Going through this immersion/emersion leads to a new richness and freedom in one's life, that is, the fullness that comes from at least sometimes seeing the world from the "autonomy" racial identity status. I find WRID an invaluable tool in understanding and successfully intervening to help Whites deal with racism. I know that my own experience and its "fit" with the theory helps make that theory more real for me and, therefore, a more useful tool in my professional work.

However, I also think the personal struggle I described here illustrates two aspects of the process of Whites coming to terms with racism that are less explicit and less well discussed in the multicultural literature. First is the idea that an exclusively individualistic worldview (what I now believe is clearly the dominant mode of thinking among White Americans) is an impediment to White racial identity development. An exclusively individualistic view of race/ethnicity and racism left me unable to see myself and my own racist mistakes in ways that would enable me to continue to grow. I have come to believe that professionals need to help Whites find ways to see the world in more collectivist and collateral terms. It seems to me that seeing the world exclusively in an individualistic way impedes or makes impossible the immersion/emersion experience described in WRID.

Second, multicultural literature has just begun to deal with the fact that human beings all have multiple social group identities. For instance, Reynolds and Pope (1991) have developed a model for how people identify with their multiple oppressed identities, and Arredondo and colleagues (1996) described a model that outlines a variety of social group identities within three dimensions of personal identity. How one type of social group identity may influence one's development concerning another social group identity, however, is given little or no attention. There are no models or guidance for thinking about how one's "minority" identity or identities may affect one's "majority" identity development. In part due to my own personal experience, I have come to believe that Whites need to open whatever windows they can to help them see their own journeys concerning race and racism. This includes those windows that may be opened by examining other social group identities that are more developed than their racial identities. Trying as best I can never to equate the experience of racism with the experience of other types of oppression, I try to use examples from the majority and minority perspectives of many different groups in my teaching and training. It is my hope that this may help people use their own majority or minority experiences with one particular type of oppression to open a window to view another of their majority or minority experiences with a different particular type of oppression.

When I consider how my professional work has been influenced by the experiences described in this narrative, I find an emotional, motivational influence to be most compelling. I think that my own experiences have given me a passion for doing antiracism professional work with Whites, especially White counselor trainees. I believe that counselors' greatest professional interests often arise in some way from their personal experiences. So it is with me and my experiences with race and racism. My life has been enriched by my racial identity journey, despite its painful moments. I am appreciative of the part that my gay identity has played in this process and remain ever-amazed at the richness that being gay has brought to so many aspects of my life. Even more, I am grateful to the supervisors and colleagues of color and the White supervisors and colleagues who have challenged me, supported me, and shared their stories with me. They have been fundamental to helping me to make progress. Put simply, I now feel passionately about doing my part to provide such assistance to other Whites who choose to take on the painful but rewarding journey toward an active antiracist identity and stance in the world.

Claiming A Biracial Identity: Resisting Social Constructions of Race and Culture

Carmen Braun Williams

Several years ago, African American poet and essayist Michelle Cliff was invited to the University of Colorado campus to give a presentation. I was working in the university counseling center as a therapist and teaching in the Black Studies program. Cliff's writing, along with that of other Black women essayists like Lorde (1984), hooks (1981), and Wallace (1979), were especially appealing to me then because they were among the few examining both racial and gender oppression and their combined effects. This was something I was exploring in my own life, and I was eager to get more insight. Cliff spoke eloquently and poignantly of her experiences with racism. I remember feeling moved by her talk and inspired by her example of courage in the face of conflict. The audience seemed to be equally absorbed. After her presentation, a young White woman stood up to make a point. This woman made no apparent attempt to conceal her hostility toward what she deemed to be Cliff's fraudulence, as a white-
skinned Black woman. The young woman asserted angrily that Cliff had no right to any claim as a victim of racism due to her having light skin.

As a biracial woman whose skin color, hair texture, and facial features often have rendered me "suspect," I likewise have had to respond to accusations—by both Blacks and Whites—of being an impostor regarding the impact of racism in my life. I have been queried about my racial identity (or, erroneously, my "nationality"). People, mostly White, have wondered why I do not choose to "pass" as White. Other people, mostly Black, have demanded to know why I say I am biracial instead of "just admitting" I am Black. I have been scrutinized and found to be "not Black enough" by some, whereas others have deemed me "too into racial issues." People have given me advice on how I should talk, think, act, and feel about myself racially. Repeatedly, people have tried to define my existence for me.

