

• COMMENT

## On Carts and Horses: The Status of White Racial Identity Attitude Research

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Recently Sabnani, Ponterotto, and Borodovsky (1991) presented a detailed curriculum outlining goals and tasks designed to affect the beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills which they believe would optimize training in cross-cultural counseling. Moreover, they related the goals and tasks to specific stages of White racial consciousness development in what may be considered a breakthrough in cross-cultural counselor training. Although we commend the vision and scholarship evident in the presentation and recognize the potential of this sort of conceptualization to revitalize or even redefine cross-cultural training, we submit that the integration proposed may be overly ambitious at the present time.

We believe that "the formation of a comprehensive multicultural training model" (Sabnani et al., 1991, p. 76) may be premature, largely because of the uncertain status of the model of White racial identity. Sabnani et al. describe a sort of compromise model of White racial identity, which they relate to cross-cultural training goals and tasks. The problem is that the model presented is not supported by a logical/rational analysis or by any empirical evidence.

In regard to the former, we believe that their "integrative stage" model lacks reasonable credibility. For example, it suggests that Whites usually arrive at pro-White, antimorality attitudes (Stage 4) as a result of rejection by minority group members. The bigots we have encountered have either been effective in covering this up or, in truth, have not had this experience. Further, the model may be simplistic. We suspect that a very large number of White people hold truly ambivalent attitudes toward racial/ethnic minority people (Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986). Finally, it is not difficult to imagine a number of alternate models. What *is* difficult is to collect objective evidence

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that will support or refute any model. Unfortunately, the empirical evidence supporting Helms's (1990) White model is no more than suggestive at this time, there is presently no empirical support for Clancy and Parker's (1989) White Racial Consciousness Development Scale, and no data or measuring device exists to evaluate the model presented by Sabnani and colleagues.

Sabnani et al. (1991) offer the obligatory disclaimers that "at a very basic level, more research on White identity/consciousness models is needed" (p. 96) and that "from an empirical standpoint, . . . we are at an infancy stage in terms of testing and fully understanding models of White racial-consciousness development" (p. 94). But they proceed to urge the integration of training goals and tasks with this virtually unsubstantiated model. In what appears to us to be a case of horse/cart sequential confusion, the authors make a major point that the training model should be put into practice first so that the research agenda they propose can then be addressed. We believe that it would be prudent to determine that a reasonable amount of empirical support for the proposed White racial identity model exists prior to implementing the training program. We do not believe that it would be realistic, let alone ethical, to attempt to delineate goals and tasks "to match the particular stage of racial-consciousness development that a White person is operating within" (p. 85) or to "use identity-assessment devices to assign new students to various sequentially organized cross-cultural classes, experiences, or practice" (p. 96).

We would like to suggest that editorial reviewers should be more discerning as to whether speculative forays encourage premature implementation or corroborating research. When speculative theory outstrips supporting evidence, we should not be advocating applications but should be focusing on collecting evidence.

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