White Male Identity Development: The Key Model

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Although most of the popular work on racial identity models has focused on people of color, both Black and White racial identity development models have been developed over approximately the past 30 years. The most notable are works by Cross (1971, 1991) and Helms (1990, 1995). There are several benefits of racial identity models for Black and White people. One essential goal of racial identity development is to advance a healthy racial identity and a positive sense of self as a racial being. (Pack-Brown, 1999). Another benefit of racial identity models is that they attest to the reality of psychological heterogeneity within racial and ethnic groups (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). These models also delineate a difference between one's race, socially constructed attitudes about race, and racial identity development. Furthermore, these models have aided an understanding of how people move from relatively low levels of awareness regarding their racial selves to a more sophisticated understanding of themselves and others as racial beings (Helms, 1984). Racial identity attitudes can be "unlearned" and replaced with more functional belief systems. In doing so, the discussion of race is moved beyond a focus on privilege and oppression (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997). Finally, by integrating racial identity into the discussion, race is conceptualized as only one component of psychosocial identity that intersects with other identities such as sex, sexuality, religion, ability, and class (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000).

Recently, Helms (1995) revised her White Racial Identity Development model to include Information Processing Strategies or IPS, which "reflect the various attitudes, behaviors, and feelings that White people have developed as a result of being socialized to engender a white racist attitude" (Pack-Brown, 1999, p. 89). (Italics are the author's and appear as is written.) The first stage (status) is Contact. At this stage, White people are unaware of themselves as racial beings and are misinformed about those of other races, particularly African Americans. Although benefactors of "White privilege," people at this developmental juncture do not have conscious awareness of being so. In the second stage (status), Disintegration, the person experiences dissonance regarding preconceived notions about race and actual experiences with people of a different color. The third stage (status) is Reintegration, which is marked by pro-White, anti-Black feelings. Although it is unearned, individuals at this stage seek to protect their White privilege. The fourth stage (status), Pseudoindipendence, is the first stage in a positive White identity. The fifth stage (status), Immmersion/Emersion, requires the person to replace misconceptions about racial issues with accurate information. The sixth and final stage (status), Autonomy, represents the accomplishment of a positive White identity wherein people are proud of their racial identity and seek to eradicate racism.

Theorists (Cross, 1991; Erikson, 1968; Poston, 1990) have articulated the benefits of a positive racial identity in developing an individual's sense of self and of others, both within and outside of the individual's racial group. Despite the benefits, Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) identified some limitations of White racial identity development (WRID) models proposed by Helms (1990) and others. One criticism is that these WRID models assume that racial identity develops in response to an oppressive dominant society as do identity models for people of color. Moreover, the WRID models are framed exclusively in Black and White terms, explaining how White people develop an appreciation of other racial groups. Little is communicated about White identity itself. Myers et al. (1991) noted that these models are linear and do not account for the forward, backward, and stalled moments that characterize normal human development. Myers et al. also stated that WRID models may be reactions to specific events in history and do not consider the multiple identities within an individual.

Despite the contributions of Helms's and other WRID models to White racial identity development, there has been...
no exploration of racial identity development regarding the **convergence of gender and race.** Within the context of counseling, a racial identity model for men that also considered gender might better facilitate their identity development. Traditionally, White men, as are other men, are socialized to equate self-worth with economic terms. In addition, they are taught to function at all costs and to be in control. These power issues are inextricably linked to the salience of their race and gender. More specifically, in American culture and apparently throughout most of the Western hemisphere, people are ranked on their proximity to the normal referents of society: White, male, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual, and able-bodied persons (Robinson, 1999). Within this system, identities with which people are born become stratified and take on meaning.

