

• **Professional Forum**

**Advancing Womanist Identity Development:  
Where We Are and Where We Need to Go**

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*Scholars have called for increased attention to within-group variability in models and measures of identity development. As a step toward responding to these calls, the current review focuses on the womanist identity development model as a model of gender-related identity development that has been argued to be applicable to women across racial/ethnic, class, and other groups. The review provides an introduction to the womanist identity development model and its operationalization, critically analyzes literature on the model and its measurement, and explores directions for further development of womanist identity development theory and research.*

Identity development models have made important contributions to the counseling psychology literature. In fact, several chapters in the first and second editions of the *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2001) were dedicated to theory and research on racial/ethnic identity development. Models of identity development for women (e.g., Downing & Roush, 1985) and lesbian/gay persons (e.g., Cass, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996) also have been proposed. Some identity development models have been criticized, however, for having a singular perspective on identity that ignores the reality of many people's lives as members of more than one subordinated group (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). For example, authors of the feminist identity development model (Downing & Roush, 1985) and other scholars (e.g., Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002a, 2002b; Vandiver, 2002) expressed concern that this model did not take into account experiences of racial/ethnic minority women. Helms's (1990b, as cited in Carter & Parks, 1996) womanist identity development model, however, is a model of gender-related identity development that Ossana, Helms, and Leonard (1992) argued applies to women across racial/ethnic, class, and other groups. The proposed broad applicability of the womanist identity development model represents an important contribution to the identity development literature that warrants a review of the model's utility, applicability, and areas for development. Thus, the purposes of the present review

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are to provide an introduction to the womanist identity development model and its operationalization, critically analyze literature exploring the model and its measurement, and propose directions for further development of womanist identity development theory and research.

In addition, the womanist identity development model (like many other identity development models) has the potential to move beyond its original focus on a single aspect of identity (i.e., gender) to capture the diversity and complexity of women's self-concepts as shaped by multiple personal and group identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation). By moving toward this goal, the identity development literature could better capture the diversity in the identities of the persons it attempts to describe and therefore provide for individuals, counseling psychologists, and society a language and framework that enriches understanding of the complexity of persons' identities. Thus, in highlighting areas for future theory development and research, the present review will begin to address how the womanist identity development model can attend to women's understanding of their own multiple identities. No prior critical review of the womanist identity development literature has been published. Thus, the current review could serve as useful groundwork for stimulating future work on womanist identity development and other models to propel this literature toward attending to the identity development of women from diverse backgrounds.

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE WOMANIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

Articulations of the womanist identity development model suggest that it draws from extant literature on gender identity (e.g., Bond, 1982; Condry, 1984; Josselson, 1973; Marcia & Friedman, 1970), the work of Black feminist writers (e.g., Brown, 1989; Walker, 1983), and conceptualizations of racial identity development (e.g., Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984). More specifically, Ossana et al. (1992) suggested that a common premise of extant models of gender identity is that healthy gender identity development for women involves moving from external and societal definitions of womanhood to an internal self-definition. Thus, womanist identity development is characterized by moving from an externally based to an internally based definition of oneself as a woman. Next, Ossana et al. acknowledged that the term *womanist* was appropriated from the work of Black feminist writers to signify that the process outlined in the model is similar across various groups of women (e.g., races, social classes, political orientations). It is important to note, however, that this use of the term *womanist* is somewhat different from Walker (1983), Brown (1989), and others' definitions of womanism as a conscious-

ness that views racial, gender, and other oppressions and identities as inextricably linked. Finally, Ossana et al. (1992) stated that the proposed "stage-wise developmental process" (p. 403) of the womanist identity developmental model was extrapolated from extant identity development models, particularly those of Cross (1971) and Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979).

Womanist identity development consists of four stages or sets of attitudes that outline a progression toward "abandonment of external definitions and adaptation of internal standards of womanhood" (Ossana et al., 1992, p. 403). Ossana et al. (1992) and Carter and Parks (1996) described the stages of the womanist identity development model. According to their descriptions, women in the first stage, Preencounter, conform to rigid societal values that tend to belittle women and privilege men. Preencounter is also characterized by a denial of societal prejudice and discrimination against women. Contact with new information or experiences may result in movement into the second stage, Encounter, where Preencounter values are challenged. During Encounter, women become more aware of sexism and identify more with womanhood. They also explore alternative ways to conceptualize the roles of women and men. The third stage, Immersion-Emersion, is characterized by two phases. During the first phase, women tend to idealize women and reject patriarchal definitions of womanhood. During the latter phase, women search for positive definitions of womanhood and seek affiliation with other women. Finally, during the capstone stage, Internalization, women integrate a personally defined positive view of womanhood into their identity "without undue dependence on either sexist societal norms or the antithetical positions of the women's movement" (Carter & Parks, 1996, p. 74).

Parks, Carter, and Gushue (1996) suggested parallels between racial and womanist identity development for Black women (and presumably other women from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds) but not necessarily for White women. They argued that for both Black and White women, womanist identity development involves progression from a position of social devaluation. Furthermore, for Black women, racial identity development also involves development from a position of social devaluation. For White women, however, racial identity development involves development from a position of power and privilege. Thus, links between womanist and racial identity development might differ for women of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Scholars have highlighted the potential usefulness of the womanist identity development model for counseling/therapy. For example, Carter and Parks (1996) suggested that women with Encounter and Immersion-Emersion attitudes are likely to experience substantial shifts in their self-concept, values, and ways of coping and thus may experience greater levels of psychological distress than women with Preencounter and Internalization attitudes. Thus, an appropriate goal for counseling/therapy may be to help

women with Encounter and Immersion-Emersion attitudes develop new ways of being. Indeed, Ossana et al. (1992) suggested that clients expressing Encounter and Immersion-Emersion attitudes might benefit from joining women's support groups where they can be exposed to a variety of women's self-definitions and can openly explore their own perceptions of gender bias. Finally, according to the womanist identity development model, healthy development is marked by a positive view of womanhood along with personal and ideological flexibility regarding one's role and identity as a woman (Carter & Parks, 1996; Ossana et al., 1992). Thus, a possible goal in therapy may be to facilitate development of healthier womanist identity development attitudes (e.g., Internalization). Clearly, as with any other therapeutic goal and conceptualization, this is a value-laden endeavor. Thus, it is essential that therapists be clear about their own motivations for such goals and act according to the best interest of their clients. In addition, potential uses of the womanist identity development model for therapy/counseling must be examined empirically.

