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# A Review of Racial Identity Theories in Relation to Career Choice

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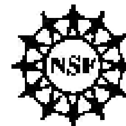


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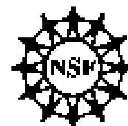
A Review of Racial Identity Theories in Relation to Career Choice

Researchers have taken a variety of approaches in exploring the role of race and ethnicity in career choice and development. Some of the approaches fall within the category of "trait and factor" theories. As the value orientation approach involves discovering and/or appealing to particular values of the different ethnic and /or racial groups, it can also be categorized as a trait theory. A number of developmental approaches have also been formulated, and seem to parallel those of Donald E. Super and Lent, Brown and Hackett's social cognitive career theory (see Allison & Cossette, 2007a). In particular, these theories center on the development of self-concept and identity among people belonging to different races and ethnicities. This review will present an overview of a number of these theories.

Lee (2003) poses an interesting question in reference to research on ethnicity that serves as a guide while exploring this literature:

> How do we resist simplistic assumptions about the meaning of group membership and develop more nuanced and complex research agendas that work from a basic assumption that human beings always have agency, always have resources, and make meaning of their experiences in varied ways? (p. 4)

Lee hopes that by integrating workers representing diverse backgrounds into various fields, a broader range of perspectives will go into that work and produce results that directly relate to a larger number of people (Lee, 2003, p. 4). He considers this an important goal of research on ethnicity in education. In order to accomplish this goal, one must come to an understanding of the complexities of and interplay between 'racial' groups and the issues surrounding the racial identity of individuals.

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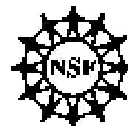
## Discussion

*Problems in Ethnicity Research*

According to Lee (2003), people have tried for a long time to pluralize their thinking about diversity. However, these attempts are usually hindered by sets of assumptions in the literature that are more along the lines of stereotypes stemming from relationships of power and dominance between different groups of people (Lee, 2003, p. 3). One example of these assumptions can be seen in the term 'cultural deprivation'. This term is characterized by deficit-model thinking in which "cultural ways that differ from the practices of dominant groups are judged to be less adequate without examining them from the perspective of the community's participants" (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 19). It was not until the 1960s when cultural learning styles appeared that researchers began to try to understand what cultural deprivation entailed.

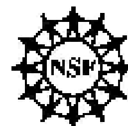
Cultural learning styles theory provides an alternative framework on ethnicity to previous deficit-models by descriptively studying the way people from diverse cultural backgrounds learn; it attempts "to describe them [cultural styles] without making value judgments that suggest value hierarchies in cultural practices" (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 19). This approach is limited, however, because it still does not take into account greater diversity by prescribing generalities and traits to broad groups of people. These generalities and traits may not necessarily apply to the whole group (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 20). Researchers often label populations and make generalizations about these labels which are inadequate descriptors of a particular group of individuals (Orellana & Bowman, 2003, p. 26) and use terminologies in the literature (e.g.



culturally deprived, culturally disabled, inner city, and at-risk) that continue to carry assumptions that put groups in ‘hegemonic opposition’ (Lee, 2003, p. 3).

‘Inner city’ and ‘at-risk’ are good examples of terms with which researchers make assumptions based on group association. For example, even though most children living in poverty are racially categorized as White, generally, only non-whites living in these same conditions are labeled inner city and at-risk because of their association with a minority group (Lee, 2003, p. 3). Minorities are perceived to need more assistance than whites because of the difference in their group’s overall traits (e.g., performance on tests, high school graduation and college acceptance rates, among other variables). When these traits are compared between groups, they reflect static differences and are easily quantified into the attributes of one group and the deficits of another (Orellana & Bowman, 2003, p. 26). A much more productive way of studying the differences between groups is to realize that each group is not homogeneous. One must explore the cultural and socioeconomic factors that affect members of one group versus members of another in order to understand the underlying reasons why similarities and differences may occur (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Orellana and Bowman (2003) advocate utilizing a more informed cultural/socio-historical method of study to avoid the sorts of false associations that come about when studying the differences between groups. They record multiple personal attributes of individuals as opposed to only noting the race or ethnicity of a group. For example, besides phenotypic markers such as skin tone, other attributes to consider are outlined by the following passage from Orellana and Bowman (2003):



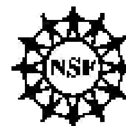
> …language(s) and/or language preferences; immigration status; countries of origin, and regions of origin within those countries (e.g., rural or urban); generational status; current and past social class positioning (particularly important for immigrants); nature and frequency of contact with home countries or other cultural contexts; and other cultural practices. (p. 27)

Orellana and Bowman use additional "cultural context markers in the data sets" such as social practices that act as the basis for developing categories (Orellana & Bowman, 2003, pp. 27-28). Examining these variables provides a context which helps avoid the quantification of group traits and offers an explanation as to why certain group differences exist (Orellana & Bowman, 2003, p. 28).

