

Organizations, Schools, and Individual Success:
What's Racial Identity Got To Do with It?

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Why has our American society been so successful at building a democratic and economic force in the world, but continues to be divided by issues of race? If you are not sure why, you are not alone. It turns out that most people I talk with, brilliant, compassionate people, find this issue too emotionally charged to think about. The easy way out—to call attention to the fact that we have come a long way since the days of slavery and oppression—does not fully get at the issue. In fact, decades of research on racial identity development suggests that racial identity is an important factor in understanding current racial dynamics.

If you have not heard of racial identity development theory and research before just know that it is life changing. That's why I am committed to doing workshops on racial identity. Racial identity development is a process that often begins in youth and continues through one's lifetime. Many African Americans and people of color in general, understand this process intuitively and racial identity theory provides the language to understand and express this experience. Many Caucasians may not have considered their own racial identity development. The fact that we are all in potentially different stages of racial identity development is a potential source of emotional stress, performance failure, miscommunications, conflicts, and poor relations. Yet it's

important to note that those who hold a positive racial identity are more likely to be emotionally resilient, motivated, productive, and respectful and inclusive of others.



Racial identity theory is crucial to understanding much of human behavior and outcomes in a multiracial society like the USA. Racial identity theory addresses the degree to which perceptions of racial group membership is salient to one's identity, whether one feels positively or negatively about racial group membership, and how beliefs about the ways members of a racial group should act influence communication, intra-race relationships, cross race relationships, emotional well being, motivation, and performance.

One's racial identity can influence one's cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and social perceptions and interactions with the world, including work and school environments. Thus, an understanding of racial identity helps to explain cross racial perceptions, communications, and relationships. African Americans, for example, are a unique people with a unique cultural heritage that is a product of their African heritage and their socio-cultural and socio-historical experiences in the USA. To ignore that would obscure our understanding of cross race dynamics in corporations, schools, and society. The US is becoming increasingly racially/culturally diverse. The emphasis here is not on race per se, but on the social construction of race, such as one's racial identity, which has considerable relevance to all members of multi-racial

and multi-cultural societies. Thus, it is crucial that organization leaders, school administrators, and individuals understand the role racial identity plays in same race and cross racial relationships.

Racial Identity Models (simplified)

People of Color Identity Development (Cross' Theory)	White Racial Identity Development (Helms' Theory)	Biracial Identity Development (Poston's Theory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Pre-encounter *Encounter *Immersion/Emmersion *Internalization *Internalization/Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Contact *Disintegration *Reintegration *Psuedo-Independence *Autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Personal *Choice of Group *Enmeshment and denial *Appreciation of multiple identities *Integration of identities

People Interaction Model of Racial Identity (Adapted from Carter)

<u>Relationship</u>	<u>Situation:</u> Work :Manager- Employee Dyad School :Teacher- Student Dyad	<u>Outcome</u>
Parallel	Dyad share same dominant racial identity status	Maintains employee's/student's racial identity
Crossed (2 Types – see below)	Dyad hold opposite identity status	See below
Progressive	Manager/Teacher holds a higher racial identity status than the Employee/Student	Manager/Teacher has potential to enhance or support employee/student's racial identity
Regressive	Manager/Teacher holds a lower racial identity status than the Employee/Student	Employee's/Student's development is either hindered or employee/student becomes frustrated with or dismiss manger/teacher in terms of quality of racial interaction

Summary Point:

If you have not heard of racial identity development theory and research before just know that it is life changing. That's why Dr. Boatswain is committed to doing workshops on racial identity.

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