White Students' Experiences of Privilege and Socioeconomic Disparities: Toward a Theoretical Model

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A theoretical model is developed for the process relatively privileged white students go through as they become more aware of their own socioeconomic and other advantages and come to terms with these within their community service learning placements. The model is supported with journal reflections from service-learners placed in inner-city homeless shelters to highlight stages of the proposed model. Resources for assisting students through the privilege awareness process and future research directions are identified.

It is important for students, faculty, staff, and other facilitators of the service-learning process to explore and understand their own and others' ideas about socioeconomics, poverty, and race before they attempt to function in socioeconomically-challenged, often culturally diverse and racialized environments (Dunlap, 1998b; O'Grady, 2000; Tatum, 1992). We present a theoretical model that explores the various ways that white[1] students from relatively privileged environments respond to and process socioeconomic and other demographic differences and similarities both during and after their service-learning experiences in inner-city homeless shelters housing people primarily of African, Latina, and European descent.

'Economically privileged,' for the purpose of this paper, is defined as having been reared in socioeconomic conditions that are markedly more financially stable and secure than the socioeconomic conditions of the community with which the students engage in their service-learning sites. The model has been developed through years of observing relatively privileged students adjust to and write about inner-city service-learning experiences. We describe the model and provide examples from a set of journals collected in 2005 from 13 service-learners placed in homeless shelters in a History course in the Midwest and a Human Development course in the Northeast (Green, 2006; see also Dunlap, 2000a, for similar context). Students do not necessarily go through the stages in a rigid temporal order, as student adjustment in the

service-learning process may begin at different points of the model. Adjustment may recur, be non-linear, and even curvilinear, depending upon individual students' past and present experiences and critical reflection processing. Thus, the stages are presented as moments that an economically privileged white service-learner could be in at any given time. We also are not applying this model, as a whole, to students of color, nor to whites from relatively lower socioeconomic groups, because it is based on our years of experience with white students from privileged backgrounds. However, we believe that there may be components of the model applicable to and useful to all students. We also recommend resources related to the model for assisting students through the service-learning process[2]. We conclude with ideas for future investigation.

The Proposed Model

Understanding one's own identity, including dimensions such as privilege and lack thereof, race, culture, etc., can be important to an accurate conception of oneself and crucial to functioning in a diverse and ever-changing world (Harter, 1999; Tatum, 1992; Wade, 2000). The realization of social and economic privilege can be difficult to accept for those in the early stages of privilege awareness or racial identity development (Herbes-Sommer, 2003; Tatum). This denial can interfere with effective engagement in a diverse community (Dunlap, 1998b & 2000a).

Further, guilt associated with privilege that arises for service-learners engaging in low socioeconomic settings can incapacitate students. Recognizing and addressing students' struggles with privilege, guilt, and related emotions can assist them in engaging more effectively in the community. As a result, some service-learners may find themselves more motivated to become activists engaged against the inherent socioeconomic disparities and racism found throughout our society (Wade).

The following model illustrates how "trigger events" can lead to "disequilibrium," and affect economically-privileged students engaged in service-learning.

Stage 1: Trigger Events

Service-learners' realization of their own socioeconomic privilege, and the accompanying internal struggles, often are triggered by a situation or event. Usually it is one in which the student is confronted with another's circumstance involving a great deal of disadvantage, making the former's privilege even more apparent (Dunlap, 1998b & 2000a; Green, 2001; Tatum, 1992). These "trigger events"[3] tend to create cognitive "disequilibrium." That is, a discomfort or confusion brought about by new information that must either be assimilated or accommodated into one's cognitive structure (Bochner, 1997; Festinger, 1957; Piaget, 1963; Wadsworth, 1996). One goal of critical reflection is to facilitate the 'accommodation' process: grappling with new information and potentially changing one's view so that new learning may occur about others and oneself (Harter, 1999). This contrasts with 'assimilation,' in which new information is made to fit one's existing view, potentially precluding learning. Thus, accommodated learning is the "epiphany," "illuminative," "ah-ha," or "lightbulb" moments that cause increased awareness (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996, p. 134;

