As suggested by the title of our book, we have divided our textbook into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1–6) has been dedicated to exploring race as a social construct (theory), specifically deconstructing its evolution and emergence into a phenomenon that shapes our identities and understandings of human interaction in the presence of racial difference. We learned that race as a concept was introduced as a means for marginalizing and oppressing certain ethnic groups. This racial hierarchy and systemic oppression was part of a political agenda designed to preserve the position of power occupied by European Americans. For racial/ethnic groups, this limited their access to resources and opportunities that would remedy this economic, political, and occupational inequity, which moved the politics of race from the political to the social arenas of life.

Part II (Chapters 7–12) provides a context within which to better understand this transition. Specifically, these chapters are designed to further our understanding of these man-made differences by presenting real world scenarios that apply theories and concepts about race to specific kinds of interracial interactions and everyday activities. In these chapters, we will learn how racial oppression and the history of race relations have played a critical role in how our interpersonal and interracial relationships are shaped. These scenarios and contexts will afford us the opportunity to understand and reflect on how we manage our attitudes, beliefs, and values when we are faced with racial differences. In short we challenge the reader (ourselves included) to move “from theory into practice”—applying our book knowledge to our actual, real interpersonal interactions—and use our own lives and experiences as a site for eradicating racism...one relationship at a time. By examining the current state and perceptions of interracial friendships, we aim to establish a knowledge base on this topic and identify the perceptual and communicative barriers that prevent these relationships from occurring.
The Significance of Interracial Friendships

Research has shown that human interaction and relational intimacy are essential for our survival. No matter how archaic the phrase “no man is an island” may sound, it really speaks to a basic human necessity—relationship. Sometimes we all need our personal space to decompress, but in the end, we all need the company of others in order to live a healthy, normal life. While we all need these relationships, it is imperative that we have the proper tools necessary for establishing and preserving these relationships. In general, we are first introduced to relationship in our family unit. As children we learn the rights and wrongs, the dos and don’ts that shape our world and interpersonal interactions. This learning process is both informal and formal, with the informal lessons being learned through observations and formal lessons learned through actual communication between parent(s) and child, with further learning occurring when social rules and norms are violated. Our familial relationships allow us to learn communication as a transactional process between interactants and to develop the skills that facilitate positive communicative interactions.

Another relational context that provides a tremendous opportunity for relational learning and growth is friendship. Unlike our familial relationships, into which we are born, we have the freedom to choose our friendships and use a variety of criteria to determine with whom we will establish some of our most intimate relationships. Our relationships with family last for a lifetime and provide us with unconditional love and support, whereas our friendships are established by choice and are voluntary in nature. Both relationship types are very rewarding and offer intimacy and connection to its partners in very distinct ways. One characteristic that makes friendship relationships different from family relationships, however, is that friendship relationships can be initiated and terminated for a variety of reasons and do not have the expectation that the relationship will last a lifetime. This means that friends must work to maintain the relationship and assure each other that the relationship is mutually satisfying. Eventually, the friends develop a pattern of communication that is comfortable for them and create a means of continued interaction that facilitates the preservation of the relationship and relational intimacy.

In general, our friendship relationships should offer support, intimacy, and connection that are most likely not found in other relationships. Take a moment to reflect on your friendships. Is there a marked difference between each relationship? Are there some qualities about one friend or relationship that cannot be found in others? How hard would you say you and your friends work at keeping the relationship alive? Do either of you need regular contact with each other, or is it okay to go a few weeks without talking, knowing that you can pick up where you left off without missing a beat? Taking this scenario a step further, how many of those relationships would you say are with a person from a different race? Do these interracial friendships differ at all from your same-race friendships? If so, why do you think that is? Hopefully, as you contemplated your answers to these questions you began to think of two things: (1) the importance of friendship and (2) what it might mean if we do not have a racially diverse friendship network. While several mitigating factors might not have afforded you the opportunity to interact, let alone develop, friendships with people who have
membership in racial groups different from your own, it is our hope that you will give
more thought to this relational phenomenon and what it means in terms of race rela-
tions. Please do not misinterpret our position. We are not advocating the initiation
and development of interpersonal friendships for the sole purpose of racial reconciliation
(the process of healing the racial tensions and bridging the racial divide that exist
between the races); rather, we challenge everyone to self-reflect on how they/we have
been socialized to perceive racial differences and how that process might have directly
impacted our decision to (or fear of doing so) have close, personal relationships with
people who are racially different from ourselves.

