CHAPTER 2

The Invisible Whiteness of Being

Whiteness, White Supremacy, White Privilege, and Racism

DERALD WING SUE

IN OUR SOCIETY, Whiteness is a default standard; the background of the figure-ground analogy from which all other groups of color are compared, contrasted, and made visible (D. W. Sue, 2004; Wildman & Davis, 2002). From this color standard, racial/ethnic minorities are evaluated, judged, and often found to be lacking, inferior, deviant, or abnormal. Because Whiteness is considered to be normative and ideal, it automatically confers dominance on fair skinned people in our society (Jensen, 2002; McIntosh, 2002).

Whiteness would not be problematic if it weren't (a) predicated on White supremacy, (b) imposed overtly and covertly on People of Color, and (c) made invisible to those who benefit from its existence (D. W. Sue, 2003). Seen from this vantage point, Whiteness is an invisible veil that cloaks its racist deleterious effects through individuals, organizations, and society. The result is that White people are allowed to enjoy the benefits that accrue to them by virtue of their skin color. Thus, Whiteness, White supremacy, and White privilege are three interlocking forces that disguise racism so it may allow White people to oppress and harm persons of color while maintaining their individual and collective advantage and innocence.

Racism hides in the background of Whiteness and is protected through a conspiracy of silence that aids in making it invisible (D. W. Sue, 2005).

As long as it is an unacknowledged secret, it allows White people to accept the unearned advantages of their skin color while allowing them to deny responsibility for how it disadvantages other groups (African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans; Harris, 1993; Tatum, 2002). Because of its everyday occurrence and because its normative features are insidiously manifested in our institutions and culture, Whiteness becomes transparent when White people are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, average, or ideal (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). The result is that both White supremacy and racism become culturally conditioned into the lives of White people, albeit without their informed consent, and institutionalized in the very organizations that control their lives (Jones, 1997; Ridley, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF WHITENESS TO RACISM: A FOUR-STEP PROCESS

Early racial classifications and many social constructions of race have used physical characteristics to distinguish one subgroup from another (Jones, 1997; Krogman, 1945). Despite the lack of scientific support for the clear biological definition of race (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Rowe, 2005; Wang & S. Sue, 2005), people in this society continue to use it to differentiate between groups (African Americans, Asian Americans, White European Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans). Physical differences involving skin pigmentation, facial features (nasal index and lip form), head form, and hair texture are commonly used. Considered one of the most important societal dimensions of race, however, is skin color that can vary from very light to dark. Theoretically, being fair skinned or White has no positive or negative connotations. Whiteness is only problematic when it becomes associated with White supremacy and forcefully imposed on an unsuspecting populace through a process of socialization and social conditioning (Jones, 1997; Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993). The process by which Whiteness is transformed into White racism is diagrammed in Table 2.1.

TRANSFORMATION ONE—ASSOCIATION OF WHITENESS WITH WHITE SUPREMACY

Whiteness and White supremacy become inextricably linked to one another so that symbolic associations with fair skin color become elevated to superior status, and darker colors come to connote inferiority. The doctrine of White supremacy can operate at both a conscious and unconscious level. It rests on an interlocking set of beliefs and principles that justifies discrimination, segregation, and domination of People of Color (Feagin & Feagin, 1996; Welsing, 1991). The conscious manifestation of White racial superiority and minority inferiority are most likely to be directly voiced by White supremacists such as the Skinheads and

Table 2.1
From Whiteness to Racism

Whiteness

The constellation of physical features most characterized by fair or light skin color/tone. Other physical features may be considered ideal (associated with Western traits) such as blond hair, blue eyes, or elongated face. Whiteness, alone, conveys neither positive nor negative valence.

+

White Supremacy

A doctrine of White racial superiority and non-White inferiority that justifies domination and prejudicial treatment of minority groups. It strongly conveys positive qualities to Whiteness and negative qualities to non-White groups.