*Theories Based on Traits and Types*

The focus of racial identity theory in its early years was on understanding racial issues confronting African-American clients. There were two major frameworks: Nigrescence or Black Racial Identity Models (discussed in the Developmental Theories portion of this paper) and the (black) Client-As-Problem perspective (CAP) (Alston, 1996, p. 2). CAP frameworks were concerned with Black identity development as a consequence of the Civil Rights Movement (Alston, 1996, p. 2). In this approach, knowing the behavior or social/political thought of African-American clients "(e.g., whether they referred to themselves as Colored, Negro, or Black) enabled counselors to identify which Black clients would be problematic for therapy" (Alston, 1996, p. 2).

Although much of racial identity theory research has been done with respect to African-Americans, this theory has been applied in exploring the identity development of other groups of

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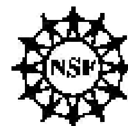
people as well. For Asian-Americans, Leong and Chou use Berry's four personality types based on levels of acculturation: integrationists, assimilationists, separationists, and marginalists (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 159). This is in contrast to the Sue and Sue model of Asian-American ethnic identity which consists of only three personality types: the traditionalist, marginal man, and the Asian-American (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 156). In the Berry model, integrationists are characterized by wanting to maintain original native culture and still interact with other groups (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 159). Assimilationists reject their ethnic identity and accept that of the host society, and separationists maintain their original culture and reject the host culture (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 159). Marginalists "have little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in relations with others" (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 159).

Leong and Chou define career maturity as "having definite career choices, making consistent choices over time, and making choices that are realistic" (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 169). Acculturated or Separationist Asian-Americans may exhibit less self-efficacy in career choice, interest, or expectations because of respect for parental authority in Asian cultures (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 169). Individualistic cultures view occupation as "an opportunity for self-expression and self-actualization" and collectivistic cultures view it as "potential contributions and obligations to the group" (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 160). Overall, Chinese culture has more community and collectivistic values than the mainstream individualistic American culture (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 159). Counselors sometimes mistake these Asian attitudes towards work as a lack of career maturity, when they may in fact be culturally oriented (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 169).

*Occupational Segregation & Group Value Orientation*

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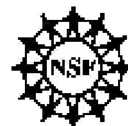
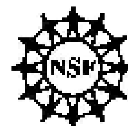
There are many theories as to why minorities more often choose certain careers. Leong and Chou define occupational segregation as "the distribution of members of an ethnic group across occupations" (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 164). A number of minority groups experience similar segregation. The career options of African-American college students were shown by research in the 1960s and 1970s to be limited (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 173). These careers for African-Americans included education, social work, and government work. To a smaller extent, medicine, mortuary science, religion, and law were also included.

Assimilationist Asian-Americans attribute lack of success to the individual, not to discrimination, and so they perceive less occupational discrimination than other personality types (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 166). But in 1978, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found that in the United States, Asian-Americans experienced more occupational segregation than any other ethnic minority group (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 164). Stereotypical "Asian" fields include engineering, computer science, and medicine, whereas fields like law, sales, and social work are nontraditional (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 166). Within the racial identity development of Asian-Americans, Separationists are more susceptible to occupational segregation than Assimilationists, and Integrationists are somewhere between these two (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 165). Occupational segregation can impede the acculturation of someone in an overrepresented field, because acculturation is not as central to success in these fields (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 165). This form of segregation may lead a person to have the impression that their ethnic membership (or identity) is related to success or failure in an occupation (Leong & Chou, 1994, p. 165).