#### **WOMANIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT, WOMANISM, AND FEMINIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

Womanist identity development should be distinguished from (a) womanist consciousness and (b) feminist identity development. First, despite the shared use of the term *womanist*, the womanist identity development model was not intended to outline the process of development of a womanist consciousness. Garth (1994) identified womanism (as well as Black feminism and Afrikan womanism) as a response to the historic and continued invisibility of African American women in European American middle-class feminist movements. African American women (and women from other racial/ethnic backgrounds) have a long history of leadership and involvement in the feminist movement. Indeed, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and other African American women were some of the foremothers of the feminist and women's suffrage movements (Kesselman, 1999). Nevertheless, racism, nativism, and classism shaped the early suffrage movement, and some White suffragists' narrow focus on gender discrimination excluded concerns of African American women and other women who viewed issues of race, gender, and class as inextricably linked (Brown, 1989; Kesselman, 1999). For example, some White suffragists denied African American women's petitions for the right to vote and argued that African American women's right to vote was an issue of race not gender. Similarly, some White suffragists argued for literacy and property ownership requirements for voting. Such requirements excluded many African Ameri-

can women and poor women and men from gaining the right to vote. Furthermore, some White suffragists made racist appeals to win the right to vote for White women. More specifically, they argued that enfranchising White women would maintain white supremacy in the South. These actions resulted in the exclusion of many women from the early feminist movement. Furthermore, in light of feminism's persistent image as a White, middle-class women's movement (Bowman et al., 2001), some women continue to experience womanism as more compatible with their commitments to their racial/ethnic, class, and other subordinated identities than with feminism.

Alice Walker (1983) coined the term *womanist* and defined it as "a black feminist or feminist of color" (p. xi) and:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility . . . and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. (p. xi)

Brown (1989) defined womanism as "a consciousness that incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political consideration" (p. 613). Garth suggested that womanism reflects a commitment to the fusion of multiple identities and fighting multiple oppressions without ranking oppressions as varying in importance or harmfulness. Collectively, these scholars define womanism as a worldview and identity that centralizes (a) women's strengths and experiences and (b) interconnection of race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of diversity.

Some scholars have argued that the womanist identity development model is based on the womanist movement, incorporates the experiences of African American women (Carter & Parks, 1996), and integrates a Black feminist perspective (Letlaka-Rennert, Luswazi, Helms, & Zea, 1997). Womanist identity development attitudes outlined in the model, however, are not conceptualized or operationalized as a commitment to recognizing multiple identities or fighting multiple oppressions. In addition, attitudes in the womanist identity development model, as currently defined in the literature, do not integrate explicitly a Black feminist or womanist philosophy that reflects such a consciousness of multiple identities and oppressions.

Ossana et al. (1992) described a narrower scope for the use of the term *womanism* in the womanist identity development model than in the womanist consciousness literature. These authors stated that "Helms appropriated the term *womanist* from Black feminist writers (e.g., Brown, 1989) to emphasize that the *process* (e.g., stage-wise progression) of self-definition among women is similar regardless of race, social class, political orientation, and so

forth" (p. 70). Thus, in the womanist identity development model, the term *womanism* was used to indicate the similarity of the process of identity development across women from various backgrounds and not a consciousness characterized by the recognition of multiple identities. Thus, unlike womanist consciousness, the womanist identity development model was not intended to capture a commitment to multiple identities.

Although currently the womanist identity development model and its operationalization do not and were not intended to capture a sense of commitment to multiple identities, integrating consciousness of multiple identities into the womanist identity development model might be one fruitful area for future theoretical development. Measures have been developed to assess attitudes consistent with consciousness of multiple identities (e.g., Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998; King, 2003). For example, the Womanist Consciousness Scale (WCS; King, 2003) was designed to measure the fusion of race and gender for women of color. Its items directly assess this fusion (e.g., "It's hard for me to think about ethnic issues without also considering women's issues at the same time"). With a sample of African American college women, WCS scores demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability ( $r = .86$ ) and were related positively to attributing a negative experience to *ethgender* (i.e., fused ethnic and gender) discrimination (King, 2003). The WCS and similar measures can serve as a basis for integrating womanist consciousness into the womanist identity development literature.

With regard to the link between feminist and womanist identity development, Ossana et al. (1992) argued that womanist identity development differs from feminist identity development (Downing & Roush, 1985) in that the former does not require the adoption of a feminist political orientation as a developmental capstone or emphasize changing the role of women in relation to men. Indeed, many conceptualizations of feminism or feminist identity focus on endorsement versus rejection of feminist political values and activities. The feminist identity development model, however, does not fit this narrow description. Rather, Downing and Roush's (1985) description of the feminist identity development model has many parallels to Helms's (1990b, as cited in Carter & Parks, 1996) womanist identity development model as described in the literature (see Table 1). Both models include an initial passive endorsement of external definitions of womanhood (Passive Acceptance and Preencounter) that is challenged by experiences that result in organizing those external definitions and their limitations (Revelation and Encounter), a period of exploration of new and alternative definitions (Embeddedness-Emanation and Immersion-Emersion), and finally, an integration of a newly developed personal definition of womanhood into one's self-concept and behaviors (Synthesis/Active Commitment and Internalization). As described

previously, Preencounter is theorized to reflect absorption of patriarchal definitions of womanhood and denial/unawareness of sexism; Encounter questions those definitions; Immersion-Emersion involves rejection of patriarchal definitions of womanhood, idealization of women, and possible adoption of feminist ideology; and Internalization reflects a flexible and internally defined sense of womanhood (Carter & Parks, 1996; Ossana et al., 1992). These definitions parallel Downing and Roush's (1985) definitions of corresponding feminist identity attitudes. Passive acceptance, like Preencounter, is marked by a denial of sexism and an *unexamined* acceptance of traditional gender roles; Revelation, similar to Encounter, is characterized by a beginning recognition of sexism accompanied by feelings of guilt and anger at others and oneself for participating in sexism; Embeddedness-Emanation, like Immersion-Emersion, includes idealization of women and women's culture and devaluation of men; Synthesis, similar to Internalization, involves development of a flexible view of women and men and an integration of a personally defined sense of feminism and womanhood into one's identity; Active Commitment, which does not have a parallel womanist identity development attitude, is the translation of one's newly formed identity into working toward societal change with the goal of eliminating all forms of oppression (see Moradi et al., 2002b, for a review of the feminist identity development model and literature). Thus, parallels clearly exist between the womanist and feminist identity development models. Furthermore, recent data with African American and White women suggested moderate to substantial positive correlations ( $r = .35 = .57$ ) between corresponding womanist and feminist identity attitudes in these samples despite potential attenuation of these links by low internal consistency reliabilities (Boisnier, 2003). Examining the replicability of links between womanist and feminist identity development attitudes across diverse samples is needed. Consistently small or nonsignificant correlations between corresponding feminist and womanist identity development attitudes, if found across samples, would support the proposed distinctiveness of these models as currently operationalized, whereas moderate correlations would challenge them.