As we will discuss further in this chapter, the contact hypothesis (Allport,
1958) is a theory that has attempted to help us better understand this very phe-
nomenon. In short, the theory asserts that increased interactions with racially dif-
ferent others will reduce prejudiced thoughts and beliefs in optimal conditions.
While this may be true in theory, in practice, this may not be the most appropriate
way by which to change one’s belief system (Dixon, Durheim, & Tredoux, 2005). I
don’t believe scholars are arguing that interracial friendships be entered into with
the purpose of deconstructing our preexisting belief systems. Rather, they suggest
that these interracial interactions function to challenge us to reflect internally on
our stereotypical beliefs about racially different others with whom we have had
little to no contact.

Unlike our relationships with family members, our friendship relationships pro-
vide us with the unique opportunity to choose with whom we would like to interact
and establish an emotional bond. Through our friendships, we learn things about
ourselves that we might not learn from our family members. More importantly,
these friendships equip us with the interpersonal skills we need to better and effec-
tively communicate with people outside of our friendship network. We understand
how personality and cultural differences shape our individual identities and experi-
cences, which undoubtedly have an impact on how we interact with people in other
situations and contexts. Because of our experiences with our friends, we become
wiser and more attuned to our intimacy needs and become more discriminating in
our friendship choices, choosing to preserve those relationships where we feel
accepted, supported, and validated and dissolving those that do not (Collier, 1996;
Goldsmith, 2004; Hamm, Brown, & Heck, 2005; Jaasma, 2002; Korgen, Mahon, &
Wang, 2003; Welner, 2006). It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to reach this conclusion,
but we all desire to be in healthy relationships that make us feel good about our-

According to LeCroy (1988) friendship can be defined as “a mutual involvement
between two people that is characterized by affection, satisfaction, enjoyment, open-
ness, respect, and a sense of feeling important to the other.” These criteria for friend-
ship are created subconsciously in childhood wherein individuals are drawn to each
other for very basic reasons. Because we spend most of our time in environments and
contexts with racially similar individuals (Forbes, 1997; Halualani, et al., 2004; Hamm
et al., 2005; Hean & Dickinson, 1995), it is no surprise that our friendships are estab-
lished within the confines of those interactions. Past research has shown that this
Friendships established in early childhood are definitely different from those we have later in life. Although we have the tendency to become friends with people who are in close physical proximity to us (e.g., workplace, neighborhood, church, and school), those relationships become more complex as we transition from adolescence into adulthood, per se. The criteria we use as we get older become more involved and discriminating (read detailed) than when we were in elementary school. Lending someone a crayon may have facilitated relational efficacy in elementary school but doesn’t really cut it when we’re in middle or high school. A new set of criteria are introduced that reflect our value system and what we believe are important for establishing a good friendship relationship. While it may hold true that friendships developed in our youth are primarily with people of the same sex and race as our own, the same can be said of those relationships we have later in life. Even though other relational issues may determine what a “true friend” is, human interactions and relationships continue to be established with people from our same racial group (Goldsmith, 2004).

BOX 7.1

AUTHOR REFLECTIONS

Reflecting on my friendships, I think I’ve done a pretty good job of choosing to have close, personal relationships with a wide variety of people who have come into my life for a variety of reasons. Those true relationships that remind me of how blessed I am to have such wonderful people in my life illustrate the beauty of having diverse friends who aren’t necessarily just like me. Many of my friends and I share common values and beliefs, and in most cases, we also share identities as Christians; however, there are those relationships where we have differences, which I think is of equal importance. The differences may be in our race or culture, but it is our similarities and appreciation of each other as individuals (who happen to have membership in a certain racial group) that make our friendship all the more valuable. I have certain friends from both racial groups with whom we share the same sense of humor, similar life experiences, and core values that overcome our racial differences or similarities.

My current friendship network primarily involves other African American women and some European Americans. I truly wish I had closer friendships and more frequent interactions with racially/ethnically different others. I attribute these lacks to the lack of diversity at my institution (see Banton’s six orders of contact) and the limited contact among most people in suburbia who hole themselves up in their homes when the garage doors go down. I remain hopeful that this will not always be the case. As our nation continues to become racially and ethnically diverse, it is only natural that interracial interactions and friendships will follow suit—I look forward to the change.