**GENDER ISSUES IN MEN’S LIVES**

Independent of one’s race and gender, it is difficult to meet the demands of a system that externalizes one’s power and links self-worth to visible and tangible measures of productivity (Myers et al., 1991). One of the benefits for men of the Women’s Movement is that it served to demonstrate that women’s powerlessness does not translate into men’s “powerfulness” (Swanson, 1992). Although “manhood” is often predicated on being powerful and having power over women and less powerful men such as gay men (Pleck, 1984), it is still true that some men feel powerful and others do not. Empirical evidence indicates that at an early age, boys are taught stereotypical gender information and are expected to follow it closely (Sadker, Sadker, & Long, 1993). According to Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (2000), “this appears to be related to the stricter sanctions against boys adopting feminine behaviors than exists against girls adopting those deemed as masculine” (p. 196). For instance, boys are encouraged to be assertive, independent, strong, self-reliant, and to restrict emotions because feelings of sadness, depression, and vulnerability are often regarded as unmanly by some men and even counterproductive to finding a solution for problems (Good, Dell, & Mintz, 1989). Research has shown that restricted emotionality is related to depression and to more negative attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help, even when help is needed (Good & Mintz, 1990). Seeking help may be perceived as antithetical to the correlates of masculinity such as being in control and having power. This may explain why most people in counseling are women. Men remain less likely than women to seek therapeutic assistance (Gertner, 1994).

The rigid behavior prescribed for men as well as those associated with these men can be detrimental (Mintz & O’Neil, 1990). Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, and Bartels (1996) conducted research on the relationship between masculine role conflict and psychological distress among a group of young adult male clients. The instrument used to measure masculine role conflict, the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS; Good et al., 1996), was theoretically based on the notion that the socialization of boys demands more than they can deliver. The four subscales of the GRCS examine men’s conflict with traditional masculine roles and are (a) Achieving Success, (b) Experiencing Emotions, (c) Sharing Affection With Other Men, and (d) Balancing Work and Family Relations. According to Good et al. (1996), four behavioral patterns emerge when men experience gender role conflict. Obsession with achievement and success is one of these patterns and refers to a disruptive and persistent preoccupation with work, accomplishment, and eminence as a means of demonstrating value. Balancing work and family relations is another area of conflict. Because men are socialized to focus on achievement, other areas of life such as home and leisure can easily be ignored or sacrificed (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). These traditional masculine patterns have been related to depression (Good & Mintz, 1990).

Gertner (1994) added homophobia and health care problems to this list of masculine patterns related to depression. Men learn to scrutinize their own lives and those of other men to ensure exacting adherence to an androcentric- and homophobic-driven code. Men are consciously and unconsciously socialized into **androcentrism.** Androcentrism refers to the centrality of the male experience for all humans, independent of sexual and gender diversity within the culture (Bem, 1993). Men (this word should be understood as applying to heterosexual men because in society’s eyes “real manhood” requires heterosexuality or the appearance of heterosexuality) have unearned yet normative advantage given to them by religious, educational, corporate, and family institutions. Men come into the world as the preferred sex; they earn more money than women for comparable work; they are not expected to change their names upon marriage, and it is assumed that their offspring will automatically take their names; nearly all human development models have been created by men and have been influenced by a male perspective; men own the majority of the world’s capital, despite the volume of nonremunerated women’s work throughout the globe (Robinson & Watt, 2001).

Despite the privileges White men receive and become accustomed to, men often feel like workhorses and many are ill-equipped to comfortably experience and express a full range of emotions such as fear, depression, and uncertainty. Good et al. (1996) stated that to be regarded as adequately masculine, men must be powerful and competitive; not show vulnerability, emotions, or weakness; control themselves, others, and their environments; be consistently rational; be sexually skilled; and be successful in their work. The impossibility of successfully meeting all these demands is hypothesized to lead to distress. (p. 45)

Given the salience of power in men’s lives, it seems reasonable (for both counselors and men) to approach the issue of power and control in a manner to enable men to become acutely aware of their power to influence self and to break the bonds to patriarchy, emotional handcuffs in the form of assumptions and interpretations that favor patriarchal values about the worth of human beings and the meaning of their experiences. (L. Brown, 1994, p. 118)
**CULTURAL AND RACIAL THEMES**