Despite conceptual and empirical ambiguities about the link of womanist identity development to womanism and feminist identity development, counseling psychologists may find the terminology of the womanist identity development model to be a useful tool for discussing the process of gender identity development, especially for women of color, who may embrace the term *womanism* more readily than the term *feminism* (Bowman et al., 2001; Garth, 1994). The terminology of the womanist identity development model may fit more readily for clients who do not identify as feminists and for women of color who resonate with the concept and history of womanism

TABLE 1: Comparison of Womanist and Feminist Identity Development Attitudes

Attitude	Womanist Identity Development (Helms, 1990b, as cited in Carter & Parks, 1996)		Feminist Identity Development (Downing & Roush, 1985)		Correlation of Parallel Subscales
	Sample WIAS Items	Attitude	Sample FIDS Items	Attitude	
<i>Preencounter</i> : Conforms to societal views about gender; holds constricted view of women's roles; unconsciously thinks and behaves in ways that devalue women and esteem men	In general, women have not contributed much to American society. In general, I believe that men are superior to women	<i>Passive Acceptance</i> : engages in unexamined acceptance of traditional gender roles and discrimination; believes that traditional gender roles are advantageous and men are superior	I do not want to have equal status with men. Generally, I think that men are more interesting than women.		.57
<i>Encounter</i> : Begins to question accepted values and beliefs of Preencounter	I don't know whether being a woman is an asset or a deficit. Sometimes I am proud of belonging to the female sex, and sometimes I am ashamed of it.	<i>Revelation</i> : questions self and roles; feels anger and guilt; engages in dualistic thinking such that men are perceived as negative	It only recently occurred to me that I think it's unfair that men have the privileges they have in this society simply because they are men. It makes me really upset to think about how women have been treated so unfairly in this society for so long.		.35

<i>Immersion-Emersion</i> : Idealizes women who expand definitions of womanhood and reject male-supremacist definitions of womanhood; searches for positive, self-affirming definitions of womanhood; intense affiliation with women	I find myself replacing old friends with new ones who share my beliefs about women. Most men are untrustworthy.	<i>Embeddedness-Emanation</i> : seeks connection with women who share emerging values; affirms and strengthens new identity; eventually develops more relativistic thinking and cautious interactions with men	Particularly now, I feel most comfortable with women who share my feminist point of view. Especially now, I feel that the other women around me give me strength	.55
<i>Internalization</i> : Incorporates positive definition of womanhood into own identity; views other women and their shared experience as a source of information about the role of women; is not bound by external definitions of womanhood	People, regardless of their sex, have strengths and limitations. Both sexual groups have some good people and some bad people	<i>Synthesis</i> : develops an authentic and positive feminist identity; transcends prescribed gender roles; evaluates men on an individual basis	While I am concerned that women are treated fairly in life, I do not see men as the enemy. I evaluate men as individuals, not as members of a group of oppressors	.42
N/A	N/A	<i>Active Commitment</i> : consolidates feminist identity; commits to meaningful action to a nonsexist world	I am very committed to a cause that I believe contributes to a more fair and just world for all people. I want to work to improve women's status.	N/A

NOTE: Definitions are based on the descriptions provided by Ossana, Helms, and Leonard (1992) and Downing and Roush (1985). Items are from the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale (WIAS) and the Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS; Bargad & Hyde, 1991). Correlations are from Boisnier (2003).

(Garth, 1994). These potential uses should not preclude, however, further work toward clarifying the connections and distinctions of the womanist identity development model with womanist consciousness and feminist identity development. One path for advancing toward this goal is to work toward theoretical and measurement refinement that incorporates womanist consciousness (i.e., recognition of and commitment to the intersections of diversities) into the womanist identity development model. Such efforts would connect the womanist consciousness literature more explicitly with the womanist identity development model and help to distinguish womanist from feminist identity development.

### **OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE WOMANIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

Ossana and her colleagues (Ossana, 1986; Ossana et al., 1992) developed the Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale (WIAS) to assess attitudes associated with the four stages proposed by the womanist identity development model. Using rational/deductive inventory construction methods (Burisch, 1984), a total of 44 items were written to capture attitudes reflective of Preencounter (8 items), Encounter (8 items), Immersion (11 items), Emersion (6 items), and Internalization (11 items) (Ossana, 1986). Immersion and Emersion were originally assessed with separate subscales because they were thought to be two separate phases of the Immersion-Emersion stage. With Ossana's (1986) pilot sample of 78 college women, alphas were .44, .36, .74, .56, and .65 for Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion, Emersion, and Internalization scores, respectively. In a second sample of 649 mostly White (77%) college women (which appears to be subsumed in the sample used by Ossana et al., 1992), Ossana (1986) examined internal consistency reliability estimates, item-total correlations, and subscale intercorrelations. Alpha internal consistency reliabilities with this second sample were .51, .39, .72, .38, and .65 for Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion, Emersion, and Internalization scores, respectively. One item was eliminated from the Emersion subscale based on its low item-total correlation, resulting in a total of 43 WIAS items. Although the structure of the WIAS was not examined in this study, the Immersion and Emersion subscales were combined because of their high intercorrelations and the low alpha for Emersion scores in this sample.

Ossana et al. (1992) described the resulting version of the WIAS as a 43-item Likert-type scale designed to measure attitudes reflective of Preencounter (8 items), Encounter (8 items), Immersion-Emersion (16 items), and Internalization (11 items). Items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from

*strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), and item ratings are added or averaged to yield a subscale score. Higher scores indicate greater agreement with attitudes reflected by that subscale. Sample items for Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization are as follows: "In general, I believe that men are superior to women;" "Sometimes I am proud of belonging to the female sex and sometimes I am ashamed of it;" "Most men are insensitive;" and "Being a member of the female sex is a source of pride to me;" respectively.