—TMH
Interracial friendships are very much like same-race friendships, the primary (and obvious) difference being that the friends have membership in two different racial groups. This racial difference creates for each friend a qualitatively different lived experience that might directly impact the friendship. For example, Milagros (Hispanic American) is having a difficult time communicating with her English professor (European American) and feels she is receiving unfair treatment because of her ethnicity. Candace (European American) is in the same class and doesn’t agree with Milagros’s assessment of what is going on. After several attempts to share her frustrations with her friend, Milagros resolves to confide in Bei (Chinese American) who seems to understand and empathize with her. Despite the fact that her friend “doesn’t get it,” Milagros recognizes that they each have different racial standpoints that allow them to interpret their experiences differently. Eventually, Candace comes to the realization that their professor is treating certain students differently. She apologizes to Milagros for not understanding and explains that she’s never had to think of things from a racial perspective, and because of their friendship, she is more sensitive to and aware of the possibility that racism and discrimination do still exist. This is also the first interracial friendship Candace has ever had, so she didn’t necessarily have the communication skills that would prepare her for this dimension of their relationship.

Barriers to Interracial Friendships

As anyone can guess, interracial friendships face a set of barriers that are absent from same-race friendships. One of the dominating barriers is the stereotypes that friends might have of each other prior to the relationship’s initiation. Few studies have been conducted that actually measure these stereotypes within this relational context; however, other research does indicate that we live in a society where racial differences are oftentimes perceived as a negative factor in the development of interracial relationships (Diggs & Clark, 2002; Glascock, 2003; Houston, 1997; Hughes & Tuch, 2003; Leonard & Locke, 1993; S. Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). In their various studies, these and other researchers continue to demonstrate that societal prejudices and stereotypes remain a constant in the minds of many people in society. By extension, our beliefs about racial difference are informed by these ways of thinking and ultimately influence our perceptions of each other as well as whether or not we choose to interact with or even have relationships with members of an outgroup.

Of the aforementioned studies, the Leonard and Locke (1993) study specifically aims to determine the extent to which such unhealthy assessments and judgments hinder the development of interracial friendships. In their study involving evaluations of an outgroup by European Americans and African Americans, Leonard and Locke (1993) found evidence proving this to be true, thereby supporting the assumption that interracial communication is difficult to facilitate and maintain. In short, they found that both groups harbored negative stereotypes of each other that would make interracial communication impossible, which would most definitely preclude any possibility of any positive interracial interactions and relationships. Similarly, in their autoethnography where they chose to discuss the intricacies of their interracial friendship, communication scholars Rhunette Diggs and Karen Clark (2002) demonstrate
how friends from diverse racial backgrounds must have some level of commitment to their relationship in order for the relationship to work. In order for each partner to feel safe and comfortable with themselves and their differences, Diggs and Clark urge the friends to communicate with each other while also having conversations with their same-race friends (intraracial communication) about the possible difficulties their relationship might be having. More importantly, they also suggest that the interracial friends make it a top priority to come back to each other and discuss those issues in order to maintain a healthy friendship relationship.

A second barrier that may hinder the development of interracial friendships is mistrust by one or both relational partners (Houston, 1997; Kohatsu et al., 2000). In an effort to further explore the relationship between stereotyping and interracial friendship, communication scholar Marsha Houston (1997) examined these issues in her essay on dialogues between African American women and European American women. Her analysis suggests that although all interracial friendships do not experience stress, the history of race relations has led to a long-standing mistrust and suspicion between racial/ethnic groups. Furthermore, Houston suggests that hesitation or uncertainty about race relations can be largely attributed to mutual negative stereotyping. In this case, both African American and European American women, as well as other racial/ethnic groups and men, have false perceptions of each other that ultimately create barriers to effective, improved interracial communication.

A third barrier we would like to introduce is the issue of intentionality versus emotionality. A theme underlying many of the behaviors we have discussed and will discuss in this chapter deal with the intended meaning and motivations behind behaviors that can potentially be viewed as racist and harmful. For the purpose of our discussions of race, intentionality refers to the degree to which a certain behavior is viewed by an offended party as purposeful in causing hurt or harm. Through confrontation and honest communication, the offender and offended party can identify the offending behavior and discuss (a) whether or not the offender intended to offend and (b) the consequences this behavior had for (un)intended parties. Such dialogue can also be used to identify and recognize the emotionality or emotional component of an interracial interaction gone bad. Intentions aside, emotionality refers to the negative emotions or feelings a party experiences as a result of experiencing firsthand, hearing, or observing the behavior she or he deems offensive. As we suggest, relational partners, friends, colleagues, or others must commit themselves to engaging in frank discussions about verbal infractions that can potentially widen the divide between racial groups.