+

Power Imposition

The ability to define racial reality by imposing White supremacist ideology and beliefs on the general population (both Whites and People of Color).

via

Schooling and Education + Mass Media + Significant Others and Organizations
Three mechanisms used to convey the superiority of Whiteness and its associated correlates through a process of social conditioning.

yields

White Racism

The individual, institutional and cultural expression of the superiority of one group's cultural heritage over another and the power to impose and enforce that worldview upon the general populace.

Outcome

White Privilege (Advantage)	**Non-White Inferiority** (Disadvantage)
Unearned advantages and benefits that accrue to Whites by virtue of a system normed on the experiences, values, and perceptions of their group.	Unequal/unfair treatment that results to People of Color not from their own actions but based solely on the color of their skin or visible physical features.

Ku Klux Klan. Most White Americans in our society, however, would openly deny or denounce these conscious and overt expressions, but it is the unconscious and deeply embedded White supremacist notions in people that pose the greatest threat to persons of color (D. W. Sue, 2005).

TRANSFORMATION TWO—POWER TO IMPOSE A BIASED RACIAL REALITY

Whether intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, White supremacist notions are imposed on the general populace and help shape their racial reality or worldview (Hanna, Talley, & Guindon, 2000; D. W. Sue, 2003). The societal racial curriculum is based on White superiority and minority inferiority. The history of certain groups (White Western European groups) are glorified and celebrated while non-White groups are portrayed as inferior, primitive, and undesirable. Misinformation, distortions, and stereotyping of groups of color contribute to the inaccurate images that people are conditioned to believe. People are taught that African Americans are intellectually inferior, good athletes and musicians, dangerous, criminals, drug addicts, and impulsive; Asian Americans are passive, hard working, studious, disloyal, sneaky, model minorities, and lack leadership skills; Latino/Hispanic Americans are illegal aliens, carefree, irresponsible, poor, lazy farm workers, and welfare recipients; Native American/American Indians are savages, primitive, alcoholics, animalistic, uneducable, impulsive, and superstitious. Not only do these stereotypes restrict, oppress, and limit the opportunities of persons of color, but they are associated with intense emotional reactions that are equally damaging and dangerous. Certain groups are to be feared and avoided because they evoke feelings of revulsion, anxiety, disgust, and contamination.

TRANSFORMATION THREE—USING SOCIALIZATION MECHANISMS TO ENFORCE SOCIAL CONDITIONING

The mechanisms by which the racial curriculum is taught to the populace is through monocultural schooling, the mass media, and significant others (Jones, 1997; Ridley, 2005; D. W. Sue, 2003):

- *Monocultural schooling:* Multicultural education scholars and specialists have argued that changing the racial reality of people necessitates incorporating the accurate histories and cultures of People of Color not only into the study of Western civilization but also into the materials used for education, teaching and learning styles, the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators, and the school

campus culture (Banks, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). There is a strong suggestion that the content, materials used, and how information is imparted to students by teachers and administrators manifest Whiteness doctrines in the guise of educational truths. Thus, when students are taught falsehoods like Columbus discovered America, the internment of Japanese Americans was a national security issue (not racism), and the taking of land from Native Americans was manifest destiny, worldviews are shaped to reflect White racial superiority and non-White racial inferiority.

- *Mass media:* Media that includes radio, television, newspapers, film, and magazines dispense powerful images of race, racial beliefs, and race relations to the general public. Through its continual repetition of themes and messages about race, culture, and ethnicity, it plays a crucial role in creating the information base by which we learn about other groups in our society (Cortes, 2004). Unfortunately, media also reflects the larger biases of society, especially that of White supremacy. In one study (Children Now, 1998), children of all racial groups were more likely to associate positive qualities with White characters and negative ones with minority characters; Latino and Asian children are less likely to see themselves represented in characters; Whites usually play roles of boss, police officer, and doctor while Blacks play criminal or domestic servant roles. More important, media portrayals generally associate persons of color as not worthy of respect and as being dangerous, criminals, or less capable (D. W. Sue, 2003).
- *Peers and social groups:* Equally powerful as sources of information regarding the racial curriculum are peers, social groups, and organizations. The Boy Scouts of America and the U.S. military, for example, dispense their attitudes and beliefs about gays through their policies of exclusion and "don't ask, don't tell." Messages received from schools, places of employment, churches, and one's own family perpetuates racism. Insidious social conditioning can occur in families without even making overt derogatory statements about racial groups but through parental actions, as shown in the following example:

> It was a late summer afternoon. A group of white neighborhood mothers, obviously friends, had brought their 4- and 5-year-olds to the local McDonald's for a snack and to play on the swings and slides provided by the restaurant. They were all seated at a table watching their sons and daughters run about the play area. In one corner of the yard sat a small black child pushing a red truck along the grass. One of the white girls from the group approached the black boy and they started a conversation. During that instant, the mother of the girl exchanged quick

> glances with the other mothers who nodded knowingly. She quickly rose from the table, walked over to the two, spoke to her daughter, and gently pulled her away to join her previous playmates. Within minutes, however, the girl again approached the black boy and both began to play with the truck. At that point, all the mothers rose from the table and loudly exclaimed to their children, "It's time to go now!" (D. W. Sue, 2003, pp. 89–90)

TRANSFORMATION FOUR—RACISM THROUGH WHITENESS

Through the association of Whiteness with White supremacy and the power to impose racial realities on the general population, Whiteness becomes manifested in racism. In broad terms, racism is the individual, institutional, and cultural expression of the superiority of White Western cultural heritage over all non-White groups. Inherent in this definition is the power to impose and enforce that worldview on those in this society (Whites and non-Whites). There are two outcomes associated with White racism: (1) justification of unequal and unfair treatment to People of Color based solely on the color of their skin or visible physical features and (2) unearned advantages and benefits that accrue to Whites by virtue of their skin color. The former results in health care disparities, employment disparities, and educational disparities to the disadvantage of People of Color. In the latter case, the advantages because of fair skin color are referred to as White privilege.

INDIVIDUAL RACISM AND THE INVISIBILITY OF WHITENESS

The White couple had obviously returned from a formal function, as the man was dressed in a tuxedo and the woman in a long flowing evening gown. Both had checked into the hotel earlier that day and were returning from an evening out. It was 3:30 A.M. as they waited in the lobby for the elevator. When the elevator doors opened, both took a step forward, and then stopped. Inside, to the right stood a Black man in jeans holding what looked like a tool box. On seeing the Black man, the woman unconsciously placed her hand over the diamond necklace she was wearing. Without hesitation, the couple stepped back, and the White man said loudly to his companion, "Let's wait for our friends." The doors to the elevator closed, and the couple waited a few seconds before pushing the button to call for another car.

Incidents such as this occur frequently among well-intentioned White people who would never consciously give voice to the fears and biases they possess. A strong case can be made that these fears and biases are not even accessible on the conscious level to many White Americans (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). In this case, the White couple reacted in a way that communicated their stereotypes and preconceived notions of Black Americans (the Black man is a potential criminal and not to be trusted).

People of Color, everyday, are subjected to such biases, fears, and behaviors that have detrimental impact on them. White people who automatically cross the street when they see a group of Latino youngsters approach them; sales clerks who require a greater number of personal identification when a Black customer attempts to cash a check; the well-intentioned White school counselor who severely restricts the career choices of Asian American students by counseling them into the physical sciences (because "you people are good at that"); and police officers who stop Black motorists much more often than White motorists are examples of the operation of individual racism.

Elsewhere, I have made the assertion that no one born and raised in the United States is immune from inheriting the racial biases of their forebears (D. W. Sue, 2003). In other words, due to the socialization process outlined earlier, all people are exposed to a racial curriculum that imbues in them biases, prejudices, and misinformation related to race. Furthermore, if these racist components exist in everyone, well-intentioned persons may also engage in prejudicial behaviors consistent with their biases. It means that people may unknowingly stereotype groups different from them and engage in discrimination. While this statement is very difficult to prove, sufficient evidence exists to support the fact that an overwhelming number of White Americans possess racist attitudes and behaviors (Dovidio et al., 2002; Pettigrew, 1981; President's Initiative on Race, 1998).