Figure 1
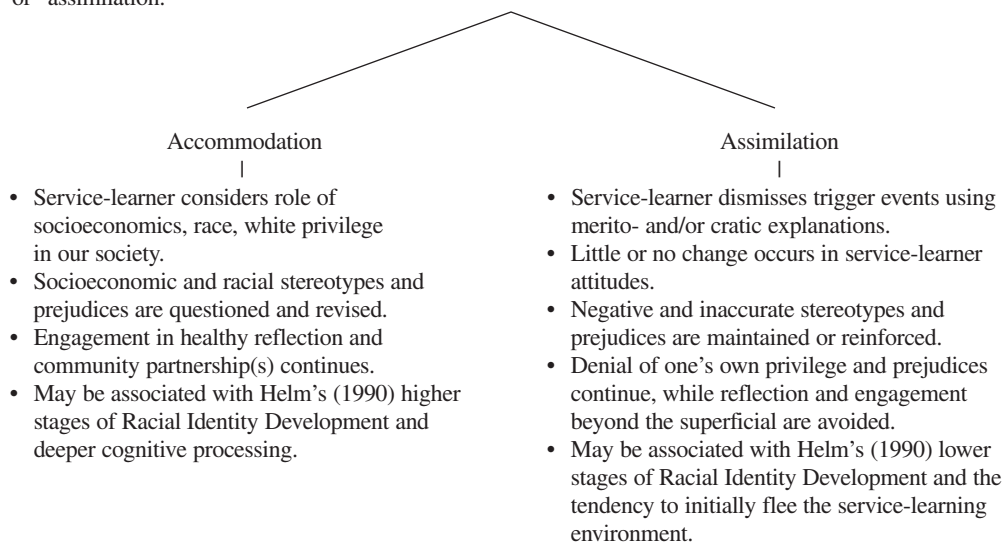*The Socioeconomic and White Privilege Awareness Process*

Stage 1–*Trigger Event(s)*: Trigger event(s) stimulates service-learner awareness of their own socioeconomic status and/or white privilege in contrast to community partners', resulting in "cognitive disequilibrium."

Stage 2–*Grappling*: Service-learner grapples with socioeconomic, white privilege, racial issues, and/or emotions. The meaning-making process begins.

Stage 3–*Personalization*: Service-learner listens to and communicates more intimately with community partners, and attempts to make greater meaning of what they are learning. The "self" continues to be challenged.

Stage 4–*The "Divided Self"*: Service-learner experiences a conflict between the intellectual and experiential self, and emotions such as "white guilt" as they continue their work in their service-learning environment, and further grapple to make meaning of the situation(s).

Stage 5–*Disequilibrium Resolution*: Service-learner reconciles/resolves the emotional confusion by cognitive "accommodation" or "assimilation."

Accommodation
- Service-learner considers role of socioeconomics, race, white privilege in our society.
- Socioeconomic and racial stereotypes and prejudices are questioned and revised.
- Engagement in healthy reflection and community partnership(s) continues.
- May be associated with Helm's (1990) higher stages of Racial Identity Development and deeper cognitive processing.

Assimilation
- Service-learner dismisses trigger events using merito- and/or cratic explanations.
- Little or no change occurs in service-learner attitudes.
- Negative and inaccurate stereotypes and prejudices are maintained or reinforced.
- Denial of one's own privilege and prejudices continue, while reflection and engagement beyond the superficial are avoided.
- May be associated with Helm's (1990) lower stages of Racial Identity Development and the tendency to initially flee the service-learning environment.

Stringer, 2004, pp. 99-100; Wade, 2000, p. 105). Reflection pertinent to social identity and privilege may contribute to an evolved sense of self and others (Harter).

Referring to Figure 1, the model begins with trigger events, which are common during service-learning because the context in which students operate often is different than that to which they are accustomed in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education (Dunlap, 2000a; Green, 2001). The trigger events necessarily make salient service-learners' own relative socioeconomic advantage, race, culture, and other differences. Trigger events often occur when service-learners begin to communicate with individual "others" (Green, 2006). The following student journal reflections were stimulated by trigger events at a homeless shelter in the Midwest:

> I met a man named [J.]…something he said really hit me in the heart, and was probably one of the defining moments during this experience. He and another guest were discussing the location of Wal-Mart, which is literally about 30 steps from the [shelter]. Then something [J.] said showed what lied beneath his relatively cheerful exterior, and really shed light on all of the people there. The other guest was poking fun at him because he didn't know that Wal-Mart was right there. [J.] then said, "Oh, I didn't even realize, *I always look down*…(then sarcastically as if to cover up the depth of the words that were just spoken)…looking for change…" As I churned out a chuckle to attempt to cover my feelings, I felt amazingly bad for these guys. The way he said, *I always look down*, just rattled me to the bone. [J.] and his friend were carrying on conversation like nothing was wrong, but at certain moments you heard things that sent a chill down your spine. As if you were watching a movie with extremely depressing parts. This was no movie; these were real people, with real problems. (Student 2, male; student's emphasis)

> During my last couple of visits helping out at the shelters, I opened up more to the guests and spent more time talking to them. I have also found out more reasons why people become homeless. Much of it has to do with job security and the wages that impact the economy. I have realized that no matter how good you may have it, it could be taken away from you at anytime…I met a woman who works for [a major airline] and she has been shifted from one state to another and having numerous amounts of pay cuts. She also went on to say that the amount of money she is making, there is not any way that she could make it on her own right now. I felt so badly for her because I knew that she was trying her best at making a living and she even said her-

self that she never would have thought that she would be living like a homeless person. She would work at [a major airport] field and drive to whatever [shelter] was closer for that evening and do the same thing over and over throughout the weeks. The final person that I came in contact with actually was escorted out of [the shelter] in handcuffs. He was younger than me and did not look homeless at all, but has had troubles with the law for some time. I will never forget seeing a young man crying and shaking as he was leaving, saying that he was cleaning up his ways and he didn't want to go back to prison. It even caused others to shed some tears as he was dragged away…(Student 7, female)

