

# **Social Healing and the Ethnic Identity Development Process**

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## **Introduction**

This document provides a framework for reconciliation across race, class and culture by explaining how the ethnic identity development process can be used to not only bring social justice, but to also bring social healing. One of the most significant barriers to reconciliation and continued growth in God is often our prejudices toward the “tools” that other groups use in seeking God. We all have prejudices about many things (prejudice is defined as a judgment or opinion formed beforehand without knowledge of the facts). For example, we may not know what is meant by “ethnic identity development,” but we may unknowingly have a prejudice against it. As a White male, several years ago when I first heard the term “ethnic identity development,” my first response was to think it must be something that is only helpful to those who come from a minority racial background. Someone else may hear the term “inner-healing” and think that it is some psychological mumbo-jumbo for White yuppies. To have a helpful conversation about reconciliation, it will be helpful to put these types of judgments on hold. In writing on issues of race and reconciliation, it is extremely difficult to use language that does not hit on prejudices or offend someone, and it is even more difficult to use specific examples while avoiding stereotypes. While I have done my best to avoid these issues, please forgive any failure on my part in presentation, and understand that I am also a work in progress.

While I have found reading about ethnic identity development to be extremely helpful, the majority of my learning in this area has been through experience. Being a White male, my own experience in ethnic identity development has been primarily from a majority culture perspective in regards to race. However, my own experience of growing up in an inner-city, poor White environment has complicated my own process because it has given me a non-majority economic class background. In addition, a Black cultural influence was pervasive in my surrounding growing up. Also, having lived in the Black church community for much of my life, I have been able to view “from the outside” the experience of those coming from a minority racial background (of course, this does not mean that I know what that experience feels like for someone going through it).

Just to provide more background on my own perspective, much of my process in my own ethnic identity development has happened through being mentored by Angel Halstead at Bruce Wall Ministries, who has helped me grow in my own cultural identity and to better understand the African American experience in this process. In addition, much of my own background in inner-healing has been through the Cambridge Vineyard, the Living Waters inner-healing program, Christian counseling and being mentored by Christopher Greco. Many people from a variety of cultural backgrounds have helped provide input specifically into this document. I would specifically like to thank Liza Adriana Cagua, Christopher Greco, Dr. Nick Rowe and Mako Nagasawa for their feedback on this document. This is not to say that all of these individuals fully agree with everything in this document, but rather to make the point that these ideas were not developed in a vacuum. In fact, almost all of the key insights in this document were taught to me by someone else experientially rather than learned from a book, although books on ethnic identity development have been helpful in providing language to describe the process. Having said that, I fully recognize that even this spread of perspectives cannot adequately capture the diversity of experience and perception that different groups and individuals have in this process.

## The Social Healing Process

### Overview of Social Healing and Ethnic Identity Development

In general, those coming from the majority culture in the US (White middle class) tend to use tools in seeking God that use an individual framework (inner-healing is just one example), largely because of the majority culture's focus on the individual. Because of this focus, it is common for these individuals not to realize the value that more group-focused tools bring in seeking God. The ethnic identity development process is one group-focused approach that has similarities to an individual's inner-healing process. An *inner-healing* process of personal development involves some separation from the family where the individual can be healed from the wounds of their family through forgiveness, then evaluate and correct for broken tendencies inherited by their family, and then reintegrate the strengths from their family and upbringing. Similarly, the *ethnic identity development process* involves some separation from the majority culture in society so that individuals can be healed from the wounds caused by society, correct for broken tendencies in their own culture, and then reintegrate the strengths from their culture of origin and other cultures. While many Christians coming from a minority cultural background may not use the term "ethnic identity development", they still invest in developing their ethnic identity through teaching on ethnic heritage (i.e. Black History Month), attending ethnic churches and small groups, valuing positive role models from their racial/ethnic group and other ways of encouraging a positive ethnic or racial identity as a part of one's spiritual growth.

While the inner-healing process provides a framework primarily focused on personal growth issues related to the family, the ethnic identity process provides a framework focused primarily on healing the brokenness we inherit from culture and society. Obviously these two areas of family and culture are closely interrelated, so in addressing these interrelated issues, it is helpful to use tools that provide both an individual and group framework. Social healing is an attempt to combine the strengths from both individual and group frameworks of seeking God. *Social healing* is defined as going through this process of healing and integration of our own and other cultures in a way that we grow more fully into who God made us to be and find healing for both personal and cultural brokenness.

For those who are familiar with the term, "ethnic identity development," this document uses the term "social healing" as being almost synonymous with that term, the difference being that social healing includes not only race (i.e. White) and ethnicity (i.e. German) but would also include class and culture (i.e. White, male, college-educated with roots coming from a background which includes low-income, inner-city, Midwestern United States and a German/Finnish family line, etc.). In other words, social healing is a group identity development process involving race, class, ethnicity and culture. For those interested in finding out more about ethnic identity development, one of the best books explaining the ethnic identity development process from a secular psychological perspective is *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Tatum. Probably the most thorough coverage of this topic is in the book *Black and White Racial Identity* by Janet Helms, which provides an extensive academic summary on how various authors have characterized the racial/ethnic identity development process.