If we define individual racism as any attitude or action whether intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, overt or covert that subordinates a person or group because of phenotypical traits most strongly manifested in skin color, and if Whiteness is considered the normative and superior standard by which such judgments are made, it becomes clear that most Whites cannot help but be tainted by racism. Note that the definition includes the words *intentional and unintentional, conscious and unconscious* and *overt and covert.* Deliberate, conscious, and overt racism is most characteristic of White supremacists. These are individuals who intentionally inflict harm knowingly on persons of color and they may even engage in overt hate crimes. Fortunately, few White people would fall into this category. Unfortunately, it is not an exaggeration to assert that most White people have engaged in unintentional and unconscious racism (Dovidio et al., 2002).

The masking of racism in Whiteness is aided through certain socialization processes where Whites are consciously taught the principles of democracy—inclusion, fairness, respect for the rights of all, and most

important, equality. The Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the U.S. Constitution are used to ingrain in people's conscious minds basic democratic principles that are reinforced in schools and in what governmental leaders consciously express (President's Initiative on Race, 1998). More subtle and less visible, however, are the metacommunications people receive that contradict democratic ideals and reinforce their beliefs in White superiority and minority inferiority. On the one hand, White Americans are taught to believe in democracy and most consciously experience themselves as moral and decent human beings. On the other hand, the subtle and unconscious socialization process that instills in them racial biases is invisible to their conscious psyche. To acknowledge that they have biases, prejudices, and have engaged in racial oppression (albeit unknowingly) violates their self-image and identity as good and moral persons (Ridley, 2005; D. W. Sue, 2005).

Herein lies the Herculean struggle that many White people must win if they are to become allies in the battle against the perpetuation of racism. If they are unwilling to explore their own Whiteness and racism, if they continue to deny that they have biases and prejudices, and if they continue to allow the status quo to be undisturbed, they knowingly or unknowingly have entered into a conspiracy of silence that protects the conditioned meaning of Whiteness (D. W. Sue, 2004). Furthermore, White privilege reinforces the avoidance of looking at how racism oppresses and harms People of Color because it seduces them with the benefits of being White. On one hand, racism systematically denies equal access and opportunities to People of Color and, on the other hand, it unfairly allows another group (Whites) to enjoy those opportunities and privileges (Ridley, 2005). The latter result is what is called "White privilege" (McIntosh, 2002). White privilege has been defined as:

> the unearned advantages and benefits that accrues to White folks by virtue of a system normed on the experiences, values, and perceptions of their group. White privilege automatically confers dominance to one group, while subordinating groups of color in a descending relational hierarchy; it owes its existence to White supremacy; it is premised on the mistaken notion of individual meritocracy and deservedness (e.g., hard work and family values) rather than favoritism; it is deeply embedded in the structural, systemic, and culture workings of U.S. society; and it operates within an invisible veil of unspoken and protected secrecy. (D. W. Sue, 2003, p. 137)

From this definition, it is clear that the seductive quality of White privilege keeps Whites feeling good about themselves and reinforces their self-esteem, identity, and existence. Further, it reinforces the belief that their achievements in life are the result of individual effort and the benefits (advantages) they receive are well deserved. It is harder for them to

entertain the notion that their advantages are unfairly obtained by virtue of skin color or that their achievements may be based more on favoritism rather than individual effort and that their self-esteem is linked to White supremacy. Allowing Whiteness to be invisible helps them deny that they benefit from the oppression of others and that they are not responsible for the racial inequities that exist in society. In essence, self-deception and living a false reality (illusion) are rewarded.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND THE INVISIBILITY OF WHITENESS

The White management team was considering two candidates for promotion to vice president in charge of production. John Chang and Paul Johnson both had MBA degrees and were well respected and liked by coworkers. Paul, however, was the more outgoing, sociable, and "take charge" in relating to people. During team meetings he appeared actively engaged, would not hesitate to express his thoughts and opinions, and seemed to love the limelight. John was seemingly more introspective, relatively quiet and shy in demeanor, and seemed uncomfortable being the center of attention. While the management team felt John to be exceptionally bright and capable, they believed he was not management material and lacked leadership potential. Some described him as inhibited and more a follower than leader. Using their performance appraisal standards, they indicated that the job called for someone who was assertive, forceful, and who could direct projects and delegate tasks. According to these standards, Paul Johnson was the obvious choice.

