The Complexities of Diversity: Exploring Multiple Oppressions

AMY L. REYNOLDS and RAECHELE L. POPE

There has been a growth of identity development models in multicultural psychology for the past 20 years; these frameworks, however, rarely acknowledge the complexities of multiple identities and multiple oppressions. The purpose of this article is to challenge our understanding of cultural diversity beyond its current simplistic frameworks. Alternative worldviews, such as Afrocentric psychology, can broaden our comprehension of human diversity and are used to examine the identity development literature. Several case examples of individuals experiencing multiple identities and multiple oppressions are explored to illustrate the complexities of cultural diversity. Implications for counseling, training, and research are briefly discussed.

Although there has been growing interest in cultural diversity and multicultural counseling since the early 1970s, the dynamics of the literature and the perspectives used continue to change (Heath, Neimeyer, & Pedersen, 1988; Lee, 1989; Smith & Vasquez, 1985). Initially, the literature focused on how mainstream psychology was not meeting the needs of people of color (Sue & Sue, 1971; Vontress, 1971). Throughout the 1970s, many authors explored how people of color differed from Whites and what effect those racial differences had in therapy. A later development in multicultural counseling focused on the differences that existed within oppressed groups including the creation and expansion of racial-ethnic identity development models during the 1980s.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was increasing interest in other aspects of cultural diversity such as gender and affectional-sexual orientation. Feminism challenged the effect of counseling on women’s lives and began offering alternative perspectives. Identity development models were created for women (Avery, 1977; Downing & Roush, 1985) as well as for gays and lesbians (Cass, 1979). Since the early 1980s, some authors have become increasingly aware of the similarities among oppressed groups and have offered frameworks to help understand the commonalities of oppression (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Banks, 1984; Highlen et al., 1988; Sue & Sue, 1990).

Although the growth of these identity development models has been fairly recent, much parallel work has already been done across a variety of groups (Highlen et al., 1986). The creation of these frameworks seems to reflect the social movements in this country (Reynolds, 1989). The first identity development models focused on Black identity and seemed to follow and describe the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Feminist identity as well as lesbian and gay identity models grew out of the late 1970s while the women’s and gay rights movements were being established.

Durante los últimos veinte años ha habido un aumento de modelos de desarrollo de identidad en la consejería multicultural; sin embargo, estos cuadros no suelen reconocer las complejidades de identidades múltiples y opresiones múltiples. El propósito de este artículo es desafiar a nuestro conocimiento de diversidad y más allá de sus simplistas cuadros actuales. Visiones universales alternativas, como la consejería afrocentrica, pueden ampliar nuestra comprensión de la diversidad humana y pueden ser usadas para examinar la literatura del desarrollo de identidad. Para ilustrar las complejidades de diversidad, se exploran varios ejemplos de individuos que sufren de identidades múltiples y de opresiones múltiples. Se discuten las implicaciones para la consejería, el entrenamiento y la investigación.

The Minority Identity Development (MID) model by Atkinson et al. (1989), along with the multietnic model by Banks (1984) and other inclusive frameworks, reflected a trend in the 1980s toward unification as in the “rainbow coalition.”

The available identity development theories as well as the general literature about culturally diverse groups have rarely examined or acknowledged the multiple layers of diversity and identity and instead offer one-dimensional images of culturally diverse individuals (Highlen et al., 1986). Within these models little attention has been demonstrated toward within-group differences such as sex, age, race/ethnicity, affectional-sexual orientation, and religion and their effect on the developmental process. A common example of this frequent dichotomization or segmenting of human identities is found in many job advertisements—“Minorities and women are encouraged to apply”—which implies two separate and unrelated groups and ultimately makes women of color invisible. Clearly, many individuals in our culture have multiple identities and are members of more than one oppressed group, thus making such dichotomization both inaccurate and limiting. Although this multiplicity of identities and its inherent challenge to current identity development models also applies to individuals who are not members of oppressed groups, this article focuses on the effects and implications of multiple oppression rather than multiple identities.