**History and Interracial Friendships**

Within recent years, there has been an increased interest in how interracial friendships function (Antonio, 2004; Carlson, Wilson, & Hargrave, 2003; Collier, 1996; Jaasma, 2002; Welner, 2006; Wright et al., 1997). Whether they occur in middle school or college, interracial friendships are increasing in number and are a reflection of the changing demographics in our country. Same-race relationships remain a common relational dyad and should serve as a template for interracial dyads. Although relational partners bring their racialized experiences to the relationship, they don’t
necessarily have to determine the entire course of the relationship. We live in a country where the government played a very active role in shaping race relations and purposely separated its citizens by race, making it illegal for European Americans and African Americans to share many of the basic rights we currently enjoy. This legal segregation of racial groups was a deterrent to any and all interracial interactions that those in power feared would taint the “pure blood” of European Americans. These efforts stem from concerted efforts to preserve a racial hierarchy and maintain an unequal power distribution that placed European Americans at the top of the social structure.

Systemic forms of oppression such as colonization, slavery, and racial segregation conveyed a clear message to the United States and the world that a racial social order was in play and would remain that way. The obvious resentment of racial groups, particularly African Americans, precipitated the legal separation of the races with the inception of the Jim Crow laws. These laws mandated that European Americans and other racial groups literally be separated from one another in both public and private spheres. Water fountains, restaurants, bathrooms, and other public facilities were decorated with signs labeled “For Whites Only” and “For Blacks Only,” thereby presenting

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**BOX 7.2**

**AUTHOR REFLECTIONS**

Friends are an important part of a person’s life, and my life is no exception. Over the years, I have relied on my closest friends for encouragement, unconditional support, “tough love,” and more uncontrollable laughter than should be allowed by law. These are the individuals who have always “had my back”—especially during tough times (e.g., the deaths of both parents and the challenges of graduate school). My friends have also provided me physical things in times of need; for example, during high school my best friend and her family “adopted” me and gave me a place to live when I moved out of my parents’ house. When I reflect on my lifetime friendships, I can’t help but appreciate all of the blessings that have come my way. . . . I also recognize how I’ve benefited from close friends from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

After leading discussions on interracial friendships with students, I am convinced that the presence, or lack, of having a diverse set of friendships is heavily related to the environment in which you were raised. According to Banton’s six orders of contact, positive interracial contact is only possible through acculturation and integration. Fortunately for me, being raised in a culturally diverse neighborhood encouraged friendships where any racial differences were transcended through the identification of other similarities (e.g., faith, music, sports, etc.). Students who were raised in environments with little diversity—and reflective of little, or unsubstantial, interracial conflict—were less likely to have friends from other races. Many have found that college presents the perfect opportunity to create friendships beyond current social circles. In my case, college allowed me to get to know people of different socioeconomic levels, and in doing so, eliminate negative stereotypes that I had. Hopefully, our interactions also helped them overcome some stereotypical beliefs. My hope, and prayer, is that you also extend your personal network of friends while in college.

—MPO
physical markers of the racial lines that divided the country, its people, and the government. Not only were public spaces racially demarcated, but so were interpersonal relationships between racial groups, and if anyone even gave the appearance of violating any of the laws or social rules, they were subjected to imprisonment, beatings, and social isolation, and in extreme cases murder and/or lynchings. Although interracial marriages were outlawed, interracial friendships were also frowned upon, thereby discouraging any and all interactions that seemed to blur the color lines and alter the racial hierarchy.

It wasn’t until 1954 that the laws separating the racial groups were dismantled. *Brown v. Board of Education* (Sigelman, Bledsoe, & Combs, 1996) was the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that desegregated all public educational institutions (e.g., elementary schools, high schools, and colleges and universities) throughout the nation. In theory, the playing field was being leveled. Up to this point, children of color, specifically African American students, were prohibited from receiving the same type of schooling as their European American cohorts. Their textbooks, curriculum, and buildings were of lesser quality, which had an adverse affect on the quality of education the students were receiving. By overturning the Jim Crow laws, the U.S. government was attempting to put an end to racial segregation in our education system. This shift in the political and social landscape would offer new educational and economic opportunities for African Americans, with interracial contact a by-product of this newfound “equal opportunity” (Sigelman et al, 1996). It is also important to note that this change also facilitated increased interracial interactions in the public and private spheres (M. Wilson & Russell, 1996), which were most likely discouraged. In this constrained environment, however, those relationships that did emerge were strained, discouraged, and stigmatized.