The decision to promote Paul Johnson was justified on a set of criteria that described what was desired from the vice president in charge of production and on a performance appraisal system that evaluated how the White and Asian American candidates performed on the work site. In essence, it could be argued that the evaluation and selection process were applied equally to both employees and the outcome was fair. If we look more closely at the criteria used for promotion and at the behaviors of both candidates, questions can be raised about the operation of potential systemic discrimination.

First, the behaviors of both candidates may be strongly influenced by cultural factors. Among many Asians and Asian Americans, subtlety and indirectness are highly prized forms of problem solving (S. Sue, D. W. Sue, Zane, & Wong, 1985). One of the dominant stereotypes of Asian Americans is that they make poor leaders, are passive and inhibited, do not relate well to people, and lack creativity in job performance (D. W. Sue & D. Sue, 2003). Such evaluative statements fail to acknowledge how culturally determined behaviors that differ from that valued in the wider society are given negative labels. Second, it's important for us to question whether the performance appraisal system is actually fair (i.e., it predicts

successful leadership and increased productivity). Would it make any difference in the evaluation of both candidates to discover that (a) leadership among Asian and Asian Americans may differ from those of White norms and (b) that the criteria used for promotion (e.g., assertiveness) did not predict leadership potential for the Asian American candidate? Among many Asian Americans, leadership is defined as working behind the scenes and building group consensus among team members to increase productivity (D. W. Sue & D. Sue, 2003). Would it make any difference to the management team to learn that John Chang's work team is the most productive one in the company and that members consider him to be central to their success? In this case, is the performance appraisal system of the company fair, or is it culture bound and thus reinforces a glass ceiling for Asian Americans who wish to rise to higher management positions? Can it be characterized as a form of institutional racism that remains hidden and embedded in company policy?

Institutional racism is any institutional policy, practice, and structure in governments, businesses, unions, schools, places of worship, courts, and law enforcement agencies that unfairly subordinate persons of color while allowing Whites to profit from such actions. Examples include housing patterns, segregated schools, discriminatory employment and promotion policies, racial profiling, inequities in health care, segregated churches, and educational curriculum that ignore/distort the history of minorities. Whiteness is systematically embedded in all institutional facets of our society (Lipsitz, 2002). It is often disguised in the form of equal treatment or standard operating procedures (SOPS) that are applied equally to everyone and thus, cannot be accused of being discriminatory (D. W. Sue, 2001).

For example, bank lending practices often consider the creditworthiness of home loans based on location. African Americans residing in Harlem who may wish to borrow against equity in their homes are less likely to obtain loans than a White person residing in New York's Midtown area. While the policy used to determine the size of a loan or if one will even be approved is the same for both parties, it inevitably discriminates against Blacks in Harlem. Yet, banking institutions may claim that their SOPS are applied equally to all groups and individuals, thus no racial discrimination occurs.

When the policies, procedures, laws, and structures of society impede equal access and opportunity or even create unfair disparities in our society against persons of color, we have clear evidence of institutional racism. School tracking systems that unfairly perpetuate inequities; educational testing that is normed and standardized on a White population resulting in culturally biased test instruments; hiring policies and practices that

utilize an "old boy's network"; biased curricula, textbooks, and materials that affirm the identity of one group while denigrating others; and inferior education based on the wealth of the school district all exemplify institutional racism. It takes great commitment and courage to attempt to change policies so firmly embedded in the SOPS of organizations and institutions. In many cases, change can only come about through political action and the law.