Although there is much discussion as to what entails or defines an oppressed group and more complex definitions and discussions of oppression have been offered in the literature (Myers et al., 1991), for the purpose of this article, oppression is defined as a system that allows access to the services, rewards, benefits, and privileges of society based on membership in a particular group. According to Highlen, Speight, Myers, and Cox (1989), “Within the United States, the generally accepted norm by which people are evaluated or against which they measure
themselves is how close one comes to being anglo, middle class, male, christian, heterosexual, english speaking, young, and mentally, physically, and emotionally unimpaired" (p. 8).

Nature does not create discrete categories of human traits or identities. People create these categories to simplify the complexity of multiple identities and multiple realities. There are many women who are also people of color; many people of color who are also lesbian, gay, or bisexual; many lesbian, gay, or bisexual people who may also have physical disabilities; and so on. According to Highlen et al. (1988), a multiple oppression is when an individual is a member of two or more oppressed groups. For example, an Asian American woman who is also a lesbian is a member of three oppressed groups. Each of her oppressions is unique and must be addressed separately (being Asian American, a lesbian, and a woman), as well as the combined oppressions (Asian American woman or Asian American lesbian) with their own issues.

The purpose of this article is to challenge and expand the definitions and comprehension of human diversity in multicultural counseling beyond its current simplistic frameworks. As the field of multicultural counseling grows, our understanding of the dynamics of human diversity becomes increasingly complicated. Although a few of the current models of identity development offer measurable constructs, they create an incomplete and, therefore, inaccurate picture of the multiple layers of identity and oppression. Although these frameworks add much to our appreciation of human diversity, they also simplify the complexities of identity development and group identification.

This article presents a brief review and critique of some of the available identity development and acculturation models. These issues are examined through the lens of Afrocentric psychology, which offers a broader perspective of human diversity and identity. Such alternative models are necessary to understand the ever-changing and continually expanding groups of oppressed people in the 21st century. Several case examples of individuals experiencing multiple identities and multiple oppression are explored to illustrate the complexities of identity. Implications for counseling, training, and research are briefly discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past decade, identity development frameworks have become a major consideration in multicultural counseling. Historically, this work began in anthropology during the 1920s in the study of acculturation. Primarily, these acculturation studies have examined the experiences of people of color when they came in contact with the dominant White culture in the United States (U.S.). Many acculturation theories contend that contact and interaction among several autonomous cultural groups may cause change in one or both groups (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Until recently, most acculturation research was primarily anthropological in nature (Olmedo, 1979). In multicultural psychology, however, research on acculturation, primarily with Asian American and Chicano/Latino people has been occurring more frequently (Keefe & Padilla, 1987; Mendoza & Martinez, 1981; Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987). Although the acculturation research continues to clarify the impact of contact with another culture, this research seems to describe the participants as one-dimensional. Although variables such as socioeconomic class, education level, and language may be explored as part of defining acculturation level, other factors such as gender or affectional-sexual orientation are rarely mentioned or explored.

Within the racial-ethnic identity literature, developmental stage models have focused primarily on African Americans (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1975; Parham, 1989; Parham & Helms, 1981; Thomas, 1971). In addition, there has been a growth of models exploring White identity (Hardiman, 1979; Helms, 1984, 1990; Ponterotto, 1988). Despite the growing available literature on racial/ethnic identity, other identities or differences within these racial/ethnic groups have rarely been explored. In fact, several authors (Akbar, 1989; Nobles, 1989) have begun to challenge the underlying assumptions of the racial-ethnic identity development models.

Although these racial-ethnic identity models often have been one-dimensional in their view of individuals, some authors have examined the intersections of gender or age with racial/ethnic identity. Cross (1974) discovered gender differences in the Immersion-Emersion stage in a study of his Black identity model. Williams (1975), in a study of the Cross model, found differences in the distribution of men and women in the various stages. Although several racial/ethnic identity studies have included gender as a variable, such distinctions were not explored in the actual development of the models.

More recently, Parham (1989), in an expansion of the Cross (1971) model, incorporated the effects of age and the developmental process on Black identity, yet his examples of W.E. DuBois and Malcolm X offered only a male point of view. Carter (1990) explored the relationship between racism and racial identity among Whites and found significant gender differences. His results suggested that gender socialization has an impact on the development of racial attitudes. Delworth (1989) examined the relationship between racial/ethnic and gender identity for college students and encouraged a reexamination of student development theories, constructs, and practices with the notions of both gender and race/ethnicity in mind.

