaped by stereotypes. You have not been provided the information you need to really redefine your identity in more positive, more empowering ways. One of the things that happens for young women, and men too, when they come to college, if in fact they get to college, is that they have the opportunity to take African-American Studies courses. It's often access to that and similar new information that helps move people along into the next stage of really redefining their identity in positive terms. The problem is, of course, that many African-American students don't get to college and, therefore, don't have access to those African-American Studies courses. But, in fact, there's no reason why that information couldn't be communicated at the high-school level. Those who are able to take those college courses often ask, "How come nobody told me about this before?" That question comes up a lot in my interviews. I think we really need to look at the ways in which the very Eurocentric, exclusionary curriculum that is the experience of many high-school students acts to keep people stuck in the Encounter stage rather than facilitating their development in this way.

Question: What is the role of anger in this process? Are you only angry at the Encounter stage or, as you develop, do you leave anger behind? And is the anger that Black women are expressing toward White women within the women's movement a function of their stage of identity development?

Tatum: I would like to say that you get to be angry at any stage. Certainly anger is a very

important aspect of the Encounter stage of development. If you are having Encounter experiences, you are angry about that. At the same time, that doesn't mean that once you've worked through and redefined your identity, you never get angry again. One of the differences may be that at the Internalization stage you are better able to deal with your anger in more constructive ways. For example, many people are experiencing the Encounter stage in adolescence, their anger is often expressed in an anti-White attitude which can be somewhat counterproductive. For example, a Black student might say, okay, before I was trying to identify with the dominant group, and now I'm getting the message that this is not possible for me. So then what I need to do is really assert my identity, and part of that assertion of identity is not be anything that I think is associated with "Whiteness." That might include not doing well in school, because academic achievement is seen as "White" behavior. That's problematic.

The question that I always ask is, "Well, how did academic achievement get identified as exclusively White behavior?" We have to really look at the curriculum. This attitude is something that tends to emerge in 7th, 8th, 9th grades, and into high school. What was happening in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th grades in terms of what was being presented as models of academic achievement? But I think this is where an understanding of the stages can be helpful, because if I am the teacher and I have a student who seems to be in this angry Encounter stage, I might introduce the student to some personally relevant information about their own cultural experience that may help them redefine that experience. For example, a number of people I've interviewed have mentioned reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as a pivotal experience in moving them from one stage to the next. Or, for example, young Black women who are in this isolated situation might be interested in reading Lorene Cary's book, *Black Ice*, which is about the experiences of a young Black woman at a predominantly White prep school. So there are ways in which that information can be shared.

The young woman I described in the paper, whose friends were saying that she didn't need to worry about college because "everybody needs minorities," was very irritated by that statement. But rather than internalize her anger, I think her response was an empowered response characteristic of the Internalization stage. She challenged their remarks

very directly. Her friends might have heard her response as sounding angry, and she was! But that is legitimate anger, and you can find that at any stage.

Question: I'm wondering if you could talk about bridging the gap between theory and practice in terms of racial relationships. I don't see White women practicing what they preach.

Tatum: I think a lot of it has to do with coming to terms with your own identity as a White person and that is a process that develops over time. Janet Helms (1990) describes a model of White racial identity that parallels in some ways the stages of racial identity for people of color. As Whites move through the stages, there is an increasing awareness of the ways in which you've been affected by your own racism, or by racism in the society, the way you've breathed it in like people in Los Angeles breathe in smog. I use the analogy of people in Los Angeles breathing smog because when we talk about racism a lot of White people get very nervous. They're afraid you are going to say that they are racist, and that's part of the "condemned isolation" Black women may experience in White communities.

If I as a Black woman am experiencing racism, and I'm trying to explain it to my White friends, and they are concerned that they may be implicated in this discussion, then there's a way in which they don't want to acknowledge the experience as racism. They may say, "Oh, she didn't mean it, she's a really nice person. You might have misunderstood. That couldn't have been it." But because racism is so pervasive in our society, people do breathe it in, and it does influence their everyday interactions. (Probably, if you went to California nobody would like to be called a "smog breather," but it's so pervasive that that's what people are!) So, one of the things that I find in my teaching about racism is that, White students, as time goes by, become increasingly aware of their own racism. In some ways this awareness leads them to act *less*, because they don't want to expose their racism. People can get stuck there. But if they're able to be in environments where they're continually being pushed to look at and think about racism, and think about what they can do about it, then it's been my experience that these people start to move. They start to reach out, and not in a condescending or patronizing way, but in an authentic way. But again, I think this movement has a lot to do with stages of racial identity development.