## **Stages of the Social Healing Process**

The following provides a summary of a framework for this social healing process (or the ethnic identity development process). For each stage, the “Minority Response” is used to denote the response of individuals who come from a cultural background that could not roughly be described as the “majority culture,” which could be characterized in the US as White middle class suburban culture. The “Majority Response” is used to indicate the response of those individuals coming from the majority culture (regardless of race—meaning a person of color can also have a majority response due to high assimilation into the majority culture, for example). Because these categories are not clear-cut, and because there is much diversity in the combinations of cultural backgrounds, many individuals will find themselves needing to go through the process from both the minority and majority perspectives.

**Stage 1: Unawareness.** Individuals at this stage do not yet recognize that they have an ethnic identity or culture.

### **Minority Experience in the Unawareness Stage**

*Possible example: An example might be a young Asian American child who has not yet recognized that she is of a different race from her White friends.*

For minority culture individuals, this phase is the time before they become aware of their race or ethnicity. For individuals of a minority race, this stage is likely to end in early childhood.

### **Majority Experience in the Unawareness Stage**

*Possible example: A White individual who believes, “I don’t have a culture. I’m just American. I’m color blind.” and does not recognize that everyone has a culture that they are coming from.*

In this phase individuals do not recognize their own cultural background, which can often lead them to be unknowingly ethnocentric. **Ethnocentrism** is the tendency of a person who, being brought up in one culture and having never significantly experienced a different culture, believes that their way of doing things is the right way.

**Stage 2: Awareness.** In the awareness stage, individuals recognize that they have a racial, ethnic and cultural identity. Individuals of a minority race will experience varying levels of racism in this phase although they may not always be consciously aware of it. In this stage, both minority and majority culture individuals will become more consciously aware of racism primarily on an intellectual level, but will not experience the emotional processing needed to heal its effects.

### **Minority Experience in the Awareness Stage**

*Example: A Latino teenager goes to a high school that is predominately White and experiences acts of overt racism and the more covert effects of others not being interested in making friends with him. This might cause him to feel ashamed of his ethnic identity and to try to assimilate into another identity by attempting to act “White” so that he can fit in.*

Those whose cultural background is not the majority culture of society will inevitably encounter this stage to varying degrees depending on how much of their upbringing is sheltered within their own culture. For many individuals of a minority race, this phase results in an enormous amount of wounding and shame that is the result of both overt and covert racism. Individuals experiencing significant wounding and racism at this level often will later

eagerly embrace stage 3, the immersion stage, where they re-immense themselves in their culture of origin, but will have a very difficult time moving beyond that phase. Individuals that do not experience as much racism and wounding in the awareness phase have a much higher risk of staying “stuck” in this phase because they will not have as strong of a need for the healing that the immersion process brings. In general the primary issue of individuals in this stage is that they are not reconciled with their own culture.

Many individuals of a minority race or culture who become Christians may also get stuck at this phase if they come from a family that is either not Christian or if their family itself is very “toxic” or “unhealthy.” For example, an Asian American individual may become a Christian as a teenager, and since his parents are not Christian and his church is a majority culture church, it will be difficult for him to sort out which parts of his cultural heritage are Godly and which are not. This may cause him to get stuck in this phase, rejecting most of his cultural heritage because he associates most of his cultural heritage with the toxic, un-Christian attitudes of his family. His Christian growth is essentially distorted by looking through the lens of the majority culture. This is abusive and wounding when it results in cultural strengths from God being rejected or in adopting cultural brokenness of the majority culture. For example, someone may come from a culture with very strong family values, much of which could be viewed as a Godly heritage, but American culture may devalue this heritage by emphasizing independence to the extent that it becomes isolating.

### **Majority Experience in the Awareness Stage**

*Example: A White college student takes a college class on race (or it could be a short-term missions trip) and is in a setting where he is a minority for a short time because he is the only White male in the class. He is for the first time able to glimpse a part of what the experience of coming from a minority culture might be like. From this experience his first response is to develop strong beliefs about the evils of racism and feel a nagging guilt of being from the majority culture. After a period of time, the strength of his beliefs might subside and his guilt may lessen, but there is always a nagging feeling that “I should be doing something.” Without a heart-level transformation he is not able to act on that knowledge, and feels guilty without taking any action.*

Majority culture individuals enter the awareness phase usually through an **encounter experience**. An encounter experience may be an encounter where the individual has a short experience of being a minority through a short-term or medium-term missions project (foreign or urban). An encounter experience may also involve being exposed to teaching that reveals the minority perspective or being in a college environment where the majority cultural views are challenged. Majority culture individuals encountering this phase will often be very surprised how different the world looks when they are in an environment that is no longer the majority culture. Individuals go through a process of removing “cultural blind spots” as they find that values and assumptions they just took for granted as “normal” or “right” were actually just cultural assumptions. Many individuals encounter this phase on a head-level in college where the focus is almost entirely academic and intellectual.