Parham and Austin (1994) discuss three types of career decision making: rational, intuitive, and dependent. The rational style is logical, systematic, and future oriented; the intuitive style is here-and-now with attention to present feelings and emotions; and the dependent style is characterized by conformity to the expectations and opinions of others (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 149). According to Parham and Austin (1994), African-Americans use a dependent style of decision making more often than European-Americans. This reflects the value African Americans place on collective work and community (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 149). There is also special importance placed on the advice and guidance given by authority figures and elders in the African-American community. Parham and Austin suggest that "research must be expanded to include the race and psychological nigrescence of those who provide assistance with career development and the facilities where African-Americans are likely to seek careers advice (e.g. the church, community centers)" (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 150).

Olive & White point out that many institutions in the United States recruit "all minority groups as a single group" (Olive & White, 2007, p. 23). But different ethnic groups have different value orientations, and so recruiting each group individually would be more successful. For example, an understanding of the role of the family is essential to understanding why Latinos/as make the career decisions that they do. Also with this group, language is a huge barrier for students and their families (Olive & White, 2007, p. 23). Translation materials should not "be viewed as preventing the mastery of English by recent immigrant families" (Olive & White, 2007, p. 23). It is hard enough for native speakers of English to understand registration information, and it only increases that problem when the language barrier is present. Another item that is very important to Latino/a students is the availability of guaranteed loans, grants, and

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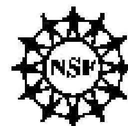
scholarships. Latino/a students who receive this information are more likely to enroll in higher education than any other ethnic group. Latinos/as also respond well to institutions that become involved with the community and establish connections to local families (Olive & White, 2007, p. 24). This type of outreach and bringing in college student role models of similar backgrounds as the prospective Latino/a students increased their motivation to attend college (Olive & White, 2007, p. 24). Research also shows that minority students need "services and support above and beyond the norm" such as that offered by some Office of Minority Affairs in order to succeed in college (Olive & White, 2007, p. 24).

Along similar lines, Brown & Lavish (2006) conducted a study on the role salience and value orientations of Native American tribal college students. These students were given a survey to assess the degree to which the importance of their individual role in the family, home, and community compare to that in work or a career (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 117). Native American adults perceive career to be lifelong and something that requires planning, coincides with family goals, and relates to one's identity (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 117).

*Critique of values and occupational choice.* Brown and Lavish's findings do not elucidate a reason why many Native American high school students do not continue their schooling into higher education, but they do provide more information about Native American college students (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 126). They discuss the issue of the role salience among Native American college students in community and family versus the role of work. The assertion exists that Native Americans value their roles of community, home, and family over that of work. Brown and Lavish's findings only partially support this assertion when considering their value expectations, because there was "no significant difference between participants'

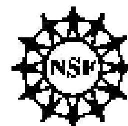


home/family and work roles" (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 122). A reason for these findings may be that all of the college students in Brown and Lavish's sample already value school and may translate this value into a value of work and "world-of-work" expectations more than non-college students (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 124). If the sample had a control of Native Americans of the same age group who were not in college, there may be a very different result.

Brown and Lavish also found that "the role of community is more salient than work for those who expect to return to the reservation" (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 124). Brown and Lavish suggest that Native American undergraduates may share more similarities with samples of undergraduates from other ethnic backgrounds in their perceived confidence in career decision-making tasks than was previously thought (Brown & Lavish, 2006, p. 126).

Because many of the traditional theories of career development are based on White mainstream values and opportunities, it is important to understand the individual client's value system and how he/she arranges what is important and meaningful (Parham & Austin, 1994). Researchers must look at personal identity factors such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, self-evaluation, interpersonal competence, ego-ideal, and personality traits in order to evaluate an individual's self-concept accurately. For example, African-Americans have been portrayed negatively in past vocational literature, i.e. being vocationally handicapped, when in fact the reason behind their actions may be related to their identity and membership in a cultural group (Parham & Austin, 1994).

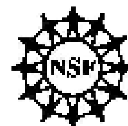
According to Parham & Austin (1994), these value orientations for African-Americans are as follows and vary from individual to individual at different stages of identity:



> African Americans are more prone to be collective and group oriented vs. individual/self-oriented; supportive and interdependent vs. competitive; affective/feeling oriented vs. rational/cognitively oriented; relationship/person to person oriented vs. task/things (commodities) oriented; orally expressive vs. written; and developing a sense of harmony with the universe vs. control and domination. (p. 146)

Individuals also choose careers based on their ability to see themselves in that particular position (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 147). This sentiment relates to the self-efficacy theory that postulates "outcome expectations influence a person's willingness to expend energy towards the pursuit of a career goal" (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 148). Then too, some researchers claim that a lack of visible role models in technical fields decreases the likelihood that African-Americans and other minorities will enter these fields (Parham & Austin, 1994; Leong & Chou, 1994).