Despite the potential utility of the WIAS as the only operationalization of the womanist identity development model, much of the extant data on the psychometric properties of the WIAS has emerged incidentally from studies that have used the scale to examine links between womanist identity development attitudes and other constructs. Only one published study to date (Moradi, Yoder, & Berendsen, 2004) has evaluated directly the psychometric properties of WIAS scores. This is despite calls and examples provided by Helms (1990a; 1996) and Carter (1996) to use alternative methods for examining the psychometric properties of scores on measures of identity development. For example, Helms (1996) argued that alpha coefficients for identity development scores are influenced by sample composition, yet most samples in research that has reported alphas with the WIAS have been fairly homogeneous, potentially attenuating alpha coefficients obtained in those studies. Furthermore, Helms (1990a) advocated the use of multidimensional scaling, and Helms (1996) and Carter (1996) each described the use of cluster analysis as an appropriate method for examining the structural properties of racial identity development scores. Nevertheless, all available psychometric data on WIAS scores rely on traditional conventions and methods of evaluation (e.g., factor analysis, alpha coefficients). Thus, the following review of psychometric data on the WIAS must be evaluated in the context of the limitations in available data.

### **Reliability of WIAS Scores Across Samples**

A few studies reported reliabilities for WIAS scores in their samples. As indicated in Table 2, for racially/ethnically mixed samples and a sample of White college students, previous data yielded lower than conventionally acceptable (i.e., < .70) coefficient alphas (Nunnally, 1978) for Preencounter, Encounter, and Internalization scores, whereas coefficient alphas for Immersion-Emersion (which also has approximately twice as many items as the other subscales) scores were acceptable generally (Carter & Parks, 1996; Moradi et al., 2004; Ossana et al., 1992). Constantine and Watt (2002) and Moradi et al. (2004) found the same pattern but generally lower alphas in samples of

**Table 2: Alpha Internal Consistency Reliability Estimates for WIAS Subscale Scores Across Samples**

	<i>Preencounter</i>	<i>Encounter</i>	<i>Immersion- Emersion</i>	<i>Internalization</i>
Racially/ethnically mixed samples				
Ossana, Helms, & Leonard (1992): <i>N</i> = 659 (77% White, 13% African American/Black, 8% Asian American, 2% Hispanic/Latina, > 1% American Indian/Native American)	.55	.43	.82	.77
Carter & Parks (1996): <i>N</i> = 218 (69% White, 31% African American/Black)	.50	.34	.71	.66
Moradi, Yoder, & Berendsen (2004): <i>N</i> = 201 (50% White, 50% African American/Black)	.44	.31	.76	.54
Boisnier (2003): <i>N</i> = 123 (76% White, 24% African American/Black)	.54	.26	.60	.38
African American samples				
Constantine & Watt (2002): <i>N</i> = 165	.38	.30	.74	.58
Moradi et al. (2004): <i>N</i> = 101	.38	.29	.73	.48
South African sample				
Letlaka-Rennert, Luswazi, Helms, & Zea (1997): <i>N</i> = 207	.63	.36	.60	.57
White sample				
Moradi et al. (2004): <i>N</i> = 100	.51	.34	.80	.60

NOTE: WIAS = Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale. Moradi et al. (2004) reported alphas for their total sample as well as separately for African American/Black women and White women in their sample. Thus, both total and subsample alphas are included in the table. Letlaka-Rennert et al. (1997) used a 55-item version of the WIAS that subsumed the 43-item version.

African American women. With a sample of Black South African college women, Letlaka-Rennert et al. (1997) used a 55-item version of the WIAS that subsumed the 43-item version. Alphas for all subscale scores in this 55-item version were lower than .70. These authors did not describe the origins of this expanded scale, and no other known published study has used this version of the scale.

Moradi et al.'s (2004) item-level analysis of WIAS subscales indicated that removing especially problematic items would not improve alphas for any of the subscales. In this study, item-total correlations were quite low and sometimes negative (e.g.,  $-.06$  to  $.53$  for the total sample). The lowest and highest item-total correlations were found with Encounter and Immersion-Emersion items, respectively. This is consistent with the trend in alpha coefficients reported for WIAS subscale scores across samples. Helms (1996) argued that racial identity measures and their subscales are not intended to be homogeneous or unidimensional. Given that item-total correlations were used to determine inclusion versus elimination of items in the development of the WIAS, however, it appears that creating homogeneous subscales was indeed a goal for the development of this measure. This goal has not been attained in extant samples.

It is important to reiterate that .70 is a conventionally acceptable cutoff for alphas, and many instruments used in social science research have yielded scores with alphas that are lower than this cutoff. Nevertheless, low reliability of WIAS scores (and measures of other constructs of interest) across samples may result in unstable or underpredictions of links between womanist identity attitudes and measures of other constructs. Helms (1996) argued that alpha coefficients might be attenuated in samples that reflect a restricted range of identity development statuses. Therefore, low internal consistency reliabilities may reflect, in part, sampling limitations, given that most studies sampled young college students who are less likely than older women to have developed attitudes consistent with later womanist identity development stages. As Dawis (1987) pointed out, "because reliability is a function of sample as well as of instrument, it should be evaluated on a sample from the intended target population" (p. 486). Thus, psychometric properties of WIAS scores should be examined with diverse populations of women (e.g., older women, activist women) to capture the full range of womanist identity development attitudes. In addition, reliability estimates beyond internal consistency should be considered. Given the proposed dynamic nature of womanist identity development, relatively brief test-retest time spans should be examined. Examining balanced split-half reliability is another promising alternative (Helms, 1996).

### **Structure of WIAS Scores Across Samples**

Moradi et al.'s (2004) factor analytic findings further illuminated the dimensionality of WIAS scores and the heterogeneity of WIAS items. A confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the proposed womanist identity development model and theorized structure of WIAS scores (i.e., four inter-related WIAS subscales/latent constructs with appropriate item parcels as indicators) yielded an unsatisfactory fit to the data. Given the unsatisfactory fit of the theoretical model to the data, Moradi et al. (2004) next used exploratory factor analysis to examine whether an alternative structure would emerge from WIAS data. Using recommended procedures for identifying the number of factors to be extracted and then extracting and rotating the identified number of factors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996; Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987), they interpreted a three-factor solution that accounted for 27% of variance in the data and reflected anti-woman, pro-woman, and anti-man attitudes. This simpler structure does not capture the complexity intended in the model but must be interpreted with caution because Moradi et al.'s (2004) sample included mostly college students and only African American/Black and White women. Furthermore, use of multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis might provide additional useful information about the structure of WIAS scores across samples (Carter & Parks, 1996; Helms, 1990a, 1996).