> I have had a couple of experiences that have caused me to pause and consider the situation of a couple of the guests and relate it to my own life. In truth, many of us have, at one time or another, found ourselves in a situation that if it had not been for the help of family or friends we could easily have been in the same situation as the guests…This makes me wonder where the friends and family of these people are-do they have any immediate family near or has the familial relationship in part caused some of the problems?…It was interesting to see a complete attitude shift when a family came in with a small child. The little girl was absolutely beautiful and when they came in after dinner had been served, the father was only interested in making sure his daughter had some dinner. I looked at the three of them and could not help but wonder what happened that had brought them to the shelter. They were well spoken and better dressed than the other guests. Where are that little girl's grandparents? (Student 1, female)

In these reflections, students reveal that a particular situation, event, or interaction "hit," "rattled," or otherwise unsettled them or caused disequilibrium or dissonance.

Service-learning environments tend to be rich in trigger events where students experience parts of society that contrast with their more privileged life circumstances. As examples, two other white students specifically grapple with their sense of socioeconomic privilege, as they engage in an inner-city homeless shelter in the Midwest:

> This experience has impacted me drastically because you really take advantage of your life and the things you have. These guests all have some belongings in a couple of bags. I am so lucky and thankful for all that my parents did for me as a child. All my life I've been in private schools. When I came home I kissed my hardwood floors and I thanked God for all that I had. I also felt helpless, like there wasn't anything that I could do for them. (Student 5, female)

I never think about when I go to the ATM and go to a fast food place since I am hungry and want something to eat. I am able to do that and I never think about how unfair it is to people that they can't even get food. I now realize that I am fortunate that I am able to eat what I want. I also try to save food for leftovers instead of throwing it out right away like I used to do. With having my own place to live, I feel more fortunate now that I have a roof over my head and I can use the heat when I am cold or the air when I am hot. Some people don't even get a chance to have these amenities, and now I realize how lucky I am. (Student 7, female)

Awakening to one's socioeconomic privilege emerged for these two students as they juxtaposed gratitude for their own history and living situation with concern for the needs of the individuals they encountered at the homeless shelter. The quotes indicate that the students began to gain a basic, first-hand awareness of socioeconomic disparities in our society.

In U.S. society, while people of all racial backgrounds live in lower socioeconomic and even poverty conditions, a disproportionate number of minorities live in poverty, while a disproportionate number of whites live in relative socioeconomic privilege (Feagin, 2006; Harris & Curtis, 1998; McAdoo, 2001). As a consequence, U.S. minorities tend to have one-eighth the average individual accumulated net wealth of whites (Herbes-Sommer, 2003). Such realities, as they become obvious to privileged white service-learners, can be overwhelming, as many do not see their social privilege, nor how their "whiteness" is a matter of racial significance (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997; McMillen, 1995).

Thus, trigger events can provide a stimulus for introducing the concept of *white* privilege and may challenge service-learners' prior notions of what it means to be white in U.S. society. White privilege is a complex concept of which whites often are unaware or do not recognize, yet many reap its benefits every day (Fine et al., 1997; Jackson, 1999). It is a system of unearned benefits that whites can take for granted, in part, because our social system has traditionally supported such benefits for whites. For example, white privilege operates when using a credit card or writing a check; white individuals do not have to wonder whether skin color will raise financial stability questions for the person with whom they are transacting. Similarly, they typically do not worry that they may be followed while shopping as if they may steal (McIntosh, 1990). Furthermore, given that 90% of U.S. K-12 teachers are white and 36% of their students are ethnic minorities, most white students do not have to think about whether they will have teachers that look like them (Howard, 2004).

Often, such everyday situations are perceived by whites as normative. But as service-learners enter into environments where whiteness and/or economic security are not the norm, the opportunity exists to question the status quo and the privileges most whites enjoy. As an example, the following student reveals her increasing awareness of white privilege amid service-learning experiences in a domestic violence shelter in the Northeast:

[At one point] I asked point blank, "Do any people of color work at the [women's shelter]?" I knew I hadn't seen every employee...but all the ones I'd seen appeared to be white. [The two supervisors] thought out loud for a couple of minutes but were stumped. [Eventually they answered saying that] the most was one woman who was maybe-part-Hispanic-but-maybe-or-maybe-didn't-speak-Spanish. Just getting bilingual staff was another issue of its own for the [shelter]. [Then one supervisor] said that she hadn't thought about that before—being white—but that yes, since so much of the client base is of color…why no staff? I told them that the other shelters I worked with were in much whiter areas than [this more diverse geographic location], it seemed like it shouldn't be so hard. They agreed and [the same supervisor], especially, seemed genuinely concerned and interested in the problem. So am I. It really bothers me. (Student 11, female)