*The "Factors" Approach.* Several studies have examined the relationship between risk factors/positive factors and achievement. Gutman, Sameroff and Eccles (2002) studied these in relation to African-American students in the 7th grade. In this study, they use Rolf and Johnson's definition of risk factors, which is variables that "have presumed effects that can directly increase the likelihood of a maladaptive outcome" (as cited in Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 369). The risk factors included in this study were maternal depression, family income, highest occupation in the household, maternal education, marital status, number of children living in the household, family stressful events, percent neighborhood poverty, percent neighborhood female-headed households, and percent neighborhood welfare recipients (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 373).

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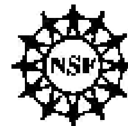
Positive factors within an individual's culture (e.g. support of family, school, or community) can serve to instigate identity changes and contribute to the success of that individual rather than detract from it (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 143). The two kinds of positive factors are: protective and promotive (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 370). Protective factors such as teacher and peer support significantly affect the success of only low risk populations and have been defined as "the positive pole of risk factors" (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 370). Promotive factors, however, are those that affect the success of both high and low risk populations (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 370). Some promotive factors include family and social support. Parents can have a great effect on their child's success depending on whether or not they are involved in the child's schooling and allow the adolescent to take a role in decision-making. In the same way, the support of peers and adults (e.g. teachers) can also have a profound positive effect on an adolescent's success.

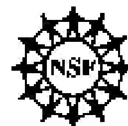
Gutman, Sameroff and Eccles measured a child's success in three ways: Grade point average, number of absences, and achievement test scores (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 373). This was done to control for the different reasons associated with the success outcomes (e.g. behavioral vs. learning and ability). With these assessments, Gutman, Sameroff and Eccles examined the relationship between academic achievement and the presence of multiple risk factors (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 373). They found that a high multiple risk score (i.e. more risk factors) was negatively related to good academic performance and "the multiple risk score had a greater association with adolescents' grade point averages and number of absences than their math achievement test scores" (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 391). Teacher support was negatively related to adolescents' math achievement score (Gutman,



Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 392). Gutman, Sameroff, and Eccles think this is a product of the students who seek out more teacher support being the students who have more academic difficulties in general (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 392). Peer support was found to have a protective effect rather than a promotive one (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 394).

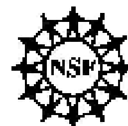
Adolescents with parents providing consistent discipline had higher grade point averages and fewer absences than those with parents providing inconsistent discipline (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 392). Consistent discipline, however, had little effect on adolescents with a fewer number of risks. Students who had fewer opportunities for democratic decision-making in their family were associated with higher GPA and math achievement test scores. Here again, students with fewer risk factors showed little effect in their GPA and test scores (Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002, p. 393).

In another study of risk, Wong, Eccles and Sameroff (2003) examined two questions about the development of African-American students. These questions were: Does perceived discrimination by teachers and by other students pose potential developmental risk? And, does positive connection to an ethnic group serve as a positive factor against the potential threats of perceived discrimination (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003, p. 1210)? They found that perceived discrimination by peers and teachers was negatively related to adolescents' reports of achievement motivation, self-competency beliefs, psychological resiliency, and self-esteem (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003, p. 1212). African-Americans who experienced perceived discrimination also had a strong identification to their racial group and experienced smaller decreases in self-concept of ability, school achievement, and perception of friends' positive characteristics as compared to African-American students with a weaker connection to their



ethnic group (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003, p. 1214). Also, students who perceived high discrimination and who also had a high connection to their ethnic group did just as well as their peers who did not perceive discrimination (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003, p. 1214). Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff make these conclusions: racial discrimination negatively effects an individual's development; a strong connection to ethnic group positively effects development; and a strong connection can also protect an individual from the affects of racial discrimination (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003, p. 1221).