**Case Study: Some of My Best Friends**

We have posed a few questions in this chapter that ask you to reflect on the racial composition of your friendships, as we have. Using a similar approach, English professor Emily Bernard posed the same question to her colleagues. In her published book entitled *Some of My Best Friends* (2004), Bernard presents to the reader a collection of essays and writings from a variety of noted writers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of their essays is to address the complexities involved in interracial friendships. The racial composition of the relational dyads include Latino and White, Black and Asian, and Black and Jewish, among others, and provide the reader with examples of experiences with race the writers have had in their personal lives. From their individual perspectives, each writer is giving voice to experiences relative to being in a friendship with a person from a different race. What’s most interesting about this book is the candid manner in which the writers share the joys, pains, and frustrations that come with allowing themselves to become emotionally vulnerable with someone whose experiences, beliefs, and ways of thinking and doing things are different from their own.

Bernard (2004) was inspired to edit this book because of her fascination with how friendships function. Her racialized experiences most likely informed her own
inter racial friendships, which she probably assumed were not the result of a phenomenon unique to her. It is quite possible that Bernard’s standpoint as an African American woman created experiences that were similar to her other friends from the same racial group. While their experiences in no way are identical, there is a strong likelihood that they share some commonalities. Bernard should be commended for her efforts to explore an unknown territory that many people are too quick to dismiss as insignificant or inconsequential. We are at a time in history where people are under the misconception that racism is a thing of the past. For those who have never had to think about their race, they might not consider it a big deal in general, let alone when it concerns the friendships they choose to establish. This could be a potential problem for them. Their lack of awareness could manifest itself in the relationship as a barrier to true communication and intimacy between the friends. On the other hand, a friend who has had encounters with racism and chooses not to share those distressful experiences with a close friend from a different race is also creating barriers to their relationship. Friendship is supposed to be a safe space where each relational partner can share their most intimate secrets or feel comfortable enough to express him- or herself without fear of judgment or contamination. In an ideal situation, the friends would really confide their true feelings in each other as well as their understandings of race issues that are directly or indirectly related to the friendship. When the relational dynamics do not facilitate an adequate amount of intimacy, the partners will experience what Bernard (2004) calls “friend divorces.” This is the decision made by one or both friends to dissolve the relationship. This may be attributed to issues or stresses plaguing the relationship that are just too difficult to bear.

If you reflect back on your past relationships, you can probably remember a friendship that just didn’t work out. For whatever reason, either you or your friend decided it was best to not continue the relationship. Regardless of the whys or hows behind the decision, you probably felt a great deal of pain, hurt, and disappointment. Well, in the case of interracial friendships, the pain can be doubly worse. Not only might the person experience feelings of rejection as a “person,” per se, but he or she could very well feel the friend no longer wants to be in the relationship because the friend “just doesn’t get it,” it’s too much work, or the person talks about race way too much. For either person, the decision to end an interracial friendship only perpetuates the cycle of racial separation or segregation in the social sphere of our daily lives. As with any other relationship, the interracial friendship takes just as much work and is equally as rewarding as a same-race friendship, if not more so. The racial differences create experiences for each friend that the other may not fully understand, yet the similarities or common ground shared should be important and strong enough to push the friends to commit themselves to a form of relational intimacy that can only make them better, well-rounded, and culturally sensitive people.

Six Orders of Contact

As you think about your interracial interactions, how have you been socialized to communicate (or not) with other racial/ethnic group members? Has your family or society
socialized you to believe that such interactions are healthy and normal, or were you discouraged from having any type of interracial contact at all? Whatever your experience has been, it is our hope that you have become sensitized to how cultural group membership (e.g., dominant culture, U.S. nationality) influences our attitudes toward and beliefs about interracial contact.

Banton (1967) developed six orders of interracial contact to describe how two racial/ethnic groups positively or negatively manage this unique communicative experience. As you will see, four of these orders discourage, and two orders encourage, an appreciation of racial/ethnic difference in varying degrees.