Most Christians who encounter this stage may get stuck here for a variety of reasons. If this awareness phase happens in a secular environment, some Christians will reject many of the lessons learned in this phase because key elements may be counter to the Christian faith, such as being guilt-based or having no role for forgiveness. After becoming aware of the injustices in society, some individuals may even consciously or unconsciously conclude that the injustices experienced by minority groups are “their own fault.” Often this is because majority

culture has a strong focus on individual choice and does not recognize social or structural reasons perpetuating injustice (the book *Divided by Faith* provides a good perspective on these issues). Even more important is that many majority individuals do not realize how their personal choices can perpetuate injustice, so they feel that their only responsibility is to avoid committing personal acts of intentional racism. Even for those who believe that they should act to address social injustice, they still must follow through in the immersion phase. The primary reason most individuals get stuck in the awareness phase is that their exposures to a separate environment are for very limited time periods (like short-term missions projects), and they are unable to immerse themselves in deep relationships in another culture for a longer term (which is the definition of entering stage 3).

Generally individuals at this stage will feel varying levels of guilt related to their race and different responses to that guilt. Individuals who have a good experience in their encounter experience will embrace this guilt on a head-level and will often try to persuade others of their enlightened view of race while not really acting on their beliefs themselves or experiencing heart-level change. Individuals who do not have a positive encounter experience will usually later close off to this guilt with either anger or denial of validity of any guilt. Regardless of their experience, both groups will often get stuck at this level because although they have *processed their ethnocentrism on a head-level*, they have not had the longevity of an immersion process (stage 3) to fully address heart-level issues. While both groups may get stuck at this level, individuals who have a bad experience and wounding in stage 2 awareness in particular are likely to need some healing from this before they will be able to move on to stage 3 immersion. In addition, it is common for individuals to enter stage 3 immersion and experience significant wounding in that stage, which causes them to return to stage 2 awareness with significant bitterness that needs to be healed before they can continue growth.

**Stage 3: Immersion.** In this stage individuals immerse themselves into a culture that is a minority group within the larger society. This is defined by being in deep relationships with minority culture individuals where the minority cultural perspective is shared and is usually dominant. The goal of this phase is to integrate the strengths of that minority group, while being healed from the brokenness of the majority culture. For minority culture individuals, they already are likely to live much of their life in the majority culture, so immersion allows them to reengage with their own culture more deeply. Because much of the larger society is made up of majority culture, for majority culture individuals, immersion enables them to be in a minority culture environment both to integrate the strengths of that culture and to better understand the perspective that minority culture individuals may have.

### **Minority Experience in the Immersion Stage**

*Example: An African American teenager entering college after going to an almost all White high-school in the suburbs, may experience part of herself in a new way when she joins a Black Student Union and the Black Campus Fellowship. She gains an understanding that as a child she was “very Black” culturally, but in high school she became ashamed of that and hid parts of herself and her culture. Among her Christian Black friends in college, she is able to be more open than she has ever been before. For the first time she encounters many people that when she talks about her experiences of racism, they do not deny them, but they affirm them and share their own similar experiences. She finds that sharing these things brings significant healing of past shame and allows her to reclaim parts of her own personality and culture that she has often hidden. She is surprised at how angry she gets at some of her White classmates when they unknowingly shame her for her culture in the same ways that she was shamed in the past. Because of these difficulties, now almost all of her friends are Black. She understands that from her Christian beliefs that she should forgive the past racism, but no matter how hard she tries she still*

*knows that from her extreme anger and guardedness that has not been able to forgive. A more popular (and somewhat extreme) example might be Malcolm X earlier in life (later in life he took on more of a stage 4 perspective).*

In this phase, individuals immerse themselves in their own culture to reclaim the parts of themselves and their Godly cultural heritage that was lost. For individuals experiencing intense racism, this stage is essential for reclaiming their self-image as being created by God in His image. In general this involves largely detaching from the larger society because of pervasive racism that exists. For Christians, this generally involves seeking growth and healing in an ethnic church or small group. The basic problem is that without pursuing Jesus and personal growth within an ethnically-focused group, it is very difficult to effectively sort out which elements of their heritage should be rejected and which need to be embraced.