A third study, conducted by Zehr, discusses the risk of high mobility on the success of Native American students in school. Zehr (2007) argues that higher mobility causes students to do worse in school than those who are stable, and that a school's attempt to accommodate these students affects the other students at the school (Zehr, 2007, p. 14). Student mobility is greatly affected by the economic situation of the parents, and many Native American parents are in an economically disadvantageous positions that require them to remain highly mobile. The students either move with the parents to these different locations, or move around between other family members (Zehr, 2007, p. 14). Some schools are trying to solve this problem by "pushing hard to reduce truancy and absenteeism" (Zehr, 2007, p. 14). Some even set up awards systems, for example rewarding students with "play money" for punctuality, i.e. being on time to first period (Zehr, 2007, p.14). This "play money" earns the student a reward such as a school supplies, T-shirts, etc. Some teachers at North Middle School in Rapid City, SD advise teaching Native language and culture classes in order to engage Native students in the classroom and help others to be more sensitive of their culture.

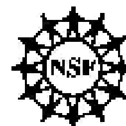


All of three of these studies found that having multiple risk factors decreases the level of performance of students. Gutman et al. and Wong et al. found that promotive and protective factors can counterbalance the effects of risk factors on performance on African-Americans. And race can be either a risk or positive factor depending on the context in which it is used and by whom.

*Developmental Theories: Nigrescence & White Racial Identity*

*Introduction: Explanation of the Developmental Approach.* Ethnic or racial identity theory examines the psychological, cultural, physical, and sociopolitical aspects of membership in a racial group and explains how an individual experiences the processes of cultural socialization and acculturation (Alston, 1996, p. 1). Cultural socialization (enculturation) is "how people learn to 'live culturally'" (Lee, Spencer & Harpalani, 2003, p. 7). Acculturation is the adaption of cultural practices that an individual undergoes when coming into "intensive, firsthand contact" with a foreign culture (Haviland, Prins, Walrath, et al., 2005, p. 457). Super indicates that "a clear self is essential to make mature vocational choices" (Verissimo & Teixeira, 2003, p. 1). Ethnic identity plays a major role in this process of creating a sense of self for young individuals of minority groups, and it influences their career development (Verissimo & Teixeira, 2003, p. 1). Verissimo & Teixeira found in their study that "the relationship between career exploration and ethnic identity is significant" (Verissimo & Teixeira, 2003, p. 7).

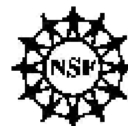
*Nigrescence theory.* Racial identity theory began developing in the 1960's. According to Phinney (as cited in Verissimo & Teixeira 2003), there are three components to ethnic identity theory: the affirmation of beliefs and belonging; exploration and commitment; and ethnic behaviors or practices (Verissimo & Teixeira, 2003, pp. 1-2). The most used framework in the



study of African-American racial identity development is nigrescence. According to Alston (1996), there are several prominent researchers who have written on this topic, including Cross, Dizzard, Jackson, Milliones, and Vontress. Nigrescence is "the development of positive self and group identification in African Americans as a progression from a negative to a positive attitude about blackness" (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 175). Evans and Herr outline five stages to this process: pre-encounter, when individuals view Black identity with negativity and accept assimilation and acculturation as the most efficient strategies for solving their problems; encounter, when individuals question pre-encounter perspectives about being Black; immersion/emersion, when individuals idealize Blackness; internalization, when individuals are internally secure with their Blackness; and internalization/commitment, when individuals experience enough security in their Blackness that it does not effect social and political realms (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 175).

As a comparison, Cross's nigrescence model is very similar and also contains five stages: pre-change identity, an encounter with racial issues, middle or transition from old to new identities, internalization and idealization of the new personal identity, and acceptance of other groups (Cross, 1994, p. 122). Since Evans and Herr (1994) give more defined labels to the stages of nigrescence, their terms will be used in this paper.

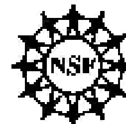
The experiences with racism that an individual undergoes play a major role in stimulating movement from one stage to another in the development of the individual's racial identity. Individuals experience differential levels of these sorts of experiences (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 142). This differential of experience results in individual members of a group being at varying stages of racial identity from one another (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 141). Parham also



suggests that an individual can re-cycle through previous stages of development in response to the experiences they have in life (Alston, 1996, p. 3).

*White racial identity theory.* Even European-Americans can be studied in the context of racial identity theory because, despite an amalgamation of their cultures being the mainstream, people still carry their own cultural backgrounds when they interact with people of other cultures. Some examples of American White cultural values are "the Protestant work ethic (hard work results in success), rugged individualism, status and power (especially as measured by economic possessions), competition, action orientation, and a hierarchical decision-making structure" (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 186). 'Work values' describes a person's cultural values in an occupational setting (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 186). These work values and other attitudes and beliefs do not depend on race but on a person's stage of racial or cultural identity within a group (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 187).