## **REVIEW OF WOMANIST IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH**

Multiple studies have used the WIAS to examine links of womanist identity attitudes to variables that are important to counseling psychologists. Despite concerns about alpha coefficients and structural properties in some samples, studies have yielded correlations between WIAS scores and other constructs that are consistent with theory and support the validity of WIAS scores with some samples. More specifically, research using the WIAS has examined (a) links with well-being and distress, (b) relationships with gender-related attitudes and perceptions, (c) associations with racial identity, and (d) WIAS subscale intercorrelations. The findings of the research reviewed in the current section can be framed as supporting or challenging the womanist identity development model and/or supporting or challenging the psychometric properties of WIAS scores across samples.

### Well-Being and Distress

Consistent with womanist identity development theory, across two primarily White samples of college women (Boisnier, 2003; Ossana et al., 1992) and a sample of 84 African American college women (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997), lower levels of Encounter and Immersion-Emersion and higher levels of Internalization attitudes were related to greater self-esteem. In two studies, Preencounter scores also were related negatively to self-esteem (Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson, 1997; Ossana et al., 1992). With a sample of 165 African American women college students, Immersion-Emersion attitudes were related negatively, Internalization attitudes were related positively, and Preencounter and Encounter attitudes were unrelated to life satisfaction (Constantine & Watt, 2002). When type of institution (i.e., historically Black or primarily White) and fit of personal values with college values were taken into account, however, none of the womanist identity attitudes was a unique predictor of life satisfaction (Constantine & Watt, 2002). Finally, in Letlaka-Rennert et al.'s (1997) sample of 207 Black South African women college students, Preencounter and Immersion-Emersion were related negatively, whereas Internalization attitudes were related positively to self-efficacy, with Internalization and Immersion-Emersion attitudes emerging as unique predictors in a subsequent regression analysis. Furthermore, higher levels of Preencounter and Immersion-Emersion were related to external locus of control, with Preencounter attitudes emerging as the only unique predictor in a subsequent regression analysis. Lack of association between Internalization and internal locus of control is somewhat surprising, however, given that Internalization is theorized to reflect the attainment of an internal definition of womanhood. The validity of these findings is qualified by the low alpha internal consistency reliability (.53) for scores on the measure of locus of control in Letlaka-Rennert et al.'s sample and the fact that general locus of control may not provide precise enough assessment of locus of self-definition. In addition, although the womanist identity model is proposed to be applicable across women of various racial/ethnic backgrounds (Ossana et al., 1992), lack of direct evaluation of this proposition and the construction of the WIAS based on responses from primarily White women raise questions about the cultural relevance of the model and the WIAS to South African women.

Carter and Parks (1996) focused on psychological distress with a sample of 67 Black and 147 White women. Using canonical correlation, they found one significant canonical root in their analysis with White women. Preencounter, Encounter, and Immersion-Emersion (the strongest loading variable) from the set of womanist identity attitudes and symptoms of hallucina-

tion, depression, obsessive compulsivity, anxiety, phobia, alcohol abuse, and paranoia from the set of psychological symptoms loaded positively on this canonical root. The link between Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and psychological symptoms for White women is consistent with the theoretical conceptualizations of these attitudes as less self-affirming and more tumultuous than Internalization attitudes. On the other hand, no significant canonical root emerged from Carter and Parks' analysis with Black women, posing a possible challenge to the notion that the process of womanist identity development is similar for women of all backgrounds. Such an interpretation must be tempered, however, by the fact that the analysis for Black women was compromised by the small sample size (67 participants).

### **Gender-Related Attitudes and Perceptions**

Links of womanist identity development attitudes to pro-feminist and feminist identity development attitudes, awareness and perceptions of gender bias, and egalitarian/sexist attitudes have been examined. Ossana (1986) reported data from a pilot study ( $N = 78$ , racial/ethnic composition not specified) indicating that Preencounter attitudes were related negatively and Internalization attitudes were related positively to pro-feminist attitudes. The fact that Internalization but not Immersion-Emersion scores were related positively to profeminist attitudes is surprising given that Immersion-Emersion is thought to be the womanist identity stage most likely to begin the incorporation of feminist ideology. Boisnier (2003) examined directly the theoretically proposed distinction between womanist identity development attitudes and feminist identity development attitudes with a sample of 29 African American and 94 White women. She found moderate to substantial positive correlations ( $r = .35 = .57$ ) between corresponding womanist and feminist identity development attitudes despite potential attenuation of these correlations by low alphas.

Using a college student sample (77% White), Ossana et al. (1992) examined the connection between womanist identity attitudes and perceptions of gender bias in the campus environment. Consistent with expectations, they found that Encounter and Immersion-Emersion attitudes were related positively and uniquely to perceptions of gender bias. Internalization scores were related negatively to such perceptions. In direct conflict with the definition of Preencounter as characterized by denial of sexism, however, was Ossana et al.'s finding that Preencounter scores were related positively and uniquely to perceptions of gender bias. The positive link of Preencounter to perceptions of gender bias seems particularly troubling given that it was found with a very

large sample ( $N = 659$ ) and an adequate measure of perceptions of gender bias in the campus environment (Ossana, 1986).

Mixed findings also emerged in Moradi et al.'s (2004) sample of Black ( $n = 101$ ) and White women ( $n = 100$ ), most of whom were college students. Consistent with theory, they found that in their total sample and within racial/ethnic groups, Preencounter scores were related negatively to flexible attitudes toward the rights and roles of women and positively to subtle modern sexist (Swim, Aiken, Hall, & Hunter, 1995), hostile sexist, and benevolently sexist attitudes toward women (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Also as expected, both overall and within racial/ethnic groups, Internalization scores were related positively to egalitarian and flexible attitudes toward women's rights and roles but were not related to modern, hostile, or benevolently sexist attitudes toward women. For the most part, Encounter attitudes were not related to any of the measures of attitudes toward women. Contrary to the expectation that incorporation of feminist ideology begins during Immersion-Emersion but consistent with Ossana's (1986) findings, Immersion-Emersion scores were unrelated to egalitarian attitudes toward the rights and roles of women in Moradi et al.'s (2004) total sample as well as within both racial/ethnic groups. Also inconsistent with expectation, for the total sample and for White women, Immersion-Emersion scores were related positively to benevolently sexist attitudes toward women. The link between Immersion-Emersion and benevolent sexism did not emerge for Black participants, among whom benevolent sexism scores had low internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = .64$ ).