Self-reliance and individualism are traditionally viewed as cornerstones of the American way and have their roots in Western philosophy. According to Castenada (1984), Rousseau more than any other modern person shaped the concept of the “monolith” (i.e., the central role that self-reliance and individualism play in the United States). Kagitcibasi (1997) argued that individualism “and collectivism” have roots in a variety of domains, including political and economic history, religion, and philosophy. Hobbes, a seventeenth century British philosopher, believed that free expression of an individual’s will was the essence of balance and efficacy. In individualism, the person is regarded as discrete from other beings. The human being is considered to be the essential cornerstone of society (Kagitcibasi, 1997). Myers et al. (1991) maintained that because Western society is philosophically oriented to individualism, individuals are the primary referent point, a point that is separate from others. Counseling has been unduly influenced by this individualistic frame of reference. This individual, as opposed to the collective, has even influenced counseling theory’s constructs. As indicated by Corey (1991), the self is often categorized within three distinct domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. As noted by Parham (1994), Freud identified three aspects of the psychic apparatus: the id, the ego, and the superego. Berne’s Transactional Analysis distinguishes between the parent, adult, and child ego states (Parham, 1994).

Individualism has been a pervasive factor in society in several ways. From a historical perspective, the mass immigration of Europeans to the United States was influenced by individualism. Many immigrants left their native lands and came to the New World as a protest against the “old,” in search of a new beginning that was free from the tyranny and oppression of the past. Erikson said, “Identity problems were in the mental baggage of generations of new Americans, who left their homelands to merge their ancestral identities in the common one of self-made man” (as cited in Stein, 1975, p. 279). White migration to the United States was largely voluntary, which is in contrast to the involuntary arrival of African slaves to American shores or the removal of Native American Indians from their tribal lands. Most immigrants came to America for the “American Dream,” which had its basis in the beliefs of individualism and competition. These immigrants’ main concern was not cultural pluralism. As acculturation occurred, a type of “cultural amnesia” soon followed. Acculturation is a process of socialization into accepting the cultural values of the larger dominant society. It tends to occur at the expense of one’s original cultural values as one internalizes values and traditions of those already established in an area. According to Berry and Sam (1997), acculturated individuals have limited knowledge of and little appreciation for their own culture while holding the dominant culture in high regard. The original culture has been lost or relinquished and acculturated individuals have given up most of the cultural traits of the culture of origin and assumed the traits of the dominant culture (Berry & Kim, 1988). Understandably, the possibility of cultural alienation from one’s traditional culture seems high.

**CULTURAL AND RACIAL THEMES: TODAY**

We believe that the entrenchment of individualism and perceived threats to the American dream could be a contributing factor to racism and restricted racial identity development in the White male. “In our society, no single situation is potentially so capable of giving some satisfaction, at all levels of basic needs, as the occupation” (Roe & Lunneborg, 1990, p. 6). As White men begin to struggle with expenses, low pay, long hours, and competition with non-White men, they begin to feel disillusioned and penalized instead of rewarded for following the American formula for success (Stein, 1975). It is often assumed that affirmative action is responsible for the benefits that people of color and women were receiving in a system that rewards “laziness” and overlooks “hard work.” If White men perceive that they are being economically controlled and denied jobs due to the presence of others, particularly newer incumbents to the workforce such as women, immigrants, and people of color, the competition for power and privilege increases.

With respect to affirmative action, according to Takaki (1994), it is actually designed to address the legacy of past racial discrimination and existing inequality by training and identifying qualified individuals of excluded racial minorities and allowing them greater access to equality and opportunity in education and employment. (p. 7)

According to Giles and Evans (1986), racism is a product of intergroup competition for control of economic and social structures, and although some early social scientists thought racism would disappear as society became modernized, racism may persist and occur as a means of seeking to remain in control and to protect one’s privileges whether they are unearned or not.