*It is important to recognize that immersion is an essential step in the forgiveness process. This is because to forgive, we must first be able to name the wrongs and uncover anger, and it is helpful to have those wrongs validated by others. This step is best done in a group with others of a similar cultural background who can quickly see, acknowledge and understand the pain experienced through injustice. Individuals in this phase may often seem angry, which can be threatening to those from the majority culture that press “buttons” that may generate a strong response. In this phase, often if there is not some separation between the minority cultural group and individuals of the majority culture (who are in phase 1 or 2), the result is that individuals in the minority cultural group will get re-wounded by those from the majority culture. For an individual to share their deepest areas of wounding from racism and injustice, there needs to be an environment where it is safe to do so. Often, this involves having a group that is ethnically-focused such as an ethnic church or small group.*

Many majority culture Christians will judge this group as being separatists because they fail to recognize that this is an essential step in the forgiveness process. Majority culture individuals who may judge others for being separatists often do not realize their own separatist tendencies. Those coming from the majority culture have the privilege of being able to choose whether to experience parts of life as a minority, and because of the pain involved in immersion most choose not to be in a minority culture. This could be viewed as a choice to be separatist by choosing to live in their majority culture. Many majority culture Christians fail to see that for them choosing not to join a church or community where they would be a minority is in many ways the same choice that those from minority groups make when they choose ethnic churches. In other words, a White person choosing not to join a Black church is similar to a Black person choosing not to join a White church, except that for the Black individual, the church may be one of their only contexts where they are not a minority. It is important to recognize that minority culture Christians who wish to engage with the larger society must do so in a culture primarily in a culture different from their own. It is for this reason that ethnically focused churches and small groups not only serve as an important step in the forgiveness process, but they also may serve as the only refuge where minority individuals can live in an environment where their own culture is dominant.

It is also possible to encounter immersion in a multiethnic group if the group culture has a minority perspective, which will usually mean being made up of people in stage 3 or 4 of their ethnic identity development. While multiethnic groups have the disadvantage of still having

somewhat different cultural perspectives within the group, they have the advantage of being able to develop healthy cross-cultural relationships in ways that can be healing and help the forgiveness process to transition into stage 4.

### **Majority Experience in the Immersion Stage**

*Example: A White Christian woman joins an almost all Black church initially because she felt God was calling her to serve the African American community, and she had been taught that the most effective ministry approach is to be under indigenous leadership. After some fairly painful experiences, she learns that maybe God has her there not so much to “minister” as to learn and grow. While she still is actively involved in addressing racism and other forms of social injustice, much of her own effort is in understanding and healing her own racist tendencies. She starts to try to “act Black,” and she takes pride in the fact that some of her Black friends call her an “honorary African American.” She finds herself learning to embrace her own “class roots” of growing up in a poor White community, and because of that often more strongly identifies with being Black than she does with being White. She may significantly overwork herself and always feel like she is not doing enough. When she offends her Black friends, and they get angry at her, she always accepts fault even if in some cases she feels like she experienced injustice. She will always let it slide because she feels “I owe them something I can never repay because I am White.” She knows that she has an unhealthy level of guilt, but does not seem to be able to move beyond that.*

Individuals in this phase will intentionally seek out living, working or life situations where they can have many deep relationships where they are in a minority culture. This allows individuals to *heal heart-level issues of their own ethnocentrism*. One key aspect for this stage to be most effective is that the individual needs to be in a power dynamic either as a peer or where the minority group holds most of the power. This stage is most often only encountered by Christians who work in either the urban or foreign “missions field.” This is because very few individuals from a majority culture will choose to live in a minority culture because it can be a challenging and painful transition. Individuals in this stage will often have disproportionate guilt and will often appease the minority group rather than challenge it even when the challenges are legitimate.

It is worth stating that an individual may be of one race and be raised in a different culture from their early childhood. An example might be a third generation Asian American who was raised in an almost all-White environment and whose family was primarily majority culture because her grandparents assimilated into White culture. For these individuals immersion within their racial group may not be as essential for their personal growth to get in touch with “who they are.” In fact, for these individuals immersion could involve much wounding from their own racial group for failing to understand that an individual’s cultural upbringing (and who they really are inside) may not match their race. These individuals will often receive challenges from individuals in their own cultural group who wrongly assume they are stuck in Stage 1 or 2 since they do not embrace their racial heritage. So while immersion for these individuals may not be helpful for “getting in touch with who they are,” it may be helpful for getting in touch with how they are perceived by others. For example, while an individual may not strongly “feel” Asian-American, others will often perceive them that way based on their race. Because of this, these individuals will experience much of the same racism that others of their race experience. It is for this reason of healing the effects of racism that it is helpful for these individuals to still embrace the immersion process. Unfortunately few of these individuals pursue this path because the criticisms that they feel within their own race can be an overwhelming barrier.

**Stage 4: Cultural Transcendence.** In this phase, the individual will have a solid ethnic identity from their own heritage, but will also transcend their culture to work against oppression of all kinds. Individuals in this stage can identify with both the oppressed and the oppressor and will appropriately challenge all forms of injustice including oppression across race, class, ethnicity, nationality and culture. Individuals in this stage will defy categorization by building on their own cultural heritage while learning to adopt the strengths of other cultural groups.