I feel somewhat limited by time here to go into

this aspect of women's development at greater length, but I would refer you to my article, "Talking about Race; Learning about Racism," in which I talk about the stages of racial identity development for both Whites and people of color, and the ways in which those developmental processes may collide, and what we can do educationally to facilitate development on both sides.

Question: I want to follow up on the question about relationships between Black and White women. When an African-American person is going through the developmental stage of expressing anger, and then reconnecting, how can we best support the reconnection?

Cook-Nobles: How to reconnect, how to have mutual friendships—relationships across ethnic and racial boundaries? First you have to deal with the anger and the guilt. And you have to be so motivated to deal with those intense feelings that you think it will be worth the expenditure of energy. Other factors impact the individuals in their lives, and people have to choose where to expend their energy. So those in supporting roles have to look at the social forces impacting on the individual and where they can invest their energy, because racism will wear a person out!

Brown-Collins: I think that part of bridging the gap is for White women to begin to acknowledge their racism. There will be no true bridging of the gap without acknowledging racism. Now you may say, "I don't know *what* this means. Due to what happened in the past, I am now inheriting the legacy of racism. I mean I didn't formulate it, I didn't set it up, but I've inherited it. So, what is the acknowledgment of racism?" It is connecting with other White women to work on your own racism. African-American women are typically very sensitive to and willing to connect when people begin to do this. Here at Wellesley there is a group of White women who come together to work on their own racism. Part of the anger here at Wellesley is that Whites are expecting us (African-American women) always to give, give, give, give, give. White women can take an Africana Studies course, you too can read Malcolm X, you too can do all these things. We think that you have to begin at some point to not only acknowledge but to find a way that you can work on racism because it is not only destroying us as African-Americans, but is certainly destroying all human beings.

Cook-Nobles: We can use the male-female analogy and talk about making the connection across gender. The fear is that, when you address the issues, you will lose connection, that there will be a disconnection, that someone will lose. But the reality is that everybody is brought up to another level. People have to be committed to going through the process of going up to that other level. And I like the analogy of smog, because who wants smog in our systems? We want to get it out, and therefore this analogy helps us to see that it is not just an individual problem, but a societal problem in which we *all* play a role. Similarly, if we're going to get rid of it, we *all* have a role to play.

Tatum: I would like to add to that. I didn't describe all the stages for Whites, but one of the stages is when someone has started to recognize her own racism and is trying to figure out what to do about it. Often at this stage she will look for the help of a person of color to educate her. "Okay, I see that there's a problem. I want to do something about it. You, person of color, tell me what to do." If the person of color at that point is in the Encounter stage, that person is not interested in playing that role. And, in fact, as Alice was saying, there's no need for a person of color to do that. There are other ways to be educated.

But there is a stage that Janet Helms calls the Immersion stage, like Cross's stage of Immersion, in which White people seek to redefine Whiteness. One of the things that happens as somebody becomes aware of the racism in this society and the way in which they have been affected by it, is that they become alienated from the present definition of Whiteness. They see Whiteness as a dominating, oppressive category, and they don't want to be a part of that. So the question becomes, "How can I be White and not be a part of that category?" Well sometimes the person will try to not be White, to try to hang out at the Black student union or to take on a different identity and say "I'm not like them, I'm distancing myself." But ultimately that kind of separation doesn't work because it's not real, and the person is then forced to acknowledge, "I am in fact White,"—"I am in fact a White woman," in this case. So the question is, "how can I redefine Whiteness in a way that makes me feel good?" There are ways to do it. There's more than one way of being White. You can define yourself as a White ally for example. You can define yourself as an agent for change or an antiracist activist.

One of the things that disturbs me about our

educational system, beyond what I said about the experiences of African-American students, is that if I were to ask each of you to name a nationally-known racist, you could all do it. You could think of David Duke or Jesse Helms or George Wallace—somebody would come to mind. If I were to ask you to name a nationally-known White antiracist, my experience is that many groups struggle a long time before they can think of one person. The names of Anne Braden and Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center sometimes come up—there are people you could name. However, the point is that if you can't think of any antiracists, then it's hard to imagine yourself being one. So that one of the things that happens in the Immersion stage for Whites is a real desire to find examples of other people who think the same way.

If I am a White person who is working against racism, who doesn't want to be involved in this process of smog breathing that we have been talking about, then is there a way for me to do that without a life of "condemned isolation"? I need to find other White people who are engaged in a similar process, and that's the role of White allies groups. Sometimes people get really nervous when you say, "Okay, White women should go off and meet together." Well, the Black women have already done it. I mean they are doing that in the Immersion stage, but it's after White women, or White people in general, have done the same work that they can become better able to do their part of the bridging—so it's not just a one-way bridge.

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