### **Racial Identity Development Attitudes**

Poindexter-Cameron and Robinson (1997) explored correlations between WIAS and racial identity development scores for a sample of 84 African American undergraduate women. These authors found significant and positive correlations between womanist and racial identity Preencounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization scores but no significant correlation between corresponding Encounter scores. In another study, Parks et al. (1996) reasoned that there should be some parallel processes between racial and womanist identity development for Black women but not necessarily for White women, given that for Black women, racial and womanist identity development involve development from a position of social devaluation, whereas for White women, racial but not womanist identity development involves development from a position of power and privilege. Parks et al. (1996) used canonical correlations to explore links between racial and womanist identity development attitudes for 67 Black and 147 White women. They found one significant canonical root in their analysis for Black women, but no significant root emerged from their analysis for White women. More

specifically, Encounter and Internalization (the strongest loading variable) from the set of womanist identity attitudes and Internalization from the set of Black racial identity attitudes loaded significantly and positively on this canonical root. Consistent with Parks et al.'s proposition, their findings support some parallels between later womanist and racial identity development attitudes for Black women. No canonical root emerged, however, that reflected proposed parallels in early (i.e., Preencounter) racial and womanist identity development attitudes for Black women. Given the exploratory nature of these studies and psychometric concerns about the measures of Black and White racial identity development attitudes (see Fischer & Moradi, 2001), however, Parks et al.'s findings cannot be interpreted clearly as challenge or support for womanist identity development theory or the WIAS. Further improvement of racial identity development measures (as well as the WIAS) is needed before clear conclusions can be made about the connections between racial and womanist identity development attitudes.

### **Subscale Intercorrelations**

Subscale intercorrelations can illuminate the meaning of womanist identity development stages and provide evidence of convergent and discriminant validity of WIAS scores in extant samples. Subscale scores reflective of conceptually similar attitudes should be related positively and significantly to one another and negatively or nonsignificantly to conceptually distinct or opposing attitudes. Furthermore, if womanist identity development is a developmental process similar to racial identity development and the WIAS captures such a process, then "adjacent scale scores (with the possible exception of Preencounter and Encounter) should be positively correlated, and scales measuring conflictive or exclusive attitudes should be negatively correlated" (Helms, 1990a, p. 37).

Five published studies reported WIAS subscale intercorrelations for (a) racially/ethnically mixed samples, (b) African American women, and (c) White women. Subscale intercorrelations and details about sample compositions are reported in Table 3. Some links among WIAS scores are consistent with womanist identity development theory. For example, consistent with the proposed developmental proximity and conceptual similarity of Encounter and Immersion-Emersion, these scores were correlated significantly and positively across all samples. Also consistent with theory, Internalization scores were typically related negatively or nonsignificantly to conceptually opposing Preencounter scores. Positive and significant correlations were found in three of five studies between Preencounter and Encounter. On one hand, Encounter marks the beginning of a new way of viewing oneself and women in general that is contrary to that in Preencounter, suggesting that Encounter and

**TABLE 3: Summary Statistics and Intercorrelations Among WIAS Scores Across Samples**

<i>WIAS subscale</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>1. Preencounter</b>			
Ossana, Helms, & Leonard (1992): <i>N</i> = 659 (77% White, 13% African American/Black, 8% Asian American, 2% Hispanic/Latina, < 1% American Indian/Native American)			
Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997): <i>N</i> = 84 African American/Black women			
Constantine & Watt (2002): <i>N</i> = 165 African American/Black women			
Boisnier (2003): <i>N</i> = 123 (76% White, 24% African American/Black)			
Moradi, Yoder, & Berendsen (2004): <i>N</i> = 201 (50% White, 50% African American/Black)			
<b>2. Encounter</b>			
Ossana et al. (1992)	.22*		
Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997)	.21*		
Constantine & Watt (2002)	-.04		
Boisnier (2003)	.08		
Moradi et al. (2004)	.24*		
<b>3. Immersion-Emersion</b>			
Ossana et al. (1992)	.35*	.53*	
Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997)	.24*	.37*	
Constantine & Watt (2002)	.24*	.22*	
Boisnier (2003)	-.14	.48*	
Moradi et al. (2004)	.30*	.52*	
<b>4. Internalization</b>			
Ossana et al. (1992)	-.28*	.14*	-.28*
Poindexter-Cameron & Robinson (1997)	-.08	-.29*	-.19
Constantine & Watt (2002)	-.26*	-.36*	-.26*
Boisnier (2003)	-.11	.02	-.20*
Moradi et al. (2004)	-.20*	.03	-.22*

NOTE: WIAS = Womanist Identity Attitudes Scale. Moradi et al. (2004) obtained correlations that were slightly lower for African American/Black women and slightly higher for White women than that for the total sample.  
\**p* < .05.

Preencounter scores should be related negatively (if at all). On the other hand, however, the positive correlations between these two subscales might reflect the fact that they are developmentally adjacent. Puzzling are negative correlations found across all studies between Immersion-Emersion and developmentally adjacent Internalization attitudes. Perhaps most problematic are the positive correlations between Preencounter and Immersion-Emersion scores reported across four studies. Given that Immersion-Emersion is thought to reflect rejection whereas Preencounter is thought to reflect adoption of patriarchal definitions of womanhood, these two sets of attitudes should be related negatively. Finally, mixed findings emerged regarding the link of Encounter to Internalization scores; across five studies, positive, negative, and nonsignificant correlations were reported. Subscale intercorrelations that are contrary to theoretical expectations (e.g., negative correlations between Immersion-Emersion and Internalization, positive correlations between Preencounter and Immersion-Emersion) suggest that WIAS subscales do not adequately tap theoretical conceptualizations of womanist identity development attitudes or that theoretical conceptualizations need to be revised. These findings point to the need for clarifying, in theory and measurement, overlaps and distinctions among womanist identity attitudes.

### **TOWARD THEORY AND MEASUREMENT REFINEMENT**

Overall, the patterns of findings in the literature highlight some promising directions for reexamination of the womanist identity development model and its measurement. In this section, relevant theoretical and empirical scholarship and findings of the womanist identity development literature are used to make recommendations for future theory and measurement refinement and research. Because there should be a recursive relationship between theory and measurement such that theory development/refinement informs instrument development/refinement and vice versa, implications of extant findings for both theory and measurement are addressed. Five specific steps are outlined for revisiting and refining the womanist identity development model and its measurement.