Stage 2: Grappling

Trigger events are not necessarily negative for service-learners, but are an important part of the socioeconomic and/or cross-cultural understanding process. However, once a socioeconomic, racial, or cultural trigger event occurs, one may have no past experience upon which to draw to understand or adequately process the occurrence. Students may experience a wide variety of emotions as they begin to understand and search for explanations for the socioeconomic inequities, institutional racism, and systems of privilege in place in our country. For example, three students reflect on their varied emotions emerging from a service-learning experience in a homeless shelter in the Midwest:

After starting the service work I realized how angry at the world I was. I sat down and really thought about why I was angry. I figured out part of it is because if you turn on the television, open a magazine and even books you are surrounded by people that have money and all their life is money. Mostly on the television, they have "reality" television on people that have money…It just makes me mad that I have to wake up everyday in a world that is so disrespectful to people. (Student 4, female)

[At the shelter] I did a little bit of everything, such as laundry and cleaning, but I spent most of the time in the kitchen helping to cook food and serve the guests' dinner. While all the people were eating, I had some time to sit and think about my feelings, and I noticed how sorry I felt for these seemingly decent human beings and how much I wished I could help them all. However, at the same time I felt angry that our country, which is one of the wealthiest and most powerful in the world, could allow this epidemic of homelessness to occur. (Student 10, female)

The last couple of weeks a full family had been coming in to the [shelter]. Well, a full family minus the father which I assume was the reason they were there. A mother, a daughter, and a son, all homeless and soon without a place to go. I couldn't even imagine this family sleeping in the woods or something of that sort. It really broke my heart…Sometimes it is not some huge institutional system like the health care system, or our global economic policies that cause homelessness. Sometimes it comes down to the ignorant and greedy choices that individuals make that throw completely innocent and good people into poverty. (Student 2, male)

In these reflections, the students are expressing disequilibrium or dissonance between what they thought they knew and what they are finding to be true, and their emotional reactions to that dissonance. Student 4 reveals an intense reaction of anger, while Student 10 expresses sadness, pity and perhaps guilt, as well as anger for the situations encountered. Student 2 also expresses sadness and discomfort, as well as some new cognitive constructs that could be connected to the situation. As these excerpts indicate, service-learner emotions may vary, from sadness, guilt, shock, fear, anxiety, anger, and relief, to gratitude for their own more privileged living situations. The emotional reaction is an indication of the student's disequilibrium and the beginning of the meaning-making process (Green, 2006). It is proposed here that it is, in part, the role of service-learning facilitators to identify this disequilibrium within the reflection process and assist students as they work through it. Service-learning-based disequilibrium, when properly supported, can enable students to reevaluate society, their place in society, their and others' identity, and perspectives on socioeconomics and race (e.g., Dunlap, 2000a; Tatum, 1992). Through reflection and discussion, students may begin to diminish the disequilibrium between their past and present experiences.

Stage 3: Personalization

Sometimes student service-learning journals indicate that not only do students tend to grapple or

struggle with their sense of the world as they know it, but they also tend to engage in the process of "personalization" (Green, 2006). Personalization is the process by which students, by listening to, and/or communicating more intimately with, individuals in their service-learning site, transform from distant observers of others outside of themselves and their environments, and instead consider the meaning of who they are with respect to the new individuals and environments they are encountering. The process of personalization allows students to begin to genuinely understand the multiple dimensions of homelessness. Once students interact with the staff and especially the guests of homeless shelters, they began to understand the different issues surrounding homelessness. As students observe and talk with individuals in homeless situations, they often relate on a personal level and begin to humanize them. The issue of homelessness becomes contextualized and the guests become real people. It is particularly in the personalization stage that students express the clearest articulation of their privilege and preconceived notions and stereotypes of people (Green). The process of personalization serves as the core of the meaning-making process for these students, which propels them toward advanced personal learning and connection to the course content.