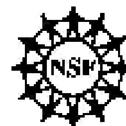
Helms proposed a model of White racial identity development in which a White person undergoes a journey in which he/she passes through five stages: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-independence, and Autonomy (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 187). Contact is characterized by general ignorance about race (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 188). Disintegration is characterized by an attempt to resolve issues that arise from a heightened awareness of race and racism (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 188). Reintegration is characterized by a rejection of non-White culture and adherence to White culture (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 188). Pseudo-independence is characterized by an intellectual interest in and willingness to explore other cultures and values (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 188). Autonomy is characterized by a positive acceptance and appreciation



of race and valuing the differences between cultural groups (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 188).

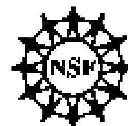
Carter, Gushue and Weitzman surveyed 109 White American college students (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 189). They used the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) developed by Helms and Carter to measure the attitudes associated with the five stages of White racial identity development (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 190). They hypothesized that an individual with racial identity attitudes associated strongly with White identification should be associated with White American work values as well (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 189). Also, racial identity attitudes associated with autonomy should be less strongly associated with White American work values (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 189).

Carter, Gushue and Weitzman found that disintegration and reintegration are positively related to the work values of economic security, advancement, economic reward, prestige, cultural identity, achievement, and authority (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 193). The pseudo-independence and autonomy stages are associated with openness to other races and cultures, and less exclusively to White culture (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 194). In terms of careers, Whites with higher levels of reintegration and disintegration attitudes are more likely to seek careers that have elements of White culture in them and associate with those who are culturally like themselves (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 194). Whites with pseudo-independent and autonomy attitudes are more motivated by altruism in making career decisions rather than personal gain and contact with people who are culturally similar to themselves (Carter, Gushue & Weitzman, 1994, p. 194).



*Another developmental theory.* Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is another type of developmental approach. PVEST has five components: 1. Net vulnerability level, which is the potential risk to an individual; 2. Net stress that is the actual experiences that challenge an individual's well-being; 3. Reactive coping methods or strategies employed to resolve stressful situations; 4. Emergent identities or how individuals view themselves (e.g., in the family, school, neighborhood, peer group); 5. Adverse or productive outcomes or the products of future perception, self-appraisal, and behavior (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 8-10). PVEST promotes an understanding of the dynamic processes that continue throughout life as individuals experience new risks, encounter new stressors, establish more expansive coping strategies, and redefine how they view themselves (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 10). For the counselor or mentor, understanding the stressors and risk factors that their clients undergo allows them to better assess how to help these clients.

*Application of cultural/racial identity.* Lee's (2001) Cultural Modeling Framework is "a framework for designing instruction that makes explicit connections between students' everyday knowledge and the demands of subject-matter learning" (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 7). This framework seeks to use cultural and community-based practices that are applicable to particular tasks in academic subject-matter learning in order to dispel the view that they are deficits and to help students connect to the subject matter in ways that are more familiar to the students (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 7). An example of cultural modeling at work is when African-American English dialogues or rap lyrics are used to help an African-American student make "explicit and public the tacit strategies they employ to reason through the problems

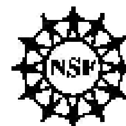


these popular texts pose" (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 8). These strategies, once realized, can then be related to and utilized for academic purposes.

*Critiques of racial identity theory.* Parham and Austin state that "recognizing the African American client's level of racial identity will substantially contribute to the counselor's understanding of the client, the ability to establish rapport with the client, and the ability to meet the client's career development needs" (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 152). According to Parham and Austin, people of a historically underserved or oppressed race will make vocational decisions based on race and environment (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 147). An example of this is when individuals choose careers traditionally associated with their racial group because of their ability to see themselves in that particular position (Parham & Austin, 1994, p. 147).

Some researchers have suggested that "career decisions are efforts to implement the [*sic*] self-concept" (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 174). Evans and Herr studied the association of self-concept, occupational aspirations and sense of mobility with social class to evaluate the effects of racial identity and perception of discrimination on the traditional career aspirations of African-American college students (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 181). They found that racial identity attitudes did not necessarily predict career aspirations and that Nigrescence is not related to the choice of a traditionally African-American career (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 181). There are a number of factors that could attribute to these findings. One is that African-Americans who have a positive Black identity may be choosing traditional careers based on need in their community (Evans & Herr, 1994, p. 182).