#### **Model Refinement**

Perhaps the most critical step in advancing womanist identity development literature is to more fully articulate the model based on extant theory and research. A number of theoretical conceptualizations could inform revision of the womanist identity development model. First, extant data suggest

the need to distinguish womanist from feminist identity development. Current theoretical descriptions and measurement of corresponding dimensions of womanist and feminist identity development are quite similar, and moderate to substantial overlap in womanist and feminist identity development attitudes existed in Boisnier's (2003) sample. One important potential distinction and fruitful area for development of the womanist identity development model could be integrating womanist consciousness and, more specifically, recognizing and integrating multiple identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, class) into the womanist identity development model. Integrating consciousness of multiple identities is critical in advancing the womanist identity development model and literature toward the goal of capturing the diversity and complexity of women's self-concepts. These self-concepts are shaped by commitments to multiple personal and group identities. Womanist consciousness directly addresses the fact that many people exist at the intersections of various identities (Collins, 1991). A refined model can articulate how womanist consciousness is or is not manifested in each womanist identity development stage/attitude. Perhaps womanist consciousness increases incrementally from Preencounter to Internalization. Alternatively, womanist consciousness may develop postinternalization. For example, once a woman has internalized a personally defined and positive notion of womanhood (i.e., Internalization), perhaps she can begin to see connections between her gender identity and other identities (e.g., sexual orientation, class, racial/ethnic identities) and formulate a personally defined and positive sense of self that reflects the intersections of these identities. Qualitative research that explores the process of womanist consciousness development can examine this possibility and inform the integration of womanist consciousness into the womanist identity development model. Such integration can propel the identity development paradigm to address the multidimensionality of the people it attempts to describe.

Advances in racial identity development theory also can inform the refinement of the womanist identity development model. For example, Helms (1995) suggested the use of the term *statuses* instead of *stages* to highlight the facts that (a) persons may exhibit multiple identity development attitudes at the same time, (b) identity development processes are dynamic rather than static, and (c) identity development stages are not mutually exclusive or pure constructs. These points are also applicable to womanist identity development. For example, a woman may experience work-family conflict because she holds a combination of Immersion-Emersion attitudes (e.g., women are strong and capable of doing everything) and Internalization attitudes (e.g., I want to define myself primarily as a mother), but the primacy of these attitudes might vary across time or contexts and covary with the level of work-family conflict that she experiences. Thus, given the potential multidimen-

sionality and dynamic nature of womanist identity development attitudes, the use of the term *statuses* instead of *stages* to describe the womanist identity development process seems warranted.

Another useful distinction, made by Cross and Vandiver (2001) between personal identity and reference group orientation, suggests the need to clarify the extent to which womanist identity development reflects each of these constructs. The womanist identity development model taps aspects of personal identity and reference group orientation, but distinguishing these aspects for each stage/attitude might facilitate the development of items that tap these aspects more clearly. Clarifying the difference between identity centrality and salience across womanist identity development attitudes also could be fruitful. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) could serve as a model for teasing apart centrality and salience.

Sellers et al.'s (1998) MMRI posits that racial identity consists of ideology (philosophy about how members of one's racial/ethnic group should behave), regard (perception of others' judgments and one's own private feelings about one's group), salience (context-dependent and shapes how other dimensions of racial identity influence one's experiences), and centrality (extent to which race is a core component of one's self-concept). The womanist identity development model and WIAS capture aspects of ideology and regard. For example, the womanist identity development model posits that healthy womanist identity involves developing an internal definition of oneself as a woman (i.e., ideology). Furthermore, various womanist identity attitudes reflect different personal views about women and oneself as a woman (e.g., women may be viewed in restricted roles in Preencounter but idealized in Immersion-Emersion). The roles of identity centrality and salience, however, could be further elaborated in the womanist identity development model. For example, identity salience may vary widely in interaction with the environment (e.g., increase when one is faced with an experience of prejudice against one's identity), but identity centrality might be less affected immediately. Thus, to the extent that the womanist identity development model is intended to capture salience and the WIAS actually assesses such salience, one would expect relatively unstable WIAS scores across samples and for the same individual across time.

The concept of centrality overlaps with reference group orientation and, in the context of the womanist identity development model, would reflect how important each womanist identity attitude is to a woman's identity. Although less affected by situational variables than identity salience, centrality of womanist identity attitudes could be dynamic across a woman's lifetime and could shape the links between each attitude and other important constructs. For example, Internalization attitudes and self-efficacy might be

correlated more strongly and positively among women for whom Internalization attitudes are highly central to their identity, compared to women for whom internalization attitudes are not central. Lack of examination of centrality of womanist identity attitudes might explain some of the mixed or unexpected correlations that have emerged in the literature. Furthermore, the centrality and salience of gender-related identity may be affected by the salience and centrality of other identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, class). Thus, one step toward capturing the richness of women's identities could be distinguishing identity salience from centrality in the womanist identity development model and integrating the reality that women's identities include salience and centrality of racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, class, and other identities.

### **Item Construction**

Once the womanist identity development model has been rearticulated with attention to extant theory and research, new items can be developed to capture the refined model. WIAS items must be developed that capture the complexity and nuances intended in the original model and assess other relevant constructs based on the theoretical integrations recommended above. Extant findings provide some direction for such efforts. For example, contrary to expectation, Immersion-Emersion scores were unrelated to feminist ideology (Ossana et al., 1992) and egalitarian attitudes toward the rights and roles of women (Moradi et al., 2004) and related positively to benevolent sexist attitudes toward women (Moradi et al., 2004) and Preencounter womanist identity development attitudes (see Table 3). These findings are in direct conflict with the conceptualization of Immersion-Emersion as a rejection of patriarchal definitions of womanhood. In addition, Moradi et al.'s (2004) exploratory factor analysis indicated that some Immersion-Emersion items loaded positively on a factor reflecting devaluation of men, and other Immersion-Emersion items loaded on a factor reflecting endorsement of traditional gender role hierarchies. Thus, currently, Immersion-Emersion may measure hostility toward men and idealization of women that reflects patriarchal definitions of womanhood (i.e., what Glick & Fiske, 2001, define as benevolent sexist attitudes). For example, women who endorsed the item "I limit myself to activities involving women" may have been endorsing the notion of separate gender roles rather than the woman-centeredness that this item intended to assess. Working to better capture the essence of Immersion-Emersion, which Ossana et al. (1992) described as "rejection of male-supremacist definitions of womanhood" (p. 403) rather than rejection of men, and "search for positive, self-affirming definitions of womanhood" (p. 403) rather than

uncritical idealization of women may improve the Immersion-Emersion subscale.