The language used in student reflections helps to create mental schemas and concepts, as well as scripts, behavioral expectations, and mores for the student(s) using them. Direct contact with people at a service site provides opportunities for students' perspectives to be challenged and transformed. By journeying through the personalization process, students challenge stereotypes and transform service experiences into service-learning experiences (Green, 2006). Grappling with disequilibrium and the resulting personalization appears to be the precursor to individual changes in attitude (Festinger, 1957; Wadsworth, 1996). After multiple service-learning experiences and multiple reflections, student processing may begin to reveal the personalization process. As examples:

I am now not scared to walk by a homeless person or talk to one. I know that they are human beings…They are very well mannered people. I think that some of the causes of people being homeless are that they can't keep a job, some of the people have mental issues, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and some just don't care. (Student 7, female)

What I saw at the shelter this past semester along with my own experiences shows me that we are all alike. Anyone can end up down on their luck. And without structures and resources available in the end one couldn't tell the difference between

two people who were homeless in terms of where they started from (Student 3, male)

Through their interactions at the homeless shelters, the students began to become aware of both the differences and similarities between themselves and others. They begin to develop a new understanding of, and questions about, the workings of social structures, the "social power" that accompanies them, and the relationship between one's identity and such structures (O'Grady, 2000, p. 5). Their emerging awareness continues to provide a challenge, and may create a sense of division or ambivalence within the self.

Stage 4: The "Divided Self"

Many students may enter the service-learning placement intellectually sensitive to many needs in society, with a good grasp of some of the academic aspects of socioeconomic inequities, classism, racism, sexism, etc. They also may be intellectually aware of the effects of such inequities and systems on the lives of people, and of some of the attempts to alleviate the problems of inequitable treatment and discrimination. However, relatively few white students from privileged backgrounds will have first-hand experience with classism and racism from the victim's perspective (Feagin, 1998; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Feagin & Vera, 1995). The collision of the intellectual and the experiential results in a divided self. Passages from two white service-learners' journals in the Northeast illustrate this:

> I feel that in terms of racism, my intellectual mind is different from my emotional mind. My intellectual mind is free of racism…However, I still find myself reacting differently to African Americans than I do to...whites. I'm often confused about why I perceive people the way I do…Why does my mind respond any differently to a black woman...than it does to a white woman…? (Student 12, female)

> It's an odd situation, I have prejudices, yet at the same time I do not believe in their validity. (Student 13, male)

Thus, for service-learners engaged in experiences that bring to the fore such tensions, their intellectual and experiential selves may collide to the point that their experiential self struggles in processing these experiences. Their academic theories and personal ideologies may not fit exactly nor explain their responses, and they may feel somewhat lost concerning the situation (Bochner, 1997). White students' "academic awareness of inequality is grounded in others' experiences of discrimination and not their own experiences of privilege," and so there may remain a considerable "distance between the experi-

ence of racial inequality and privilege" (Pence & Fields, 1999, p. 151). To understand and incorporate these feelings and ideas into their worldview, the service-learning student must allow their service-learning and personal experiences to resonate within them through the critical reflection process in order to create meaning and therefore close the gap between the academic and experiential selves. The result may be a more coherent and fluid concept of their identity as a service-learner.

Thus, for many newer service-learners a chasm may exist between that which they may know intellectually and that which they have actually experienced in their lives. As one student explains the chasm:

> This experience helped me realize how lucky some people are and what we take for granted. Understanding the homeless is also very stereotyped [sic] by people. You really have to have a hands-on experience to know the real meaning of homelessness. Living in a country and a town where the word homeless isn't exactly in everyone's vocabulary makes me realize how much people really want not to deal with this subject. It is part of life whether we like it or not. (Student 7, female)

Thus, this division of knowledge and experience, when it occurs, may manifest itself in a resulting disequilibrium and divided sense of the intellectual vs. experiential selves (Bochner, 1997), depending on the student's awareness of and experience with particular social issues. A student at this stage will continue to struggle to reconcile their cognitive or intellectual knowledge and their emotionally-laden experiential knowledge, which may lead to grappling with new conceptions of identity and privilege.

While reconciling the intellectual and experiential selves, guilt is one of the emotions with which students may grapple the most. Guilt is a distinct emotion that grows out of the experience of realizing one's privilege. The emotion of guilt is complicated and best described by Walbotto and Scherero (1995) as a specific type of anxiety stimulated by the fear of one's own conscience either before or after an event has occurred. It is characterized by an awareness of a breach of rules or norms and arises from a resulting conflict between the ego and superego. Upon realizing the immediate presence of forms of historical oppression present in our society, one's internal narrative about one's self and conception of one's place in the world is interrupted, causing a conflict of feelings and subsequent guilt and possible shame (Walbotto & Scherero). It is here that students may become either immobilized by their feelings of guilt or overly defensive about their privilege. Either

response may cause students to be drawn to interrupt the grappling and personalization processes, and instead to quickly assimilate their experiences to avoid the cognitive and emotional discomfort that can accompany the privilege-awareness process (Tatum, 1992). As an example, the following student reveals cognitive grappling as he tries to better understand people who are homeless, and begins to identify feelings of privilege and guilt during his work in an inner-city homeless shelter:

> I still had this horrible misconception that they truly were that stereotypical dirty drunk in a back alley…all those misconceptions [of homeless people] fell apart quite quickly. Even at first glance my thoughts of what, and who these people were changed dramatically. I was a little drawn back during the beginning of the evening I must admit. Despite the fact that most of the men and women looked rather normal and even friendly I still had reservations about approaching them. As the night progressed though, I started talking to quite a few people and they seemed, if anything, like everyday people. As I actually interacted with these people, I began to feel more and more guilty. These were just men and women who lost their jobs, or were part of an abusive home, things of that nature. (Student 2, male)

Cognitive and emotional grapplings such as these can be elusive as such processing can be clouded not only by guilt, but by *white guilt*, if not dealt with supportively (Dunlap, 1998b; Helms, 1990; Tatum; Wade, 2000). Conflicts or divides within the self is the point at which a white student is most likely to struggle with white guilt. White guilt is an important emotion in the process of developing one's racial identity as it "officially recognizes one's realization of...past and present participation in a racist society...and the knowledge of the advantages one receives from being in a privileged group" (Swim, 1999, p. 500; see also Walbotto & Scherero). However, with supports and resources in place that delineate this process (e.g., Dunlap, 1998b & 2000a; Green, 2001; Green, 2006; McIntosh, 1990; Tatum), white students can move through their initial feelings of white guilt, focus on the engagement process, and even be "motivated" to commit to social justice work (Wade, p. 102). That is, students can begin to resolve the cognitive and emotional disequilibrium that often accompanies the service-learning process.

Stage 5: Disequilibrium Resolution

We propose that students tend to resolve the disequilibrium that often accompanies the service-learning process either by cognitively assimilating or accommodating their experiences. As mentioned earlier, if service-learners "assimilate" (Piaget, 1963; Wadsworth, 1996) their early service-learning experiences, they will simply fit their new experiences into the stereotypical cognitive concepts they already have about the groups with which they are working. However, if they "accommodate" (Piaget, 1963; Wadsworth, 1996) their service-learning experiences, they will begin to revise their stereotypical ideas and develop them into more open, complex, and accurate concepts.

Accommodation is a more in-depth form of cognitive processing associated with a deeper level of, or more complex, cross-boundary exchange that, we propose, mirrors Helms' (1990) higher-level stages of racial identity development (i.e., the Pseudo-Independent, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy stages). Accommodation is less likely to be associated with simple, negative, and inaccurate stereotyping that, we propose, mirrors Helms' earlier-level stages of racial identity development (i.e. the Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration stages). The accommodation process requires in-depth grappling with new information or experiences encountered and the *learning* of something new-whereas assimilation allows one to forgo the in-depth grappling and superficially categorize the information or experiences into one's existing world view. As with most learning contexts, cognitive grappling is healthy as long as reflective opportunities and access to resources are in place as part of the service-learning experience.

Referring to the work of Helms (1990) and Tatum (1992), the initial stages of racial identity development involve a lack of awareness or understanding of the institutionalized presence of racism and/or one's own white privilege. These early stages often are characterized by "colorblindness" and a naïve fear of, or curiosity about, people from other ethnic groups as a result of stereotypes developed from inaccurate media images or racist attitudes of family members or friends (Rice & Pollack, 2000, p. 130). It may be at the early stages of racial identity development that service-learners may most likely want to flee an unfamiliar service-learning environment, request a change in their placement location, drop their service-learning course, and/or delay starting their assignment to postpone further engaging in the environment. For example, one student reflects at the beginning of her service experience:

> They moved me into the kitchen to do dishes. I didn't mind for a couple of reasons. [For one], I was nervous. I didn't know how to approach these people. I was afraid anything I said might be taken the wrong way, or would come out wrong. So I just watched from the door. (Student 7, female)

However, experiences with or increased exposure to individuals of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds lead to the acquisition of new knowledge and comfort regarding both culture and racism (Stephan & Brigham, 1985) and movement toward more advanced white racial identity stages.

At the most advanced levels of racial identity, one experiences somewhat of a racial self-actualization characterized by the consistent openness to new information and experiences, and an ability to consider various aspects of racial issues. Helms (1990) states that white students at the higher levels of racial identity are more likely to *question* stereotypes as they grapple to incorporate new, more accurate information which in our view is consistent with the definition of accommodation. It is proposed here that service-learning students' comfort with dealing with ideas of race, difference, privilege, etc. are influenced in part by their racial awareness and racial identity development stages. Racial identity stages may influence how students process and resolve circumstances in a multicultural service-learning setting. It may influence whether students dismiss trigger events and related experiences, or whether they will try to deeply process and learn from their experiences.