What this has done is forced me to examine myself. I have had to challenge myself about why I have conformed at times to social expectations by calling myself "Black" instead of claiming my biracial identity. I have had to search hard for answers to why I spent a good deal of my adolescence wanting desperately to be White. I have asked myself how I became convinced that the talented and smart girl I was as an adolescent was ugly and worthless. I have sorted through layer upon layer of internalized racism that has been woven through me. Steele (1990) described an anti-self who stockpiles society's racist valuations and uses these as fuel to diminish self-esteem. My anti-self has been a powerful saboteur of a healthy racial and cultural identity.

CLAIMING THE "I"

In a world where socially constructed categories of race are misconstrued as biological, little encouragement is offered to people like me to claim an identity that falls outside prescribed frameworks. I do not fit neatly into any of the current racial or cultural boxes. I am the firstborn child of an African American man and the young German woman he met and married while overseas during World War II. I grew up in Germany, surrounded by beloved German grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and our longtime friends. The culture I was immersed in, the foods I ate, the holidays I celebrated, the activities I engaged in, and the language and dialects I spoke were German. I did not speak English fluently until I was 5. Despite the fact that my siblings and I were certainly a racial anomaly in postwar Europe, as a child I was blissfully unaware of my difference.

The innocence and unself-consciousness of those early years were shattered by racism. When we got to the United States, we lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly White. This was the 1950s, before social movements would shake up cherished notions of racial superiority and inferiority. I was around 8 years old when I first started noticing that my parents often were subjected to intense scrutiny by passers-by. I started hearing ugly words kids shouted at us from their porches as we walked past. I felt deeply humiliated when leaving restaurants with my family after waiting and waiting for service, finally being approached and told to leave. I began to understand why I was not invited to friends' birthday parties. I learned that my entire being was reduced to one thing: "not White." This idea of not being something, being nothing, was to define my life for years to come.

In a recent essay, hooks (1992) explored the process of moving from object to subject, that is, from having one's identity defined by others to defining oneself. This need to "claim the I"—to actualize the self (Cliff, cited in hooks, 1992, p. 46)—is complicated by the constant struggle to assert a sense of self against powerful cultural limitations and boundaries imposed by racism. To define a self that fails to conform to rigid categories of racial and cultural identity is daunting, given the virtual absence of outside affirmation. Growing up, I searched for ways to affirm my racial identity but had no role models nor anyone I thought I could talk to. I knew something about being White, but did not know what it meant to be White and Black at the same time.

CLAIMING A BIRACIAL IDENTITY

I started college needing to explore my Blackness. My world until then had been White, and I was longing for a sense of wholeness. I have always believed it was a stroke of divine intervention that on that very first day, I happened to be standing in line behind a Black woman for dorm room assignments. Barbara became my roommate and friend and introduced me to all 70 other Black students on campus, thus launching my immersion into the Black experience. I dove into Black literature and poetry. I devoured Black history. I protested and rallied and came close to being suspended for helping organize a sit-in. I even joined the college newspaper staff, which gave me a public outlet for my mounting anger about racism.

Those days, I was not biracial; I was Black. Publicly, I rejected White people and hid the part of me that was White "in the closet." Unless people asked, I did not admit to having White parentage. Privately, however, I was aware of several contradictions. While I was waxing rhetorical about White people and their racism, inside I knew I was betraying myself. How could I reconcile my ostensible rejection of Whites with my own loving feelings toward some of the most important people in my life?

When I first read the research on racial identity development in graduate school, facets of my struggle for self-definition began to make sense to me. I read these models (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990; Parham, 1989) excitedly because they reflected my journey from nonconsciousness about my Black identity to my immersion in it. However, the racial identity development models could not help me with the questions I was asking about also being part White and how to reconcile the two. Although these models work to a point for all people of color as we grapple with racism, they do not delineate the biracial experience. The task of integrating
my experience as a person who is racially and culturally both African American and European American was something I had to figure out for myself.

