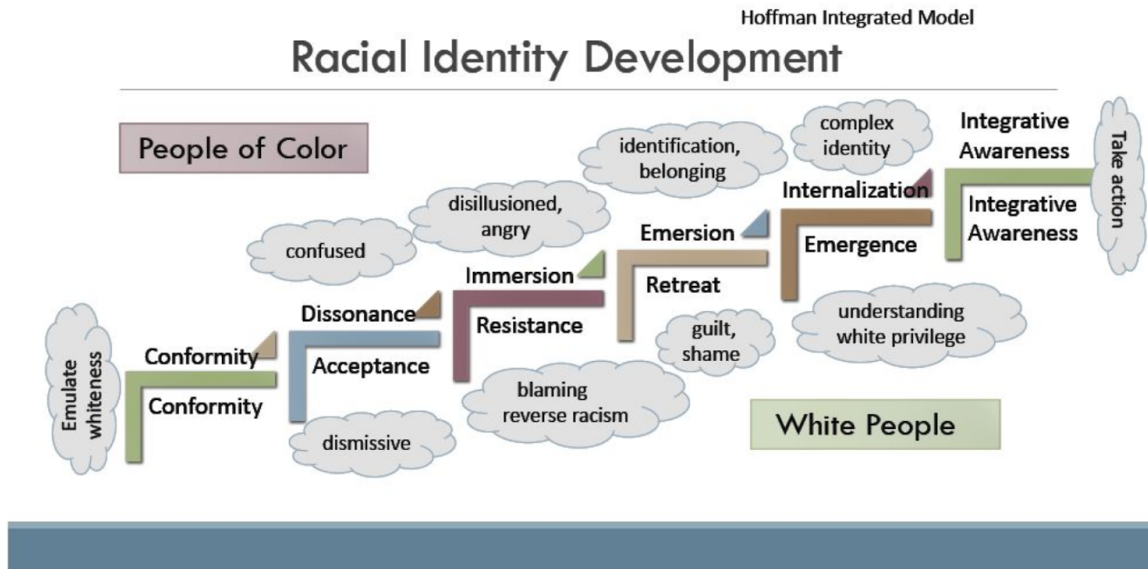


# Racial Identity Development Scale

Developed by McGrail and Rowe Gorosh (2018), portrays Hoffman and Hoffman's (2004) model, which is an adaptation of Janet Helm's (1990) model.



## Racial Identity Development: White People

The schemas of racial identity development for White people are conformity, acceptance, resistance, retreat, emergence, and integrative awareness (Helms 1990). Let's look at what each of these developmental moments involves.

### Conformity

If you are White, before critical incidents of racism open your eyes to the realities of race in the world, you are fairly oblivious about your race and the race of others. That makes sense, because racism isn't a system that demands to be known, learned about, and questioned. Otherwise, you might have learned about your race and racial identity development in school, or some similar context. You tend to not be aware that racism exists. Sure, you might be able to point out overt acts of racism, or historical ones, and say these are bad. However, in this part of your identity development, you tend to believe the world for the most part doesn't "see" race. You have a "color blind" view of the world with a conformity to White norms, values, and ways of doing things that is unquestioned.

*Feelings in this schema include obliviousness, safety, contentment, satisfaction, and comfort.*

#### Acceptance

As a White person in this schema, you more consciously reject the notion that racism is real. When people of color talk about racism, you dismiss their thoughts and feelings and justify your own position that racism isn't an issue. It's tough for you to see the racism in whatever topic people of color are bringing up. You urge people of color to assimilate and merge with the (unacknowledged) White norms in whatever setting they are in so people of color stop "causing problems." *Feelings include alarm, surprise, anger, anxiety, and being overwhelmed.*

#### Resistance

In this schema you begin to distance yourself as a White person from the idea that racism is real. It's too difficult to think about racism. You might have tried to address some issues of racism and gotten criticized by White allies (White people who are antiracists, which you'll read about in chapter 9) or people of color. The persistent and

exhausting nature of racism as a system can feel like too much to think about, so you ask questions like "What can I really do anyway?" You tell yourself that racism existed so long ago, and people of all races just need to get along better. You move from minimizing what people of color experience to blaming people of color for racial disharmony. *Feelings include anxiety, anger, worry, irritability, frustration, and numbing.*

#### Retreat

If, as a White person, you keep developing your identity through paying attention to race, you can start to notice that the world is more unfair than you thought it to be when it comes to race. You notice not only that racism does exist, but also how you may have participated in or witnessed racism without taking action. As you explore how this White privilege thing works, and how people of color don't have the same privileges, you move from being unaware of racism's operation in the world to feeling guilty about racism. You can also retreat from fellow White people who are in earlier schemas involving unconscious and conscious denials of the impact of racism on people of color. *Feelings include guilt, shame, anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, and impatience.*