Other models of identity development have not fared much better in their exploration of human diversity. Downing and Roush (1985) modeled their feminist identity framework on the Black identity model by Cross (1971), yet acknowledged their lack of attention to diversity among women (e.g., class, race/ethnicity, age) as a major limitation. In many respects, their model might best be renamed as an identity development model for middle-class, nonlesbian White women (Reynolds, 1989). Hess (1983) explored the similarities and differences in the identity development of lesbians and feminists although her analysis often implied and described them as separate rather than overlapping groups.

Although there has been much psychological literature examining the "coming out" process for gay and lesbian people, Cass (1979) offered a stage model most similar to the previously described identity development frameworks (Highlen et al., 1986). This model groups gay men and lesbians together in this process even though other authors describe significant gender differences (DeMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Faderman, 1984). In addition, Cass (1979) did not acknowledge or examine the issues related to bisexuality despite strong support in the literature for a bisexual orientation (Golden, 1987; Klein, 1978; Schuster, 1987). Some authors have explored the identity development dynamics of being a person of color as well as gay or lesbian, although not
in the context of a specific identity model (Chan, 1989; Cochran & Mays, 1986; Loiacano, 1989).

Although on the surface the models that focus on the similarities among oppressed people might seem most open to exploring the complexities of diversity, such as the MID model by Atkinson et al. (1989), their framework discusses how members of culturally diverse groups must struggle with how to relate to members of other oppressed groups as if implying that they might not also be members of other oppressed groups. Although the Original Theory Applied to Identity Development (OTAID) model has challenged the tendency of the identity development literature to ignore the effects of multiple oppression (Highlen et al., 1986), it has done little to offer specifics about the impact of such complexities on the identity development process.

Little research has been done to examine the internal process of dealing with multiple oppressions and identities; several possible options, however, exist (Highlen et al., 1988). An individual may address her or his multiple oppressions at the same time (e.g., deal with being an American Indian and a woman simultaneously). Or such work may occur separately where, for example, one might face aspects of being an American Indian first, then experience a similar process for being a woman. The shift in focus may be affected by one’s environment, reference group, or individual needs (Highlen et al., 1988). Often a person is most likely to focus on whichever oppression is most salient in her or his life (Reynolds, 1989).

The only paradigms available to aid in the exploration of this phenomenon of multiple identities can be found in biracial and bisexual identity development theories and models. Inherent in their self-definition process, bisexual and biracial individuals must face the realities of multiple identities. Although the literature in these areas is still scarce, the past several years have brought increasing interest in exploring the identity issues of these groups.

In examining bisexuality, a common definition is an individual who connects with both women and men in terms of attraction, love, and desire. There are different types of bisexual identification or routes through which bisexual individuals understand their sexuality (Schuster, 1987). Contemporaneous bisexuals are in intimate relationships with both women and men. Sequential bisexuals have a series of intimate relationships with women and men. Other bisexual individuals may be monogamous in their involvement with a woman or a man yet may define themselves as bisexual.

Like gays and lesbians, bisexual individuals go through both an internal and external process of self-definition, although “the diversity of bisexuals’ individual histories makes it difficult to generalize about those processes” (Schuster, 1987, p. 59). According to Schuster, “By definition, bisexuals defy categorization” (p. 57). Although there is often an expectation that identity development occurs in a predictable manner, “there is not a bisexual prototype: that is the center of both their significance and their challenges” (Schuster, 1987, p. 57).

Because of this complexity, bisexuals are often hidden among gay and nongay individuals. There are myths, stereotypes, and biases that keep bisexual people marginal and make it difficult for them to find a supportive community. Many women who self-define as bisexual may publicly define themselves as lesbian and may be strongly connected to the lesbian community (Golden, 1987; Schuster, 1987). Golden articulated how many bisexual women come out as lesbians first and then realize that their sexual identity is more accurately defined as bisexual. The nongay culture sees bisexuals as gay and, therefore, subjects them to homophobia and discrimination. Meanwhile, in gay and lesbian communities, there is fear and distrust of bisexual individuals. Golden stated that a bisexual identity may have more stigma than a lesbian identity. Clearly, to self-define as bisexual, these individuals must be willing to challenge the notion of dichotomous sexuality and identity (Schuster, 1987).