An example of such action was in the case of *Serrano v. Priest* (Keiter, 1971), where the California Supreme Court ruled that the quality of education for children could not depend on the wealth of a school district and that the method used in property taxation of communities and the formula used for distribution of educational dollars by California violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. The reasoning used by the court was that it unfairly discriminated against People of Color and the poor by denying them the right to a quality public education (Morales & Sheafor, 2004). The decision has implications far beyond California as most states in the nation continue to engage in identical racial practices. Likewise, is it possible that certain practices in our society also increase disparities in health care, access to mental health services, and basic human rights (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001)? If so, do they also not deny equal protection to those groups that are marginalized by policies and practices of our society?

Whiteness shields the operation of institutional racism by couching them in the language of equal treatment, standard operating procedures, and the equal application of criteria or policy to all groups regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and so forth. Unfortunately, the hidden dimensions of policies and practices arise from White normative standards that are quite transparent and invisible. When applied broadly, it has the effect of creating inequitable outcomes to the disadvantage of People of Color, preferential treatment for Whites, and what has been called "nonrandom victimization" (Ridley, 2005). What our society must realize is that equal treatment can be "discriminatory" (inequitable outcomes) and that differential treatment may not be preferential at all. People of Color may not be asking so much for equal treatment, but fair treatment; fair treatment dictates differential policies and practices consistent with the goals of social justice (equal access and opportunity).

In summary, it goes without saying that the existence of systemic racial barriers (policies and practices) often mirrors the nature of race relations in the United States. Higher status positions in organizations continue to be White dominated, while lower status positions are occupied by People of Color. Performance appraisal systems, management systems, chain of

command systems, communication systems, and so forth all mask hidden White standards that disadvantage certain groups and advantage others.

CULTURAL RACISM AND THE INVISIBILITY OF WHITENESS

The young Latino student stood in front of his classroom minutes before the school bell was to ring. He spoke rapidly to his brother in Spanish, as they both laughed and joked to one another. The White teacher came out of the classroom to shut the door and to begin her class. When she overhead the two speaking in Spanish, she approached them and admonished them to go to their classes. Then she bent over, and in a stern tone of voice stated: "If you people want to succeed in America, you must learn to speak in English. You will fail in school and life unless you learn good English and stop talking in Spanish. Besides, it's rude to speak a language others don't understand."

This reaction from the White teacher to hearing a language other than English spoken continues to occur in one form or another in our schools and in our society in general. One wonders why the teacher reacted so negatively to the students speaking Spanish and one wonders why hearing another language is so disturbing. After all, isn't being bilingual an asset in our society? Unfortunately, while the teacher may be expressing annoyance and individual bias toward another language, she is also manifesting cultural racism—the belief that one group's cultural heritage is superior to another. In this case, English is superior to Spanish.

The actors involved in the manifestations of Whiteness and White supremacy tend to be at three levels: (1) the individual level—dominant group members (White Americans) discriminating against a target group (persons of color); (2) the institutional level—structures, policies, and practices that unfairly treat persons of color; and (3) the cultural level—imposition of White European American cultural heritage on other groups while negating or destroying the cultural heritage of minority groups.

We have already discussed the first two manifestations, but it is the cultural level (like the earlier example) that provides the overarching umbrella of White racism that gives rise to the other two. Cultural racism has been defined in the following ways:

> Cultural racism comprises the cumulative effects of a racialized worldview, based on belief in essential racial differences that favor the dominant racial group over others. These effects are suffused throughout the culture via institutional structures, ideological beliefs, and personal everyday actions of people in the culture, and these effects are passed on from generation to generations. (Jones, 1997, p. 472)

> Cultural racism is the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one group's cultural heritage over another group's (arts, crafts, language, traditions, beliefs, and values) and its imposition on racial/ethnic minority groups. (D. W. Sue, 2003, p. 33)

These two definitions suggest that (a) cultural racism, from a White U.S. perspective, is self-perpetuating because White-supremacist notions are passed from generation to generation; (b) that cultural racism weaves a White worldview that attributes positive qualities to Whites and negative traits to People of Color; and (c) that this racial ideology is manifested in not only individuals but also institutions that affect their lives. These two definitions directly address the issue of ethnocentrism, which is characteristic of most societies where all groups tend to elevate their own ethnic heritage. It may be an overstatement, but it appears normal and natural that most groups express a preference for their own habits, values, and styles of life. The defining feature of cultural racism, however, is the power of one group to impose that worldview on another. In this case, power is the ability to act on the needs, desires, and beliefs of White Americans to control and define the existence of persons of color.