## Emergence

As you explore White privilege, you move into taking action about racism, such as starting to educate yourself on what you can do about racism or speaking up when you see a racist incident. You can get stuck, feeling uncomfortable in moments when you encounter your White privilege and then moving on to something less awkward or painful instead of taking action against racism. This is why, to start to develop a positive White racial identity, you need to link up with other White folks exploring racism and broaden your communities to include people from different racial backgrounds. *Feelings include relief, motivation, curiosity, hopefulness, understanding, caring, and grief.*

## Integrative Awareness

In this schema, you continue to look at your White privilege. You also become more curious about other identities you have (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, disability, and social class, which you will explore in chapter 8). You realize the fullness of your racial identity development and the possibility of cycling into other schemas with awareness and skills to experience those schemas more consciously. You have respect for the racial identity development of people of color, including the various schemas they may be in that

are different from or similar to your own. *Feelings include a range of healthy emotions related to racism, such as confidence, clarity, curiosity, and motivation, as well as difficult emotions including anger, sadness, anxiety, and fear. You'll sometimes feel these multiple emotions all at the same time in this schema, but you aren't overwhelmed by them so much that you lose your center.*

As you read about White racial identity development, you can see that positive racial identity entails White people realizing that being White in itself isn't a bad thing or a thing to feel guilty about. Yes, when White folks enact conscious and unconscious racism, that is something to feel bad about and to change. But if you get stuck in these emotions as a White person, you can't challenge yourself to learn and grow. White people with positive racial identities understand their White privilege and are more aware of how racism works in the world. They can connect with people from diverse racial backgrounds, and they can use their privilege to take action interrupting and challenging racism.

## *Racial Identity Development: People of Color*

As you read about racial identity development for people of color—conformity, dissonance, immersion, emersion, internalization, and integrated awareness (Helms

1990, Hoffman and Hoffman 2004)—you’ll see that the “first” and “last” schemas are the same as those for White people, but the experiences are different, even at those points, because people of color are the targets of racism. You’ll also notice the difference in the “middle” schemas that occur as people of color accept that racism is real and move into more conscious awareness of this.

### Conformity

In this schema, as a person of color, you are oblivious to the existence of racism. You ascribe to White norms, values, and behaviors without question, thinking that this is just part of being a good person. Some of your emulation of Whiteness is driven by norms that value Whiteness over people of color. In other words, you think White norms are positive and good. *Feelings include obliviousness, safety, contentment, satisfaction, and comfort.*

### Dissonance

As a person of color, you experience one or more critical incidents of racism and realize the world isn’t fair or equitable when it comes to race. For instance, you experience racism yourself. You ask yourself a series of questions: *Did that really happen? Was that directed toward me? Wait—I am a good person, why would they treat me that way?* The experience is not only shocking, unexpected, and unfair, but it also seeds your suspicions of the motivations of White people. As a person of color, you begin to see the world differently in terms of race. *Feelings include confusion, surprise, and anger.*

### Immersion

Immersion is the schema where, as you notice more and more of the racial inequities you and other people of color experience, you feel anger toward White people. You don’t feel as safe being around White people because you can’t trust them. You assume that all White people are racist. *Feelings include disillusionment, frustration, anger, and worry.*

### Emersion

Emersion is the schema where you become engrossed in your own racial community due to the distrust you have toward White people in the immersion schema. You experience an even greater need to connect with members of your own race and other people of color so you can feel comforted and validated when you do experience racism. You avoid White-majority spaces when you can and seek community with other people of

color. As the target of racism, you may feel the need to be aware that racist incidents can happen and be prepared to act or react. You may seek connection, solace, comfort, and understanding about shared experiences of racism within your own racial groups. You can think of these experiences of racial emersion as healing spaces in which people of color learn strategies for how to cope with racism, stand up against racism, and experience feelings of pride in their race. *Feelings include avoidance, questioning, anger, comfort, and a strong sense of belonging with people of color.*

### Internalization

In this schema, as a person of color, you have positive experiences with White people who are antiracist and are working to challenge racism in positive ways. You also explore other parts of who you are (e.g., social class, gender, sexual orientation) and how these complex intersections of identity shape your experiences of race. People of color acknowledge they are more than their race. *Feelings include surprise, relief, complexity, and curiosity.*

### Integrative Awareness

At this point in your racial development, as a person of color, you experience the capacity to reach out to a more racially diverse group of people with whom to build communities. You do not feel you are less than another racial group, you are still aware of how racism works, and you value your own racial identity as a part of many important identities you have. *Feelings include a range of emotions related to racism, including confidence, clarity, curiosity, and motivation, as well as anger, sadness, anxiety, and fear. You'll sometimes experience multiple emotions at the same time in this schema, but you aren't overwhelmed by them so much that you lose your center.*