Similar struggles occur for individuals of mixed racial heritage. Brandell (1988) noted that the “formation of ethnic/racial identity in the biracial child seems to be a complex and variable developmental process” (p. 179). According to Root (1990), “Theoretical conceptualization and application to therapy must become multiracial and multicultural to accurately reflect the process of more than one single racial group” (p. 192). Biracial individuals have always been viewed as marginal people and have had to resolve an ambiguous ethnic identity (Poston, 1990; Root, 1990). The traditional racial/ethnic identity models do not encompass the reality of biracial people, especially if their racial heritage involves both oppressed and dominant racial groups (e.g., Asian American and White). As such, biracial individuals cannot reject either part of their racial heritage without continuing a process of internalized oppression (Root, 1990). Somehow they must be able to reach a resolution that allows the diverse parts of their racial heritage to coexist.

Root (1990) allowed even more diversity to complicate the issues of biracial individuals by examining gender issues. She suggested that biracial men may have more difficulty overcoming social barriers because they are often viewed as more threatening because of their male status. Biracial women have to deal with myths, such as being exotic, which they may not be as prepared to do because of their invisibility as women.

Root (1990) offered a new framework of identity resolution for biracial individuals that challenges the linear notions found in traditional identity development models. She described this process as facing “internal conflict over a core sense of definition of self” (p. 204). The strongest tension occurs between the racial components within the biracial individual in the context of the family and society. In her model there is more than one acceptable outcome, which contradicts the tenet found in mainstream psychological theories that allows for only one healthy option.

The first possible resolution, “acceptance of the identity society assigns,” is a passive resolution in which the individual usually accepts a definition as a person of color. Because of racism in this culture, most individuals with any non-White racial heritage are usually defined exclusively by that heritage (Poussaint, 1984; Root, 1990). This process is similar to the effects of homophobia that cause bisexual individuals to be perceived as gay by the dominant nongay culture. A second option for resolution, “identification with both racial groups,” means that the individual actively identifies with both racial groups. They may often realize their similarities and differences to others around them and work to connect with both groups.

“Identification with a single racial group” is a third option for resolution of a biracial identity. Unlike the first option, this individual makes an active choice to identify with a particular group. In doing so, this individual may or may not deny the other aspects of her or his racial identity. The final option for resolution is called “identification as a new racial group.” This identification
means that the individual’s strongest connection is to other bira-
cial people. This strategy may be the most challenging because
there is little acceptance of a biracial identity and not any visible
community.

According to Root (1990), all of these options have opportuni-
ties for both positive and negative outcomes. These options are
not mutually exclusive; individuals may move among them dur-
during different parts of their lives. All of these choices can be
positive unless individuals deny any aspect of their heritage.

Clearly, this framework offers a flexible and dynamic view of
identity development within a nonlinear process. In challenging
the core beliefs of psychology, Root (1990) has made way for
alternative theoretical models. Her theory illustrates some of
the complexities of multiple identities such as addressing the
implications of when those identities are from oppressed groups
and when they are from dominant groups. Being biracial and a
member of more than one oppressed group, such as being both
African American and Japanese American, has a different mean-
ing than being biracial and identifying with both oppressed
and dominant groups such as being both Chicana and White. Such
complexities demand further exploration and in-depth research
before any true understanding can occur.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS

According to Root (1990), “Current models of mental health do
not accommodate the process by which individuals who have
‘other’ identities, such as biracial and/or gay/lesbian, arrive at
a positive sense of self-identity or maintain a positive identity in
the face of oppressive attitudes” (p. 186). Mainstream psychology
must consider alternative frameworks to better meet the needs of
culturally diverse clients and professionals who continue to test
the limits and generalities of psychological theories (Sue et al.,
1982). Alternative perspectives, such as those offered by afrocent-
ric psychology, can broaden our understanding of human diver-
sity. Afrocentric psychology is a conceptual system or worldview
that challenges the core assumptions of Western psychological
theory and creates an optimal and holistic conceptualization of
human beings and the universe in which we live (Myers, 1988).

A major tenet of this optimal conceptualization or worldview
centers on the inseparability of the spiritual and material aspects
of reality (Myers, 1988). In other words, our spiritual essence and
our physical and material realities are completely interwoven
and as one. In a Western worldview, the nature of reality is
primarily material, which supports the notion that there are
limited material resources and we must compete for these re-
sources in order to survive. This materialistic, and often competi-
tive, perspective causes individuals to emphasize their individu-
ality and separateness from others.