Just as there are personal and institutional consequences of racism for people of color, there are consequences of racism for Whites (Pinderhughes, 1989). One of the consequences of racism for White people is they do not “consider race or racism to be an issue that directly affects them and those who look like them” (Robinson, 1999, p. 74). Therefore, they may lack understanding about the effects and consequences of race and racism on their own lives. Simply stated, racism and sexism affect all parties involved.

One way to foster insight about racism, sexism, and other discriminatory practices is to examine unearned privilege. McIntosh (1989) stated that privilege is an “invisible knapsack” of assets that an entitled group can access on a regular basis to more effectively negotiate their daily lives. The notion of unearned privilege is an illusive subject, partly because many White people are oblivious to it and to the fact that people who are not White do not participate in the privileges they take for granted. Discussing unearned...
privilege produces dissonance among many Whites because it questions basic Western beliefs of meritocracy and creates confusion about the meaning of being White (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). Clearly, a relationship exists between power, privilege, race relations, and racial identity in America.

**THE KEY MODEL**

Pack-Brown (1999) stated that “the general developmental issue for Whites is abandonment of entitlement” (p. 89). Research conducted by S. P. Brown, Parham, and Yonkers (1996) with 35 European American trainees in a 16-week, graduate level, cross-cultural course revealed that the men were more likely to exhibit more advanced Autonomy attitudes, whereas the women were characterized by Pseudoindependence attitudes. Autonomy is the highest stage of Helms's conceptual model and individuals with these attitudes more “freely espouse and practice a multicultural mentality” (S. P. Brown et al., 1996, p. 515). Despite the fact that White men in the United States represent the race and gender group that is most privileged economically (Haider, 1995), they are arguably the most disadvantaged with respect to developing as racial and gendered beings due to entitlement and privilege bestowed on them (McIntosh, 1988).

The Key model, a theoretically derived identity model, is influenced by other theoretical identity models such as those of Helms (1995), Myers et al. (1991), and Sue and Sue (1990; see Table 1). In addition, the Key model addresses the convergence of race and gender attitudes that White men may exhibit as a result of socially constructed attitudes regarding appropriate displays of manhood in their lives. Although not a linear model, the Key model reflects the assumption that initial phases of development involve minimal self-interrogation, whereas the higher levels of development reflect a personal crisis and its subsequent resolution, which leads to greater self-knowledge. The hope is that through education and experience, White men can challenge the debilitating socialized notion that they are superior to others.

The use of types and phases rather than stages has been supported by Rowe et al. (1994), who suggested the use of types to describe a set of attitudes that can be modified by experiences. This differs from an unmodifiable fixed personality trait. Also, the term stage suggests linearity and a clear delineation among different stages, which differs from the tenets of the Key model. The Key model is circular in nature and suggests that movement occurs in multiple directions, similar to Kegan’s (1982) helix. A man may share characteristics of multiple stages; however, it is presumed that one stage is most descriptive of an individual (see Figure 1).

**Type 1: Noncontact Type**

*Description.* Attitudes of individuals in this phase include little or no knowledge of other races or of their own race. The White male is functioning in society as he is expected to function and will either ignore, deny, or minimize the issues dealing with race and race relations. In addition, his attitudes about gender tend to be very traditional wherein gender roles are rigid and prescribed. Low level encounters dealing with race will not trigger dissonance. Individuals in this phase are operating on what Rowe et al. (1994) labeled the “fairness principle,” which implies that the man wants to continue the status quo and is not aware of the need for legal steps to correct discrimination. Ethnocentrism characterizes this type as does a belief in the superiority of White males to women and to people of color. There is limited awareness of how women and people of color contend with discriminatory practices related to their gender and race.