#### **Minority Experience in the Cultural Transcendence Stage**

*Example. An African American man still strongly identifies with his African American heritage, but has found significant release from past anger and bitterness caused by the effects of racism. He still attends a Black church, but is actively working to reach out to people of other racial backgrounds. When he encounters racism or injustice he will continue to take a stand, but does not react with such strong anger as he has in the past, and when he does feel this anger, he has learned to direct it constructively. He has integrated both his own cultural heritage, but also strengths from other cultures and is not afraid to use tools and methods of following Jesus from those cultures. Many other African Americans in his church often say that they cannot “figure him out” because he seems like he is “really Black,” but every now and then he surprises his Black friends by standing up for White individuals in situations they do not agree with and he often seems too focused on racial reconciliation. Some of his more radical Black friends may call him an “Uncle Tom” and accuse him of not being “really Black.” At times he may feel unable to fully fit in with either community, but understands that this is a part of his calling as a bridge-builder. A more popular example is Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Individuals at this stage are secure in their own ethnic identity, and intentionally choose to reengage in deep relationships with healthy individuals of the majority cultural group. This allows them to integrate the strengths of that group and to continue the forgiveness process. As they are healed, they will be able to extend more grace and not continually show a disproportional response of anger to racial offences. They will seek out more relationships with people from other cultures while unapologetically embracing their own culture.

Individuals who are in this stage are often wrongfully accused of being in stage 2 (usually by those in stage 3). This is because these individuals are able to understand and challenge both minority and majority cultural views. When they side with the majority culture, it may seem to some that they are still in stage 2 because they do not always side with the opinion of their own minority group. Two good examples of this are Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X later in life after he had been through a forgiveness process. Because of this misperception, individuals in this stage who continue to attend an ethnically focused church within their own ethnic group may experience some abuse within their own ethnic group.

#### **Majority Experience in the Cultural Transcendence Stage**

*Example. A White woman who spent several years working in an African American ministry may find herself re-engaging with the White community after going through a period with very few White friends. She still spends much of her life in an African American context, because that is what she feels God has called her to, but she no longer tries to “act Black” to fit in. She recognizes her cultural limitations, but also understands that God has called her to serve as a “bridge-builder” between White and Black communities. Rather than putting all of her energy into directly serving those experiencing racism and other forms of injustice, she also finds herself putting more of her energy in bringing healing to broken cultural tendencies in the majority culture that cause injustice. She has integrated both the strengths of her own cultural heritage as well as the strengths she learned from living in a Black community, and she is comfortable using methods and tools of following Jesus from both communities. She no longer feels that she needs to apologize to every person of color just because she is White. Neither Black nor White individuals can “figure her out.” To the Black community she seems like a White person who “gets it” on being able to see racial issues, but she will surprise them by standing out against specific cases of injustice experienced by White individuals. To the White community, she seems “healthy” but she can often get angry*

when they do not respond to the injustice that exists. Because of this, she often will feel unable to fully fit in with either community, but understands that this is a part of her calling as a bridge-builder.

Individuals at this stage will have integrated the strengths of a minority group and will be re-integrating the strengths of their own majority culture while continuing the forgiveness process. As they are healed, this group will no longer feel guilt for past cultural wrongs either caused by themselves or by the majority group. This group will also extend greater grace to those from minority cultures that are angry from past cultural abuse, but they will gently stand against all forms of oppression. Individuals at this phase will often be accused of being racists (often by those in stage 3) when they stand up against injustice against majority culture individuals or if they stand secure in their own ethnic identity.

**Table 1. Summary of the Ethnic Identity Development Process**

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Stage 1. Unawareness</b>	Unaware of racial and cultural identity.	Become aware of racial/cultural identity	Minority: Very young black child Majority: "I don't have a culture"
<b>Stage 2. Awareness</b>	Growing awareness of race, culture and racism, but most processing is on a head-level	Become aware of racism and other forms of social injustice to provide basis for entering immersion	Minority: A Latino teen trying to act White Majority: Intellectual liberal
<b>Stage 3. Immersion</b>	Immersion and identification with minority culture	Process on an emotional level and heal the effects of racism and social brokenness through action, relationships and forgiveness	Minority: Malcolm X Majority: Guilt-filled White woman in a Black church
<b>Stage 4. Transcendence</b>	Secure, consistent racial/ cultural identity while integrating strengths from other cultures	Continue reconciliation by addressing social injustice, bringing social healing and addressing personal cultural brokenness	Minority: Martin Luther King, Jr. Majority: Healthy White social activist

## **Racism, Personal Growth and Social Healing**

It is worth commenting more about racism. A common definition used for *racism* is an **injustice that involves both prejudice and power**. This definition is helpful in that it recognizes that people of all racial backgrounds will have prejudices, but those prejudices are especially damaging when the person who holds them is in a position of power. Largely because of past injustices, much of the power in American society is held by White individuals, which creates much more potential for racism from White individuals. For example, if a Latino employee has a prejudice against his White boss and gets angry, he may vent his rage at his boss, but if his White boss gets angry at him because of a prejudice, then he has the power to fire the Latino individual (which would be racism).