Helms and Piper argue that there are no consistent between-group differences on the basis of race, because vocational behavior is not biogenetically determined, and race is not an

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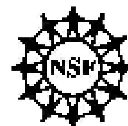
indicator of a person's biogenetic ability (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 125). Therefore, one cannot anticipate commonalities within different racial groups based solely on racial classification (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 125). Cultural socialization does not require that the cultural dimensions of one group be exclusive to any particular racial category (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 125). An example of this might be a European-American who is culturally socialized into African-American culture and exhibits the behaviors and aspects of that culture. Because one person can be socialized into the culture of another group, Helms and Piper assert that vocational behavior is not biogenetically determined through race, and thus race is an irrelevant factor in the study of career choice.

Helms and Piper state that "racial identity constructs are intended to pertain to the process of racial collective identity development and the nature of the (racial) environment in which that process occurs" (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 128). If there is no differential racial oppression in the environment, then there is no need for racial identity theory. However, a crucial element of the effects differential racial oppression has on an individual is the individual's perception that this oppression exists. Racial salience is a person's perception (correct or incorrect) of whether race significantly affects his/her employability (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 129). Wood investigated the relationship between racial salience and racial identity by attempting to predict the intended entry into race-traditional occupations and majors of African-American college students based on their racial identity attitudes. He found no meaningful relations (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 129).

To reiterate, Helms and Piper argue that one should study the relationship between cultural dimensions (rather than race) and vocational behavior in order to produce conclusions

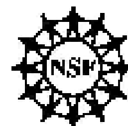


about vocational behavior that are more predictable (Helms & Piper, 1994, p. 125). This is a worthwhile pursuit, but there may be just as many variations in the cultural dimensions between the individuals of a group as there are in biological, geographical, and socio-political dimensions. If there is to be consistency in the study of vocational decisions, it may be necessary to take a more holistic approach and examine the history of interactions between targeted groups, their cultural dimensions, and also the racial identity of their individual members.

## Conclusion

This paper reviewed ethnicity's effect on the career choices of individuals through the lens of multiple racial identity theories. In general, these racial identity theories examine the process through which an individual undergoes change in their racial identity. They illuminate the complexity of variance in identity that individuals experience at different stages in this process. This complexity is difficult for researchers to encapsulate in a single framework without a certain amount of error. Another approach, an ecological systems approach, to the study of race and ethnicity in relation to career choice may prove more useful than racial identity theory. This approach covers a broader range of issues across socializing systems and activity settings than racial identity theory and attends to an individual's history of participation in activities, and the broader social, economic, and political conditions surrounding those activities (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 11). An ecological model may also be useful in tracking variation in culture over time as a dynamic process.

The difference between an ecological or racial identity model and others such as cultural learning styles is that the former attempt to understand processes, and the latter attempt to locate characteristics (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 20). Gutierrez & Rogoff (2003) state that "without

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situating social practices and the histories of participants in particular communities, approaches that attribute style to membership in a group make it difficult to account for variation and change in individuals to their practices" (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 20). For example, African Americans come from a number of different cultural traditions (e.g. African American, Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean, immigrants from various African countries, and others) (Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003, p. 12). And these different cultural pathways lead to different impacts on the way these people make career decisions. Another problem with racial identity theory lacks is that it does not consider individuals who are multiethnic. People are a product of their many different interactions with representatives of cultural, [multi-] racial, linguistic, academic, religious groups that all affect the traditions and behaviors a person acquires. Thus, the ecological perspective attempts to look at all of these influences (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, pp. 21-22). This ecological perspective offers a more useful paradigm for analysis than simply labeling a group with a trait, such as "visual" or "verbal" or even labeling an individual's level of membership to a racial group (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 22). A historical outlook that contextualizes the actions of an individual avoids assumptions that certain group traits are innate rather than the product of a vibrant and constantly changing history. And this context is needed in order to appropriately assess the needs of all groups to recruit, retain, and teach students in higher education.

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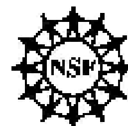


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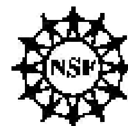

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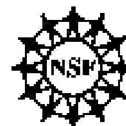

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