Parham (1989) identified three possibilities for movement through stages of racial identity: stagnation, linear progression, and recycling. For biracial people, I believe another possibility exists: simultaneity. By this I mean that I experience my biracial identification as placing me in several "stages" at the same time. For example, in every context I am in and in every interaction, I am at once both White-identified and Black-identified. By this I am not referring to the preencounter and immersion stages. Rather, my White frame of reference is captured best by the autonomy stage and my Black frame of reference by the internalization stage (Helms, 1990). These stages refer to two very different identity processes: one for Whites and one for African Americans. Yet, I do not experience the two as split, but as fluid, seamless parts of who I am. I am describing a combined consciousness that is very difficult to reconcile with existing social constructions of race and racial identity development theory.

There are few racial identity development models that capture this simultaneous reality (see Poston, 1990). Indeed, as I write about my experience, I struggle to find words that do not compartmentalize, words that do not divide. Yet, our cultural beliefs about race are mired in dualistic constructs: good and bad, right and wrong, us and them, black and white. Finding words that convey both/and rather than either/or is challenging. Describing an experience that does not fit dualistic constructions is even more difficult. In placing people into either/or categories, their experiences are forced into simplistic paradigms that fail to capture their complexities.

Recently, I attended a national conference in Orlando on race and ethnicity. I was delighted to be among people of all colors sharing ideas, discussing problems, and formulating strategies related to racial and ethnic issues. I was especially interested in a workshop about biracial identity in which the presenter described her research on African American/European American adults and her own experience as a multiracial woman (Wijeyesinghe, 1997). In this workshop, we discussed the idea that racial identity, especially for mixed race people, is centered in the person, not in societal constructions. That is, there is no one "correct" identification for mixed-race people—it is the person herself or himself who gets to name her or his experience.

What has stayed with me most from this workshop is the radical notion that racial identity is an individual's own choice. It is this concept that flies in the face of social constructions of race. The idea that individuals have a right to define their own experience, to create their own personal meanings, to frame their own identity, to claim an "I" that is uniquely their own, shakes up many people's most dearly held beliefs about race. Courage to claim one's own experience despite resistance and judgment from others allows biracial people like me to begin to forge an authentic self.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING**

Howard (1991) called "empathic experiencing" the therapist's greatest aid in transcending our own limitations and understanding others from different races and cultures (p. 187). Feminist therapists have also written extensively about the mechanism of empathy and its operation in psychotherapy (Jordan, 1997). My experience as a therapist reinforces the idea that what people want most is to be understood, and empathic understanding on the therapist's part can be enormously healing in and of itself.

Although these processes apply regardless of race and culture, it is our preconceived notions and unresolved feelings about race and culture that present some of the most formidable barriers to expressions of empathy in therapy.

I first entered my own therapy as part of my graduate training. An underlying theme in my therapeutic work was my unfolding journey as a mixed-race person profoundly affected by cultural messages about race. What I am most aware of regarding how my racial issues were dealt with by therapists is avoidance. I remember once working with a White therapist who, in 4 years, never once asked me about racial issues. When I brought up subtle racist incidents I encountered, he minimized them by suggesting alternative explanations, leaving me without viable ways to process what was happening. This approach to the issue of race was the standard I encountered during years of graduate training.

**Breaking the Silence**

Race, one of the most complicated and conflicted issues facing our country, is a scary topic. White counselors I meet at workshops voice their unease about bringing up racial issues with clients through questions like the following: Will I offend if I notice my client is racially different? Will I be seen as imposing a racial agenda if I ask about racial issues? What if the client is not there to talk about race? Should I still ask about it? How do I handle a client's anger about racial issues? What if a client gets angry at me for being White? Why should I bring up race; aren't we supposed to treat everyone the same? How can I help someone if I've never had to deal with racial issues myself? These questions are good because they begin the dialogue. One of the most important things I believe I do as a counselor is simply to help people begin to break the silence concerning issues of race and culture.