### TABLE 1

**White Racial Identity Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helms (1990)</td>
<td>Stage 1: Contact</td>
<td>Unaware of own racial identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage 2: Disintegration</td>
<td>First acknowledgment of White identity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 3: Reintegration</td>
<td>Idealizes Whites; denigrates Blacks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 4: Pseudoindependence</td>
<td>Intellectualized acceptance of own and others' race</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 5: Immersion/Emersion</td>
<td>Honest appraisal of racism and significance of Whiteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 6: Autonomy</td>
<td>Internalizes a multicultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue and Sue (1990)</td>
<td>Stage 1: Conformity</td>
<td>Ethnocentric, limited knowledge of other races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 2: Dissonance</td>
<td>Inconsistencies in belief system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 3: Resistance and Immersion</td>
<td>Person challenges own racism</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 4: Introspection</td>
<td>Acceptance of being White</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 5: Integrative Awareness</td>
<td>Self-fulfillment with regard to racial identity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type I: Noncontact</td>
<td>Status quo; denies racism; seeks power and privilege</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Type II: Claustrophobic</td>
<td>Other races are &quot;closing in&quot; on him; disillusionment with the American dream; feels power and privilege are going to other races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type III: Conscious Identity</td>
<td>Dissonance between existing belief system and reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type IV: Empirical</td>
<td>Questioning their role in racism and oppression and their struggle for unrealistic power from oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott (1997)</td>
<td>Type V: Optimal</td>
<td>Person understands how his struggle for power and privilege has caused racism and oppression</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Type 2: The Claustrophobic Type

Description. As the White man begins to realize that the American dream is not reality, he may start to look to "outsiders" (i.e., persons of color and women) to blame. The "Claustrophobic type" begins to feel that people of color and women are receiving unmerited advantages at his expense. Stein (1975) stated that such individuals believe that they "are being forced to bear the brunt of earlier American injustice" (p. 274). During this phase, the person secures power for those like himself while seeking to restrict women and people of color from gaining access to their privileges. This position of privilege is inevitably gained at the expense of others. The person in this phase thinks there are too many groups vying for power and privilege. They feel "closed in" by the majority of the new workers in this twenty-first century: women, people of color, and immigrants. This person still views other races and women in a stereotyped and overgeneralized way. As discussed earlier, there are psychological consequences to becoming aware of one's privilege (Robinson, 1999). Thus, many White men may never exhibit attitudes other than the Type 1 and Type 2 attitudes. This stagnation in development can result from a failure to experience true dissonance or from the inability to move out of Marcia's (1981) foreclosure stage wherein commitments are made by encountering and resolving a crisis.

Implications for counselors. Counselors are encouraged, as with any threat or loss, to acknowledge that the client's feelings are real. For example, the client who may be terminated after years of loyalty on the job and replaced with a younger, less skilled, and lower-wage female worker may begin to experience disillusionment with the American dream. By helping the client to own and talk about his feelings of anger, resentment, and loss, important strides toward healing as well as the creation of new and meaningful dreams or a reframe of the American dream can take place.

Type 3: Conscious Identity Type

Description. This phase is characterized by a precipitating event, positive or negative, that creates dissonance between a person's existing belief system and real-life experiences with women and people of color that contradict this system. An example would be a professional woman or a person of color who intercedes significantly on the man's behalf, perhaps through surgery or adjudication of a difficult case. As a result, the man is required to reevaluate his culture, both as it exists around him and the extent to which he has internalized it. In doing so, he recognizes that both racism and sexism play an important role in how he views and blames others for the current social and economic situation. The person in this phase can either adopt the attitudes of the Claustrophobic phase or move into a phase (the Empirical type) in which he rationally and realistically looks at his feelings and actions toward women and people of other races and the overall struggle for power and privilege.

Implications for counselors. Counselors are encouraged to assist the client to deal with feelings of confusion and anger and begin to realize the inequities that exist as a function of institutional racism and sexism. For example, while participating in mandatory diversity awareness job training, a man might become aware for the first time of his Black colleagues' experiences with racism and of women's expe-
periences with sexism. The client may experience guilt at having blamed people historically without being mindful of the impact of unearned privilege and discriminatory practices on both his life and those of others.