There are three primary forms of racism: personal, institutional and cultural. Majority culture individuals most often are familiar with *overt personal racism*, like someone saying a racial slur or individual hate crimes. Even the term "prejudice" is often interpreted as conscious attitudes, but it can also include unconscious, heart-level feelings of prejudice towards groups of people. Psychology calls these heart-level prejudices "transferences" because we "transfer" our feelings that we have about one person or a group onto another person, such as feeling anger or fear toward a particular racial group, which may unconsciously influence our actions. An example of *institutional racism* might include racial profiling done by police officers, where Black individuals may be disproportionately pulled over in their car for no offense other than "driving while Black." Another example is that Black men will often experience discrimination in the job market, not only for overt racist reasons but also because of more unconscious fears that many managers have about hiring an "angry minority." The book, *Divided by Faith* (by Emerson and Smith) reveals many of these institutional racist tendencies both within churches and the larger society. *Cultural racism* is imposing one group's culturally relative values onto another group.

This can be done by an individual who has ethnocentric tendencies or by a group that assimilates away Godly cultural heritage from other groups and individuals. These different forms of racism all could be viewed as a “generational curse” that gets passed down between generations by our families and society as part of the historical legacy of racism.

This definition of racism involving prejudice plus power is often hard for majority culture individuals to accept, but it is a helpful definition to use because it emphasizes that the injustice caused by prejudice is magnified by the power dynamic. A Black individual may have prejudice against a White individual that causes them to act unjustly toward that person, but unless the Black individual is in a position of power over the White individual, the injustice is prejudice rather than racism. This framework has caused many secular authorities to argue that there is no such thing as “reverse racism” and only White people can be racists. However the framework presented here is that *reverse racism* can happen when majority culture individuals experience prejudice in a setting where the power structure over them is dominated by the minority culture. It is important to note that most often reverse racism is on a personal level, because there are not as many environments that create opportunities for institutional or cultural reverse racism since most often the majority culture group holds the power.

The danger in legitimizing the idea of reverse racism is that when any racial conflict comes up the majority culture individual will conclude that it was the result of reverse racism. The problem with this is that very often majority culture individuals will have blind spots where they commit a significant offense without knowing it, and will never learn the reasons why others were offended if they conclude that it was just the result of reverse racism. For the most part, those coming from a majority culture who are just beginning their ethnic identity development (stage 1 or 2) cannot discern whether someone being offended and getting “too angry” is the result of reverse racism or the result of the majority culture individual’s own blind spot. For example, a White individual might tell her Latina friend that her parents are “messed up” because of their concern for her and that her closeness with her family is unhealthy. If the Latina individual gets really angry at this comment, the White individual might conclude that her anger is the result of reverse racism, whereas in reality, the comment was actually the result of “blind spots” (ignorance of the Latina’s life, family and cultural experience). The level of anger may have been proportionate to the offence and clearly not a case of personal racism of disproportionate anger, nor a case of trying to impose Latino culture on the White person.

**Table 2. Responses to Cultural Conflict**

	<b>Majority Culture</b>	<b>Minority Culture</b>
<b>Stage 1. Unawareness</b>	<b>Tendency:</b> accuse other side of reverse racism while failing to acknowledge any part in offence. <b>Growth:</b> avoid reverse racism defense and acknowledge racial differences and racism.	<b>Tendency:</b> does not recognize that offence is a racial offence. <b>Growth:</b> acknowledge racial differences and racism.
<b>Stage 2. Awareness</b>	<b>Tendency:</b> acknowledge conflict is from a cultural difference, but still accuse others of reverse racism <b>Growth:</b> avoid reverse racism defense and understand and challenge institutional and heart-level racism.	<b>Tendency:</b> will conform and accept most racism without recognizing or challenging it. <b>Growth:</b> acknowledge and racism and heart-level wounds caused by it.
<b>Stage 3. Immersion</b>	<b>Tendency:</b> take blame for nearly all racial conflict, and will openly confront others of racism. <b>Growth:</b> to root out one’s own racism and begin to receive forgiveness for one’s racism and acknowledge reverse racism harming one’s self.	<b>Tendency:</b> guarded response to any racial offense, will not admit reverse racism, desire to surround one’s self with symbols of minority ethnic community. <b>Growth:</b> name and forgive racial offenses and acknowledge all forms of oppression.
<b>Stage 4. Transcendence</b>	<b>Tendency:</b> will challenge all forms of oppression based at a level appropriate to the situation. <b>Growth:</b> learn to appropriately challenge all forms of oppression	<b>Tendency:</b> will challenge all forms of oppression based at a level appropriate to the situation. <b>Growth:</b> learn to appropriately challenge all forms of oppression

It is helpful to understand the tendencies that individuals have in reacting to cultural conflict depend on the stage they are experiencing in their ethnic identity development process. The table above summarizes the different responses and the step of growth in the social healing process that individuals can take in their understanding of racism to get to the next step.