In addition, the complexity of womanist identity development stages suggests that attitudes reflective of each stage may be better conceptualized as multidimensional than as unidimensional. For example, the heterogeneity of Encounter items (indicated by item-total correlations and factor analyses) may accurately reflect the transitional and questioning nature of Encounter attitudes. Indeed, several Encounter items attempt to measure the presence of uncertain or conflicting feelings about being a woman (e.g., “*Maybe* [emphasis added] I can learn something from women”; “Sometimes I am proud of belonging to the female sex and sometimes I am ashamed of it”). Although confusion and flux may be cornerstones of Encounter, measuring such confusion in an internally consistent manner with one subscale may not be optimal. Indeed, Cross and Vandiver (2001) described similar difficulties in operationalizing Encounter attitudes in Cross’s racial identity development model. These authors chose to remove Encounter from their measure. Such a decision seems premature with regard to the womanist identity development model, given limited efforts at scale refinement. Developing subscales that separately measure various aspects of Encounter may be one approach to improving measurement of Encounter attitudes. Similarly, items could be developed to assess separately personal identity and reference group orientation aspects of each womanist identity attitude. Furthermore, instruments that assess womanist consciousness (e.g., Henley et al., 1998; King, 2003) can serve as a foundation for developing WIAS items that assess how awareness of multiple identities is manifested in each womanist identity development stage/attitude.

### **Measurement Evaluation and Refinement**

Evaluation of the structure, reliability, and validity of the revised WIAS scores across diverse samples is a necessary next step. Moradi et al.’s (2004) three-factor solution suggested that womanist identity development stages as described in the current model may be more complex than the types of attitudes actually reflected in samples with which the WIAS has been used. Sampling intentionally diverse populations of women to capture the full range of womanist identity development attitudes may result in more supportive factor analytic results. In addition, Helms (1990a, 1996) and Carter (1996) both advocated the use of alternative statistical strategies to factor analysis. These authors suggested that multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis might provide alternative perspectives on the organization of womanist identity development constructs/attitudes. Such analyses as well as attention to item-total correlations can guide the development of subscales

that assess clearly the constructs of the refined womanist identity development model. Findings from such studies should guide item revisions and subscale refinement.

### **Attending to Diversity Among Women in Measurement and Research**

The womanist identity model is proposed to be applicable to all women (Ossana et al., 1992). However, empirical evidence of this proposition is lacking because non-college-aged women and racial/ethnic groups beyond Black/African American and White women participants are underrepresented in extant research. Furthermore, no research has been conducted on womanist identity development attitudes of women outside of the United States, with the exception of Letlaka-Rennert et al.'s study with Black South African women. Therefore, examining the applicability of the refined model and the psychometric properties of the revised WIAS for women of diverse backgrounds will be necessary. Extant research does not address important questions such as whether definitions of womanhood are consistent across women of various racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, religious affiliation/orientation, and women from countries other than the United States. Each dimension of identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation) may alter a woman's sense of womanhood, self, and identity. Thus, studies are needed to examine women's definitions of womanhood and explore conjointly the range of identities that reflect the reality of women's lives (Bowman et al., 2001; Moradi et al., 2002a, 2002b). Qualitative research that explores the process of womanist identity development for women from various backgrounds could reveal shared and unique experiences across various groups of women. Interviews, focus groups, and the use of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) would be invaluable in facilitating the understanding of definitions of womanhood and the process of womanist identity development across women of various backgrounds. Such research allows women's voices to shape theory rather than imposing theoretical models or assuming their applicability to women. Women's voices can provide invaluable information for evaluating and refining the womanist identity development model's applicability to women from different backgrounds. Until such work is done, what we know about womanist identity development is limited largely to young African American and White women from the United States and young Black South African women.

Another noteworthy point is that there is a general trend of lower alphas for WIAS subscale scores with African American samples versus with racially/ethnically mixed or primarily White samples and that mixed findings seem to go hand-in-hand with psychometric problems. For example, Carter and Parks (1996) found some theoretically consistent links between woman-

ist identity attitudes and psychological distress with White women but not with African American women in their sample. This trend highlights Helms's (1996) point that sample composition can substantially influence the observed psychometric properties of scores of identity development (as well as other) measures. It may also be that the meaning of womanist identity development attitudes differs for different samples. Thus, researchers need to explore the nature and process of womanist identity development for various populations before assuming construct equivalency across groups.

### **Research on the Process of Womanist Identity Development**

Extant data raise some questions about the meaning of womanist identity development stages and processes and/or the WIAS's ability to capture those constructs and a developmental process. No study to date, however, has examined directly the process of womanist identity development. Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies that examine the process of womanist identity development are needed to address directly questions regarding the developmental nature of the womanist identity model and the proposition that the process of womanist identity development is the same across diverse groups of women. Furthermore, although womanist identity development researchers are encouraged to report subscale intercorrelations in their samples, a number of published studies did not report these data. Reporting subscale intercorrelations across future samples can illuminate the extent to which unexpected intercorrelations among WIAS subscales across extant samples reflect sample idiosyncrasies (e.g., younger college students) or reflect a more persistent and general trend. The former possibility may be inconsistent with the notion that the process of womanist identity development is the same across groups, and the latter possibility points to the need to refine operationalizations of womanist identity attitudes and hypothesized links among womanist identity development stages.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that revising and refining the womanist identity development model and the WIAS are important in advancing the womanist identity development literature. Extant theory and research should guide this process. Integrating persons' recognition of their own multiple identities and the sociopolitical meaning and consequences of these identities into the womanist and other identity development models and their operationalizations may be fruitful areas for future theory refinement and measurement development. Recognizing the complexity and multi-

dimensionality of persons' identities may be one of the most important steps needed to further the womanist identity development model and identity development literature as a whole. One promising approach to advancing the womanist identity development literature may be to use qualitative methods to directly hear women's voices and to integrate these voices into theory and measurement refinement. Indeed, such an approach seems consistent with the spirit of the womanist identity development model, which highlights the importance of self-definition to women's identities and well-being.

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