The following students grapple and come to a newer, less stereotypical and more accurate understanding of homeless individuals:

> These people were the exact opposite of the typical stereotypes I have regarding homeless people. I envisioned them to be dirty, wearing old rags, walking around with a shopping cart. But all of these people were clean, adequately dressed. Many people believe that they are better than homeless people…I don't feel that way. (Student 3, male)

> I've learned that anyone can become homeless and the reasons that force people into homelessness are many and also may vary. But I believe that the leading cause of homelessness is the inability to afford housing. Low-income people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, child-care, healthcare and education. But there are many more reasons why people become homeless. These reasons include poverty, disabilities (untreated mental illness), substance abuse/drugs, domestic violence, gambling addictions, destroyed homes (fires), and the loss of jobs. I've learned that the homeless consist of all races and ages of people. (Student 5, female)

In these examples, the students clearly accommodate previous notions of homeless individuals into a new cognitive construct based on service-learning experiences, and articulate a change in their world view. This process may not be the same for every service-learner and, again, may depend to a great extent on

their privilege awareness and/or racial identity stage(s). It is proposed here that the racial identity process and service-learning experience influence each other. The racial identity process affects and is affected by a service-learning experience. The service-learning experience affects and is affected by the racial identity development process. The better the service-learner is supported by reflective opportunities and access to resources, the more favorably he or she may move through the disequilibrium resolution process. The next section will explore further possible supports for assisting students in this process.

Privilege Awareness Supports and Resources

A number of previous studies suggest that students do indeed struggle with and often grow in relation to socioeconomic and racial identity, white privilege, and other issues of difference when encountering new environments (Berson, 1997; Boss, 1994; Coles, 1993; Damon-Moore, 1997; Dunlap, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2000a; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Tatum, 1992). Issues of privilege, stages of racial identity development, and struggles with socioeconomic and racial differences often appear in service-learner journal writings. We proposed earlier that because relatively privileged service-learners' knowledge initially may be somewhat removed, separated, or independent from actual hands-on experiences, a divided self may be experienced. Notions such as the divided self (Bochner, 1977) and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) seem to articulate and explain what may be a common experience for many in terms of the emotional struggle that can accompany the community engagement process (Dunlap, 1998b). Helping students to understand concepts such as privilege, whiteness, and racial identity through readings and discussions is the first step in assisting them through the privilege awareness process (e.g., Howard, 2004; McIntosh, 1990; O'Grady, 2000; Tatum, 1992 & 1999). However, not every student will connect right away to these issues.

Some students may find ideas such as racial identity to be irrelevant and even nonexistent. When racial identity development is acknowledged by students, however, race is usually only conceived as a facet of identity for members of ethnic groups that typically do not fall under the racial category of "white." Scholars such as Feagin and Vera (1995), Fine et al. (1997), and Howard (2004) have noted that even today, some people believe race and racism are phenomena that do not relate to white individuals. Helping students to understand that race applies to everyone is useful. For example, many students are surprised, and also relieved, to discover that most

children notice skin color and other cues for socialized race no later than the age of three (Aboud, 1988; Clark, 1988; Ramsey, 1987). Nevertheless, young white children often are discouraged from acknowledging, processing, and/or discussing these differences, and many students can recall this in their own lives. They may speak of adults tending to be embarrassed by children's attempts to understand their race-based observations and therefore send the message that race is a taboo topic (Ramsey, 1987; Tatum, 1999). Many students can relate to Tatum's (1992, p. 5; Tatum, 1999) notion that "white children quickly become aware that their questions about race raise adult anxiety, and as a result, they learn not to ask the questions." By helping students to recall and process their early experiences involving race, they become increasingly aware that the avoidance of race-related perceptions and discussions can implicitly promote a false sense of equal opportunity that allows white children to grow up not only denying whiteness as a racial construct itself but also allows them to do this in a state of unawareness of the systems of white privilege active in society (McIntosh, 1990). Further, white youth who have been taught to avoid race may begin to accept the myth of meritocracy, believing that the efforts of every individual are fairly and equitably rewarded. This notion of a just society of equal opportunity and rewards contrasts and conflicts with the reality of a racism-plagued society, and unconsciously serves to perpetuate this system (Feagin & Vera; Herbes-Sommers, 2003).

According to Tatum (1992), to develop a positive or healthy sense of white racial identity, students need to embrace their whiteness, accept the socialized implications of being white, and reconstruct a view of themselves as a racialized being that does not rely on the alleged superiority of one racial group. The positive evolution of a white racial identity involves realization about, and efforts toward abandonment of, racism, as well as a resulting less-racist white identity. This journey can occur over a variety of steps or stages described by Helms (1990) and Tatum. Each white service-learner's primary stage of racial identity development may be reflected in how that individual approaches the differences and similarities that he/she encounters-not only in the classroom curriculum but also in the service-learning environment and experiences.