It is worth stating that the ethnic identity development process is not entirely a linear process. An individual may be primarily embracing their ethnic identity in stage 3 in immersion, while also doing work on stage 4 forgiveness, while still often fighting the shame that comes from stage 2. Another example might be an adult who may be primarily in stage 4, but encounters racial discrimination in the real estate market or the workplace, and may experience stage 3 again. In fact, many individuals will have compartmentalized (non-integrated) aspects of their life where they will live in different stages. For example, many individuals may be in stage 3 when they are with their family, but in stage 2 when they are in their church or at work, as mentioned in one of the examples. It is helpful to view it as a progressive process in that individuals will have the majority of their focus in a particular stage, and as the “stage of focus” changes to later stages the individual is experiencing growth. **As an individual experiences more of their life in the later stages of the ethnic identity development process they are experiencing personal growth.**

It is also worth stating that some majority culture Christians (regardless of race) will have at least some parts of themselves where they will need to be integrated through the minority process. This is because in the process of becoming a Christian and being transformed, almost everyone will lose parts of their culture which were Godly and will later need to be reclaimed.

For most people this integrating process represents a pendulum where we may go from one extreme to another early in the healing process depending on the environment we are in, but later the variations between the “two sides” become much less until we are able to be consistent in who we are in all environments. For example, a new Christian in a college fellowship might be very “Christian” among their college friends, but still “party” and live out her previous lifestyle when with her old friends from high school. As she grows, she finds herself bringing much more of the healthy aspects of her “old self” with her Christian friends, and does not feel the need to hide her Christian beliefs and behaviors from her non-Christian friends. For those coming from the majority culture, understanding this integration in terms of an ethnic identity process is helpful to be able to have a better understanding of the process that minority culture individuals go through. This is not to say that majority culture individuals can know what it feels like to have lived as an individual of a minority race in the US, but it does provide a glimpse of the depth of pain that most individuals of a minority race experience.

The overwhelming tendency for people of all backgrounds is to first focus on the parts of themselves that are the minority group where they have been hurt. Someone who is White from a low socioeconomic status or with a strong White ethnic group heritage (i.e. Irish or Italian) may first relate to how their group has been oppressed, but not be willing to embrace their “White” side which has oppressed others in even more significant ways and still confers privilege. A middle class or upper class individual of a minority racial group may want to embrace the ways that they have experienced racism, but it will be much more difficult to embrace how they may have participated in classism either within their own racial group or across race. **Because of this, it is important for individuals to work to transcend their culture across race, class and ethnicity.** This is not to say that within the US, the oppression from classism is as significant as the

oppression from racism at all (because classism is often used as an excuse to avoid addressing racism), but to say that all forms of oppression need to be addressed. A middle class White individual with a strong ethnic background may have lived an experience where they were 90% of the time in the majority group and 10% of the time in the minority group in terms of power and oppression, while a middle class person of color may feel that they were 90% of the time in the majority group and 10% in the minority group.

What is important for forgiveness to happen is that all individuals process both how they have been hurt and how they may have hurt others (even unknowingly). This is important to avoid continuing the cycle of oppression by being only able to identify as being oppressed. This is especially important to avoid continuing oppression within racial groups. An individual who has never learned to identify with being in the role of the “oppressor” may blindly oppress others especially within their racial group when they are in the position of power. This could involve assimilation of other ethnic groups within their racial group, classism or discrimination within their racial group based on ethnicity, language or skin color. This is especially important to think about in terms of “foreign missions” because US citizens of all racial backgrounds are nearly always in the position of power with respect to individuals in developing countries and will need to learn to relate in a healthy way from the perspective of having power.

### **Relations Among Different Christian Cultural Groups**

In understanding how to develop healthy relations among cultural groups, it is also helpful to understand common misunderstandings. One of the major communication breakdowns between those from the majority culture and those from minority cultures happens primarily because of different cultural understandings of personal growth and what is psychologically “healthy.” The result is that generally an individual from one group shuts the other person down before a significant conversation can happen because the former does not see the latter as “healthy.”

Quite possibly the most significant misunderstanding is between those in the majority group who are not racially aware (either in stage 1 or 2) and those having an “angry minority” response in stage 3. Those from the majority group embrace examples like Martin Luther King, Jr. as examples of what every minority should be (stage 4), but often fail to see that they themselves are in stage 1 or 2 in their own ethnic identity development. In general, those from the majority culture will completely shut down the angry minority individuals and refuse to talk with them until they are “healed” and can come from the stage 4 (MLK Jr.) perspective. This generally infuriates individuals of minority background who know that they themselves are racially aware (in stage 3), and the majority culture individual who is not racially aware (stage 1 or 2) is using their power to shut them down. For the minority culture individual, healing involves embracing stage 3 and naming the offenses so that they can forgive them. If the minority culture individual is shut down, they are likely to get angry because this will limit their own growth in the forgiveness process.