Alternative perspectives about who we are in relation to oth-
ers do exist. Nobles (1976) described the African concept of
extended self in which self includes all ancestors, the yet unborn,
all of nature, as well as the surrounding community. This optimal
conceptualization honors and emphasizes connections among all
of life and denounces separation of individuals.

According to Afrocentric epistemology, self-knowledge is the
basis of all knowledge (Myers, 1988). Reasoning in this mindset
is based on diunital logic or the union of opposites (Myers, 1988).
Diunital reasoning challenges the dualistic and either-or beliefs
found in the dominant Western worldview and is centered on the
notion that all things or beliefs can occur simultaneously and in
harmony with each other. In other words, the dualities com-
monly known to our culture (i.e., mind-body, theory-practice,
science-art) are the result of a segmented worldview (Myers,
yields a world view that is holistic, assuming the interrelatedness
and interdependence of all things” (p. 13).

Western culture, however, supports the notion that knowl-
edge occurs outside of us and that we are inherently separate
from all others (Myers, 1988). According to Myers et al. (1991),
“To be oppressed is to be socialized into a worldview that is
suboptimal and leads to a fragmented sense of self” (p. 56). As
such, it is difficult for individuals to embrace all of who they are
when they internalize a worldview based on fragmentation and
dichotomization. Therefore, science, in which psychology is
based, views individuals in one-dimensional ways, thus making
the notion of multiple identities and multiple realities inconceiv-
able. By comparison, an Afrocentric worldview places a pre-
mium on self-knowledge as the basis of all knowledge which in
turn encourages individuals to define their own realities and
embrace their entire beings (Myers, 1988).

Afrocentric psychology is but one alternative worldview that
can expand our visions and understanding of human realities.
Obviously, new perspectives and definitions are needed if we are
to embrace the complexities of identity. To further highlight and
understand the nature of identity and multiple oppressions,
several case examples are explored.

John is a 20-year-old Mexican American man who is gay and
has been involved in a gay relationship for the past year. He is
a junior in college and is studying business. He entered therapy
because he was feeling ambivalent about his relationship. He
was feeling depressed and unmotivated, and his alcohol use
had increased during the past several months.

John was born in Mexico and lived there until he was in the
fifth grade. His parents speak only Spanish and have little formal
education. John resents his parents’ lack of comfort and ability
to live in Anglo culture and has expressed feeling ashamed of them.
John has never strongly identified as Mexican American or Chi-
cano and changed his name from Juan to John when he was in
junior high. He identified as gay in high school and has had
several relationships that never lasted more than 1 year.

John has always sought out stable and committed relation-
ships yet has had difficulty maintaining them because he feels
“crowded.” He seems uncomfortable with emotions and inti-
macy yet feels a strong sense of isolation and emptiness. He is
highly self-critical and feels a strong need to be better than others.

John’s interpersonal and intrapersonal struggles seem
strongly connected to unresolved developmental issues of iden-
tity, autonomy, and intimacy. He seems to have made a choice to
submerge his Chicano identity. His depression, perfectionism,
and difficulty in interpersonal relationships may all be related to
his inability to integrate and accept all of who he is. John has
internalized the dominant worldview by choosing to believe his
different identities are incompatible.

If John chose to integrate his multiple identities, he might
experience rejection on all fronts. If he is strongly Chicano iden-
tified within the gay community, he must face racism directly. If
he is strongly gay identified in the Chicano community, he must
face homophobia. Instead, he has chosen to live in a gay world
as a gay man with little notice of his ethnicity. His choice to be
highly acculturated occurs in a specific context unique to his multiple oppressions.

Within therapy, efforts were made to examine the underlying issues that fueled John's depression, low self-esteem, and discomfort with intimacy. His core belief is that he is unacceptable. Obviously, he has internalized his oppression and, therefore, has a fragmented sense of self. To accept all of who he is, John must be willing to embrace and understand his multiple identities.

Judy is a 35-year-old African American woman who is a fourth-year doctoral student in political science. She has been experiencing much anxiety about school and her relationships. Judy entered therapy to help her deal more effectively with stress.