In addition to familiarizing service-learning students with concepts such as racial identity, we recommend the following. First, facilitate and mediate a regular or consistent critical reflection process to provide students with the support their cognitive or emotional grapplings may need (Cooper, 1998; Dunlap, 1998d & 2000a; Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996; Goldsmith, 1993; Green, 2006). Second, provide reasonable freedom, opportunities, and appropriate boundaries for dealing with socioeconomic status, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and other such issues in their written and verbal reflections (Dunlap; Dunlap & Coughlin, 1999; Green, 2001; Howard, 2004; Wade, 2000; Williams, Dunlap, & McCandies, 1999). Third, help students understand the diversity that exists even among themselves with respect to personality, racial identity development, and other social-cognitive style factors (Sperling, Wang, Kelly, & Hritsuk, 2003). Fourth, provide students with curricular resources that will assist not only in their intellectual development but also in their psychosocial adjustment to multicultural experiences (e.g., O'Grady, 2000; Tatum, 1992 & 1999). Fifth, make the best use possible of the critical reflection process with prompting questions that will encourage accommodation, especially for students who seem inclined toward assimilation. In some of our courses, we utilize narratives involving race (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1996), films such as *Crash* (Haggis, 2005), and documentaries such as *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Herbes-Sommers, 2003). Such resources complement course readings, but also engage students' emotions (Dunlap, 2000b). Such resources may cause students to consider others' historical and current experiences. Sixth, clearly articulate to students the breadth and depth of the support systems available to them, which may include particular faculty, staff, administrators, college offices, community members, peers, their own family and friendship networks, diversity support groups, curricular resources, Web site resources, and technological supports such as list-servs (Dunlap, 1998d; Zlotkowski, 1998). These kinds of supports should help service-learners gain a better understanding of the diverse society that surrounds them and better visualize the ways in which they may be able to both learn from and make a difference in their service-learning and beyond.

Future Research Directions

There are many possibilities for exploring and further developing this theoretical model. For one, the model could be tested empirically with service-learning students from a wide range of socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, and both genders. Further, using Tatum's (1992) qualitative method or Bernard's (1994) Topical 2 method of qualitative data analysis (and used in Dunlap, 2000a), studies could be conducted to examine the frequency and quality of which service-learner journals address privilege awareness. Reflections also could be analyzed for their fit with specific racial identity development stages. If students' racial identity development stage scores were assessed (Helms, 1990), as well as out-

come measures concerning their service-learning experiences (Bringle, 2002), correlations could be conducted to assess whether there is indeed a significant association between higher levels of racial identity development and quality of experience or satisfaction within multicultural service-learning placements. Such approaches would help to clarify the limitations of privilege awareness and racial identity development stages within the service-learning context.

Models and analyses also could be developed specifically for students of color engaged in the service-learning process, to gain a better understanding of how their trigger events, cognitive and emotional grapplings, racial identity development, ways of resolving situations, and resources are similar and different than those of white students. Along these lines, for example, Davi (2006) explores the service-learning adjustment process for students of color, and such work could be extended along the lines presented here.

Studies also could be conducted to test whether or not providing students up front with this and similar models aids in their adjustment and learning (e.g., makes them feel more confident, more prepared, more effective, or more anxious, less prepared, less effective). Studies could be conducted to reveal whether and how such preparatory information is useful to newer service-learners and seasoned service-learners.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this model will assist faculty, students, practitioners, and community partners in identifying a continuum of possible service-learner developmental issues and responses. The model suggests that reactions to trigger events and the emotions that can accompany them need to be addressed as early as possible, so that individuals are more likely to advance through the service-learning process and engage as effectively as possible across socioeconomic and other borders. Students may have to become comfortable with themselves, as socioeconomic and racial beings, before they can invoke or create change-or be changed themselves-within diverse environments. If students can be better informed of the privilege discovery process, they might be less overwhelmed and less likely to want to quit when they experience the uncertainties that accompany this process. Perhaps addressing the privilege discovery process and the disequilibrium that often occurs in service-learning before students begin their experiences will prepare students more effectively for the transformational possibilities of service-learning. The model proposed offers a preliminary effort to understand white students' privilege-awareness process in the context of service-learning. We hope it will inspire further thought, student support, research, and better understanding of the role of privilege within the service-learning experience. Service-learning may be more cognitively enriching and fulfilling, and more accurately reflect the needs and experiences of our diverse and ever-changing students and society, if accompanied by better education about, and support concerning, privilege-related issues.

Notes

[1] The authors recognize that there is more diversity *within* any given racial, ethnic, or cultural group than between these groups. When using terms such as "white," "black," or "of color," the authors are addressing the U.S. racial socialization process in general. We certainly recognize that individual differences and experiences exist among each group as well as within any social-cognitive or socialization process.

[2] Resources will be provided in our paper on how to assist students through the privilege-awareness process in general. Each of the authors structure student journal assignments differently. For details on how each structures and evaluates their students' journal assignments, see Davi (2006), Dunlap (1998d), and Green (2006).

[3] The term "trigger events" was used by psychologist R.J. Rummel (1976) concerning intergroup relations and events that can precede intergroup conflict. However, this term has not been previously applied to service-learning.

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