Type 4: Empirical Type

Description. During this phase, the White man finally realizes that racism and sexism are real (i.e., not fabrications of people of color and women) and are involved in many aspects of his life. The person sees that he has been misplacing blame and that women and people of color are not responsible for discriminatory practices that may have directly affected him. The “Empirical type” is “forced” to again question the reasons for his disillusionment with the American dream. He recognizes that his privileged existence—earned through no effort of his own—is at the expense of many women and people of color who have been oppressed. At this phase, there is a growing, albeit disturbing, awareness of unearned privileges, due only to the color of his skin, that have allowed for easier negotiation of life. This person seeks the answers to questions he had previously answered in a racist way. The person also questions his role in the pervasive competition for power and privilege.

Implications for counselors. In a way similar to the example discussed for the Conscious Identity Type, the “Empirical Type” client may immerse himself in readings and group discussions to gain greater self-knowledge about discrimination. In doing so, his eyes are opened in ways never experienced. The counselor can help the client to reconsider any previously held definitions of manhood as well as the meaning of being a White man. Exploring race issues is possible and necessary at this point because the client understands that the White male experience has been used to define the experience of men of color and women.

Type 5: Optimal Type

Description. This person has changed his worldview into a holistic understanding of the common struggle of all people for survival. There is the realization that working with and interacting in other ways with all people independent of the constellation of one’s identities (race and gender) is advantageous for truly meaningful existence. The person opens his lost and unexplored self to commune with self, family, and diverse others. There is an increased knowledge of race and gender relations and the roles they play. In this phase, the individual values all people for their intrinsic worth as human beings. The struggle for power over others is greatly minimized. The person is more aware of oppression in a general sense and works to eliminate specific instances of oppression. There is a pervasive understanding that survival is assured not by oppressing others but by living peacefully and harmoniously with self and others. The Optimal Type person is functioning with a positive intrinsic drive and does not measure worth and esteem with external criteria (Myers et al., 1991). There is a deep understanding that the American dream is externally driven and that a sense of success can only come from within.

Implications for counselors. Counselors can be instrumental in facilitating insight about how privilege and power can be used constructively toward healing of both the self and others. For example, a man in this phase who may be dealing with a cancer diagnosis is able to give and receive support from people across race and gender in his survivors group. He welcomes the benefit of being in relationship with others, even during a crisis, and values every life. He is better able to use his power to heal his life and is not struggling with others for power. Again, a counselor can facilitate a full realization of what this phase implies.

APPLICATION OF THE KEY MODEL TO COUNSELING

Men tend to journey through their developmental path unduly conflicted yet endeavoring to maintain power over women and other men (Pleck, 1984). The necessity to grapple with power issues in many dimensions of life (i.e., career, relationships, and finances) can produce a sense of being compartmentalized. The Key model addresses the types of attitudes described by the basic levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which includes shelter and food (D. Brown & Brooks, 1990). Moreover, the attainment of physiological and safety needs can create a false drive to oppress others for personal advancement. The main goal of the Key model in counseling is to facilitate growth in White males by seeing them as whole beings. Toward this end, it is critical that counselors recognize the types of attitudes White males struggle with, as a function of their socialization patterns, that teach them to equate productivity and control with success and manhood and reward them for doing so. A man who does not adhere to society’s rigid cultural script defining manhood exposes himself to possible ridicule and questioning of his masculinity, heterosexuality, and so on. Counselors need to be mindful of this possibility as well.

CONCLUSION

The Key model offers a way of understanding White male identity growth by considering multiple facets affecting their psychosocial identity development. As indicated in this article, there are five types in the Key model: Noncontact, Claustrophobic, Conscious Identity, Optimal, and Empirical. We believe that the Key model offers a useful schema to guide current counseling interventions and future research efforts. We also believe, as with Helm’s ground-breaking work, that it is best to view the Key model as a means of advancing our understanding of White male identity development and as a starting point from which to further explore issues surrounding both male identity and identity formation in general.

REFERENCES