Judy is politically active and is strongly Black identified. In the past several years she has been exploring feminist theories and considers herself a feminist. Although she has always been involved in issues central to the African American community, she feels most strongly connected to African American women. Judy, however, has felt increasingly isolated and alienated from many African American women who believe that sexism is a White women's issue.

Because of her strong feminist beliefs, Judy's community of friends is predominantly women, which has limited her romantic options as a heterosexual woman. On the outside, Judy says she has accepted the possibility that her values and education may decrease her chances of finding a compatible life partner yet she seems to be more ambivalent than she reports.

Judy's anxiety over relationships seems connected to the roles and expectations in her life. She seems to have a strong identity as a woman and as an African American, yet she may be struggling with the intersection between those two identities and their impact on her hopes for a supportive community and possibly even a long-term romantic relationship. The alienation and isolation she experiences adds to the level of stress in her life and creates barriers to any available inner resources.

Within therapy, Judy explored her image and expectations of herself and what she wanted out of her life. She identified conflicting goals that she had between some values that she was taught (e.g., support the struggle against racism no matter what) and her belief in paying attention to her own needs. She explored how her feminism and racial identity clashed at times as she struggled to find a community where she felt she belonged. In the African American community she was frustrated with a lack of attention to sexism and women's issues, yet she was even more fed up with the White feminist community and its unwillingness to examine its own racism. Judy may need to look inward to find a place where she can integrate and accept all of who she is.

Megan is a 24-year-old White woman who is also blind. She recently graduated with a degree in women's studies and political science. During the past several years, she became strongly involved at the women's center. Megan came to therapy to deal with her low self-esteem and depression.

Because Megan's parents had difficulty dealing with her disability, she was both sheltered and neglected as a child. She has internalized negative messages about being blind that affect every aspect of her life. When she was introduced to the women's community, she embraced the positive acceptance she found and began to focus on her identity as a woman.

Although Megan acknowledges difficulty dealing with her disability, she has been hesitant to form relationships with other people with disabilities. Whenever she examines her blindness, she feels it is ugly.

Megan's low self-esteem and depression seem strongly linked to her difficulty in accepting her disability. She seems to have chosen to celebrate the female part of her because it is more acceptable, yet she is unable to shake the other unacceptable parts of her. Her discomfort is so high that she hesitate to seek out positive relationships or role models with other people with disabilities.

If Megan chose to integrate her multiple identities, she would have to face her fears about being blind and she would need to reexamine her beliefs about what blind people are capable of doing. Rather than face those possible barriers, Megan has chosen to embrace her female self. Somehow she is able to identify sexism and externalize her anger toward the inequalities that women face, yet she has difficulty transferring those notions to her disability. To address these conflicting messages about herself, Megan needs to explore the core roots of oppression that lead her to devalue the many diverse aspects of herself.

COUNSELING IMPLICATIONS

These case examples illustrate the complexity and importance of considering multiple identities and realities in multicultural counseling. Without exploration of the multidimensional aspects of identity, psychotherapists increase the likelihood of misunderstanding or misinterpreting their clients' perspectives and actions.

Just as many authors have challenged the notions of traditional developmental theories that have often labeled women as developmentally delayed (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986), identity development theories also may make unjust assumptions about individuals' identity based only on their behavior. For example, an African American gay man who is strongly connected with both identities and is trying to be involved with these diverse communities might be perceived quite narrowly through current identity development theories. If he chose not to be very public with his gay identity with his family or within his church, he might be perceived as closeted. If at times he distanced himself from the African American community and associated with predominantly White gay friends, he might be perceived as denying his African American heritage. Neither of these identity development theories fully comprehends and allows for his multiple identities. If therapists base their understanding of identity on these available models, they can easily make assumptions about their clients' experiences and perspectives.

When therapists are able to identify and understand the complex nature of their clients' realities, they will be more equipped to help them deal with such issues as marginality, isolation, and internalized oppression. To clarify and expand understanding of the existing multiple options for identity resolution for members of more than one oppressed group and to build on the biracial identity model by Root (1990), the Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM) has been created. Figure 1 shows the four possible options for identity resolution that occur within a dynamic process of self-growth and exploration.