This misunderstanding is caused by the cultural differences in understanding what healing and growth looks like. **For the majority culture individual, healing and growth involves naming the offense and forgiving it.** The majority culture individual recognizes that the disproportionate anger shown in the stage 3 minority response is from bitterness and is something that needs to be healed, and so they will refuse to engage in a dialog. The majority culture individual feels justified

in not responding to the disproportionate anger because the individual from a minority cultural background is “unhealthy.”

**For the individual coming from a minority background who has had significant experiences of racism, the primary healing process is the ethnic identity development process.** Because the wounds of racism are so deep for many minority culture individuals, healing comes primarily through an ethnic identity development process. A majority culture individual that is not very far in their ethnic identity development process is viewed as being “unhealthy” because they are not racially or culturally aware, which means that they have not learned to relate well to other cultures. From the minority cultural perspective, a majority culture individual in stage 1 or 2 of their ethnic identity process who shuts them down represents someone who is less healthy than them using the power they get from being the majority culture, which is a clear incident of racism. Often the majority culture individual fails to understand that part of the forgiveness process is often to name the offenses and have a period of anger, and that for individuals who have experienced a lifetime of racial abuse, this period may last for a while. To make this point of the role of anger in the development process, I have used the phrase, “To get to Martin Luther King, Jr., you often have to go through Malcolm X first.” This is not to justify any the abuse that may happen from racial rage, but it is more to provide an understanding that going through a period of anger is an important part of the forgiveness process.

In reality, both sides have correct elements in their perspective—the majority culture group is being abusive by using their power to restrict the growth process of the minority culture individual, and the individual having an “angry minority” response does need to forgive. What both sides fail to recognize is that the perception of what healing and growth involves is different for the two groups. For majority culture individuals to respond in a healthy way to other cultures, they must become culturally aware by going through an ethnic identity development process. For minority culture individuals to find healing they must let go and forgive at a heart-level after getting in touch with anger in the immersion phase of the ethnic identity development process.

There are significant systemic reasons why it is hard for either majority culture or minority culture individuals to progress in their healing beyond these barriers. For those coming from the majority culture, the only way to really get heart-level change in the ethnic identity development process is to embrace the immersion stage. It is only after that step that majority culture individuals can find heart-level change in how they relate to other cultures and then finally reach integration. To enter immersion, individuals coming from a majority culture must choose to put a significant part of their lives in an environment where they become the minority culture for a while. Because the immersion stage can be very painful for individuals coming from a majority culture, many choose not to go through that pain even though it might bring growth.

One of the key barriers to minority culture individuals is that most of the foundation of ethnic identity development is rooted in a secular perspective which may have some differences from a Christian perspective. The secular perspective often proposes that a person is most healed when you are the most “Black” (or whatever your minority ethnic group). A Christian perspective would be that we are most healed when we are closest to God so that each of us reflects the image of God through our unique Godly cultural heritage. Another important distinction is that the secular perspective downplays the significance of forgiveness, which is a central truth of Christianity.

Because of this, many individuals growing in their ethnic identity development get stuck in immersion unable to fully forgive to get to integration.

Often the best “tools” to enable forgiveness come from inner-healing and Christian counseling traditions, but minority culture individuals often have strong attitudes against inner-healing and counseling. While some of this is purely a cultural prejudice, in other ways this attitude is justified because almost all Christian inner-healing programs and materials come from an ethnocentric perspective. For minority culture individuals, pursuing inner-healing in that context represents a decision to assimilate, which could be viewed a step backward in healing from the ethnic identity development perspective. If they are fortunate, minority culture individuals might be able to locate a non-Christian counselor coming from a common ethnic background, but even that is missing the Christian perspective. While there are a few culturally relevant Christian inner-healing groups (like Arise), there is such a strong stigma associated with Christian inner-healing that it is perceived to take an assimilative approach to minority culture individuals that few actually pursue it (if they already strongly identify with their ethnic background). The result of this is that many individuals feel stuck and unable to forgive because they fail to seek tools of inner-healing that are often better at helping people process forgiveness.

Only individuals who have been through both an inner-healing process and an ethnic identity development process can really have a helpful dialog with both sides. This dialog almost never happens because there are very few individuals who have been willing to embrace the path of the other. The solution to this problem is to take the social healing approach which involves both pursuing inner-healing and embracing the ethnic identity development process. It is by following this path of social healing that we can become individuals who can dialog with both sides and become bridge-builders who can provide a safe environment for majority and minority cultural groups.