On one hand, the task in training White counselors is to desensitize them to talking about their feelings about race. For counselors and trainees of color, on the other hand, this usually is not the problem. Much of their experience, like mine, has been marked by frequent, lively discussions about racial issues with other people of color. However, what typically has been missing in these discussions is White people. The counselor education classroom or professional workshop, thus, becomes a forum for an unfamiliar enterprise that is rich with opportunity for growth for everyone: dis-
cussing race across racial groups. In such settings, exploration by White counselors and counselors of color of their unresolved feelings around racial issues is facilitated.

**Processing Difficult Feelings**

Talking about racial issues across racial groups is a task fraught with anxiety. This anxiety may be manifested in feelings of defensiveness, resistance, guardedness, mistrust, and vulnerability. The counselor education classroom is the first time many trainees have confronted their feelings about racial issues, and many approach the task with tremendous apprehension. I believe it is imperative that counselor training programs create a safe space for processing these feelings, preferably outside the evaluative context of the classroom. Counselors in training need to feel free to discard politically correct screens and filters when voicing their beliefs and feelings about racial issues.

By the same token, practicing counselors must avail themselves of opportunities to confront their own racism. White counselors and counselors of color alike need to examine how they have internalized racism and the subtle ways this might manifest in the therapeutic relationship. Avoiding discussion of racial issues, invalidating clients’ anger about racism, and imposing one’s own racial worldview are potential pitfalls for counselors of all racial groups. As a counselor educator deeply concerned that clients affected by race still cannot rely on the therapeutic relationship to provide a safe place to address their struggles, it borders on being unethical for counselors to treat clients if they have never examined their own unresolved feelings about racism.

**Appreciating the Complexities of Race and Culture**

Race and culture defy simplistic schemas. As an African American and White woman whose culture of origin is German, I cannot be placed neatly into a racial/cultural category, nor can another person determine the nature of my experience with racism on the basis of that information. Counselors must suspend their assumptions about clients’ experiences and allow clients’ stories about the richness and texture of their lives to unfold. Not one counselor I worked with as a trainee explored the complexities of my racial/cultural background as part of my search for identity. Nevertheless, many were willing to offer interpretations of my experience.

Race and culture are variables in every therapeutic relationship. They are not always articulated overtly, nor always as the presenting issues, but they are present nonetheless. The segregation of these variables in counselor education programs into multicultural counseling courses is a subtle expression of racism: that race and culture are the sole province of non-Whites and do not affect White people. Indeed, the American myth of the melting pot has obfuscated dialogues on race, ethnicity, and culture among Whites and relegated such discussions primarily to those focusing on people of color. This is problematic because many White counselors have never explored how they too are affected by race, and how their failure to examine their own privileged racial/ethnic/cultural status compromises the therapeutic relationship.

Like the young woman in the audience who dismissed the speaker’s story and imposed her own assumptions and interpretations, counselors may find themselves engaging in more subtle forms of invalidating their clients’ racial/cultural realities until they have explored their own countertransference concerning racism. As the numbers of biracial individuals and multiracial families grow, counselors will increasingly find themselves faced with complex racial problems in their practices. Empathic understanding must begin with counselors’ own exploration of their deepest beliefs about race and culture. Only then is effective multicultural counseling, in all its complexity, possible.

**Racism, Racial Identity, and Racial Socialization: A Personal Reflection**

Anita Jones Thomas

A young girl remembered the stories that her parents had told her about how Blacks were mistreated in this country. When her parents were younger, there were separate facilities for Whites and “Coloreds,” as they were called. Black people, her parents included, engaged in marches and civil activities to make changes to end oppression and racism and to increase opportunities for all people. All of the stories seemed more like fantasy than reality to the girl; her world seemed so dramatically different. She lived in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood, attended predominantly Caucasian schools, and had many Caucasian friends. All of her friends seemed to like her, and she performed well in school. In fact, some of the cautionary statements that her parents made about the school system seemed more appropriate for that fantasy land. They always told her that she may be judged by the color of her skin, but she should remember that she is beautiful, intelligent, and wonderful, and that the judgments would come from “people who were ignorant.” Her parents told her that she would have to work twice as hard as her White...