As is seen in the first two options of the MIM, some individuals may choose to identify with just one aspect of their identity. This option may be passive (allowing society or one's community or family to determine one's primary group) or active (making a conscious choice of self-identification). Part of this choice may
cause individuals to suppress one aspect of themselves to feel more accepted in their family or community.

Another option involves individuals who decide to embrace all aspects of their identities by living in separate and sometimes unconnected worlds (e.g., a nonlesbian Puerto Rican woman embracing her racial-ethnic heritage in her Puerto Rican community yet also becoming involved in predominantly White feminist groups where she can more fully celebrate her female self). In both of these communities she presents a one-dimensional, incomplete, and segmented self.

A final option for identity resolution for members of more than one oppressed group is to identify as a new group. By focusing on the intersections of their identities, these individuals may be able to integrate their multiple identities. In other words, rather than identifying as a woman or as person with a disability, a deaf woman might make connections with other women with disabilities so she no longer has to segment and dichotomize the different aspects of herself. These communities are appearing more frequently and offering new perspectives that challenge the status quo. Women of color, bisexual individuals, and gay and lesbian people of color are examples of communities that are embracing the intersections of their identities.

Within this model, all options are acceptable and create opportunities for positive self-esteem and pride as well as challenges to maintain an integrated sense of self. Figure 1 is drawn to exemplify the dynamic and fluid nature of this identity development process through its use of broken lines between the various options. Throughout one’s life, movement among these options occurs based on personal needs, reference group, or environment.

If we are to be supportive of our clients, we must also be able to understand and facilitate this integration of identity. Psychotherapists must be willing to challenge their assumptions about identity development and group identification if they are to create a responsive environment for their clients. Encouraging self-awareness of the available options for identity resolution and creating a supportive relationship for exploration are two vital goals for therapy with individuals who are members of more than one oppressed group. Being nonjudgmental and open to the strategies chosen by one’s clients is necessary to facilitate growth and insight. Such tasks are not easy in a culture and profession that often implies and directly states that healthy development occurs only in a specific manner.

Because such complexities have never been part of traditional psychological frameworks, we must make great efforts to retrain and reeducate ourselves. There are many unanswered questions to aid us in this process of fully understanding the complicated nature of human diversity. New training and research paradigms must be created to develop and perpetuate alternative perspectives or worldviews.

TRAINING AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS
Teaching the complexities of multicultural psychology is challenging at best when the field of psychology is still struggling to incorporate multicultural issues into the mainstream of the profession. So often, multicultural training occurs at the content level—teaching trainees and professionals about different oppressed groups and their perspectives. Such approaches segment and simplify the notions of diversity.

Process-oriented approaches allow for alternative models that emphasize self-knowledge, relationships, and worldviews (Myers, 1988; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991; Sue & Zane, 1987). Speight et al. (1991) have encouraged the redefinition of multicultural counseling using optimal theory, which emphasizes self-knowledge and uses experiential and didactic learning. If our training examines the underlying principles and worldview of psychology that may lead to fragmented identities, we will be better prepared to help our clients understand their own struggles.

Like training, psychological research has yet to embrace the full complexity of human diversity. New research questions and methods need to be designed to expand our understanding of identity development as well as traditional methodology (Helms, 1989; Speight et al., 1991). Exploring the realities of a multiple oppression from an emic perspective (using the worldview of the participants) that honors the experiences of those diverse individuals is crucial in order for us to comprehend the multidimensional nature of their lives.

CONCLUSION
The frameworks in this article illuminate the issues of multiple oppressions and their impact on the identity development process and offer new directions for multicultural counseling, training, and research. Although the issues presented challenge the universal claims of developmental theories and models, more research and exploration is needed to fully understand the multidimensional nature of human identity. We must expand our worldviews more broadly to understand and embrace the multiple realities of our clients and colleagues. By moving beyond simplistic frameworks, we inherently need to struggle with the challenges of changing the ways in which we view the world. This nexus of identities is a vital and necessary link to a more complete appreciation of the complexities of human diversity.

REFERENCES

JOURNAL OF COUNSELING & DEVELOPMENT • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1991 • VOL. 70 179
Reynolds and Pope


Amy L. Reynolds is a senior staff psychologist with University Counseling Services at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Raechelle L. Pope is a doctoral student in multicultural organization development at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to Amy L. Reynolds, University Counseling Services, S-330 Westlawn, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242.