The distorted racial reality of Whiteness allows for the systematic mistreatment and victimization of persons of color in this society. It also allows White Americans to receive unearned benefits and privileges via White privilege. As discussed earlier, the racial reality of White America is a biased and bigoted one that ignores or distorts the history of People of Color, glorifies one group over another, and instills frightening and/or stereotypic racial images of minorities on the general populace (Guthrie, 1998; Jones, 1997). The United States is a schizophrenic society in that people have been taught that this nation was founded on basic democratic ideals of equality, justice, and inclusion. Why, we may ask, is racism such a problem in our nation? The answer lies in the fact that racism is also part of U.S. culture and probably always will be (Jones, 1997). We are continuously taught undemocratic principles and shameful values of cultural superiority and racist values, beliefs, and practices.

In some ways, cultural racism allows us to understand that everyone whether "red, yellow, black, or white" are victims of a vast socialization process that instills the biases and prejudices of society in us. Although it may be difficult for People of Color to accept, Whites are also victims. I think it safe to say that no one was born wanting to be a bigot or racist. As children, White Americans had no choice in the type of culture they were born into and they had minimal choice other than to take their place in the racial hierarchy that they occupy; that of the oppressor. For White Americans to realize that they have also been victimized in the

socialization process, however, does not excuse them from the responsibility to now take action against the unjust forces of racism.

MAKING THE "INVISIBLE" VISIBLE

If we are to overcome, or at least minimize the forces of racism, we must make Whiteness visible. As long as Whiteness remains invisible and is equated with normality and superiority, People of Color will continue to suffer from its oppressive qualities. The challenge before us is how to deconstruct Whiteness at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels. For example, when teachers admonish their Black students to leave their "cultural baggage" outside of the classroom, when Whites assert that they never owned slaves and should not be blamed for the actions of their ancestors, and when the "melting pot" is held up as an ideal, few may be able to see how the hidden forces of Whiteness have determined the reality of the actors involved in these three examples. In the first example, the teacher does not realize that he or she brings his or her Whiteness into the classroom everyday. As a result, it is the Whiteness standard unknowingly used by the teacher. In the second case, the statement may be true, but what Whites don't realize is that they still benefit from the past injustices of their forebears. In other words, the land they took from Native Americans and Japanese Americans, the vast fortunes earned from slavery, and the current socioeconomic structures of society are based on the inequities of the past. Whites are the ones who benefit from these arrangements. Last, the melting pot is a myth that promises unconditional acceptance once full assimilation and acculturation occur. For early White ethnic immigrants, this has proven to be somewhat of a reality. What is unseen, however, is that despite how Western or White a person of color becomes in attitudes and values, many doors in society will continue to be closed to him or her. The melting pot is a myth because it assumes (a) a receptive society for persons of color and (b) an equal status relationship between all groups. In that respect, it offers a catch-22 for People of Color. They are told that it is desirable to assimilate and acculturate, but, even when they do, they are denied full access to the benefits of society because they are not White.

Whiteness is very visible to many People of Color. Whiteness, however, continues to be primarily invisible to White Americans. The ultimate hope for change lies in having Whites (a) actively make "Whiteness" visible, (b) explore themselves as racial/cultural beings, (c) take responsibility for defining Whiteness in a nondefensive and nonracist manner, and (d) take antiracist actions aimed at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). To do this, however, White Americans will have to be willing to look at themselves honestly, to confront the truth about themselves and the world, and to liberate themselves from the invisible cultural conditioning of a racialized society.

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PART II

Racism in Mental Health Contexts