The four orders fostering negative or no interracial contact include peripheral contact, institutionalized contact, pluralism, and assimilation. **Peripheral contact** refers to a minimal amount of contact between racial/ethnic groups that is transient (e.g., in classrooms, grocery shopping, riding the bus). In this framework, limited interracial interaction is expected and maintained by individuals. **Institutionalized contact** refers to contact occurring between independent nations. As we noted in previous chapters, this type of contact is manifested through colonialism (subordination) or paternalism (sharply defined roles and status). More importantly, the dominant group maintains social distance through regulation (e.g., antimiscegenation laws) and repeated demonstrations of power. **Pluralism** occurs when racial/ethnic differences reflect variation in expected behavior and there is minimum social interaction. In general, racial/ethnic groups are coexisting without much effort put into interracial contact, which could potentially be mutually beneficial. The final order that fails to value racial/ethnic difference is **assimilation** or amalgamation. Banton describes this order as an unavoidable consequence resulting from integration via interracial marriage. Others have operationalized assimilation as a people adopting the dominant group's attitudes and beliefs while forsaking those of their primary racial/ethnic group. For the purposes of this text, the latter definition is used to describe the tensions associated with interracial contact.

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**BOX 7.3**

**STUDENT REFLECTION**

A few years ago I attended a party at the Abby West Apartments. My girlfriend and her roommates had befriended the superintendent, who happens to be a Black male. His name is Martin or “Big Nasty.” It was his 30th birthday, and he was throwing a big bash at the pool and having a lot of his friends attend. She had made a huge happy birthday poster/banner with his name on it along with many other fun sayings that were aesthetic to the eye. When we got to the pool, we realized we were the only White people among approximately 60–80 Black people. My friend Rachel took the banner up to Big Nasty and a few other people standing around him to show it off. Immediately she received some comments pertaining to her place at this party and why was she here. Big Nasty overheard these comments and immediately asked those other people to leave. He didn’t want anyone making us feel uncomfortable.
The two orders that foster more positive interracial contact are *acculturation* and *integration* (Banton, 1967). These two processes are more effective in resolving tensions related to interracial contact by valuing difference and accommodating for this difference in one way or another. Acculturation occurs when racial/ethnic group members learn about a culture (dominant group) that is different from the one they are born into (racial/ethnic group). In this case, people learn to live in both worlds while maintaining their racial/ethnic heritage and identity. In the case of integration, however, racial distinctions are given minor consideration and interracial interactions are maximized. More importantly, friendships and social relationships are fostered that provide individuals with choices that allow them to move across racial/ethnic lines. Ideally, both orders of interracial contact would greatly contribute to effective interracial communication. Unfortunately, various barriers prevent this utopian state of race relations from occurring. In order to achieve this complex, yet attainable, goal of positive interracial communication, we must first consider what barriers prevent this process from occurring.

### Understanding the Contact Hypothesis

The contact hypothesis, also referred to as the mutual intergroup differentiation model, was developed by Allport (1958) who hypothesized that increased interaction between ingroup and outgroup members will reduce prejudice. This framework was not used to dismantle the Jim Crow laws of years gone by but can be utilized to address the aftereffect of such a dramatic change in society. As N. Miller (2002) notes, the contact hypothesis functions under the assumption held by “social interventionists” (Miller, 2002) that being in the presence of people from other outgroup members will lead to a change in the way they think about racial and ethnic differences. The most natural relationship to emerge from these interactions is friendship, and it is our goal to use this theory to better understand how to foster positive race relations within the context of interracial friendships.

According to Miller (2002), there are four key concepts that inform the contact hypothesis and how we perceive racial differences. The first concept is *salience* and...
refers to the attention individuals place on their intergroup differences. Individuals are highlighting the racial categories to which they belong, thus increasing the salience of those differences. Decategorization, the second concept, is different and refers to “an awareness of individual distinctiveness,” which involves a person redirecting his or her interest from a person’s outgroup status to more individuating information. In short, the person is “evaluated on [his or her] own merit” (p. 394). This concept suggests that an individual is faced with “counterstereotypical information about the outgroup”; however, it is not guaranteed that the individual’s bias is removed. She or he may perceive the person as an anomaly, or an exception to the rule. The third concept, personalization, occurs when “(1) one responds to others in terms of their relationship to self (commonalities are found) and (2) one self-discloses positive information they otherwise would not know. Individuating information is processed. Anxiety and discomfort are often times experienced (affective impact)” (Miller, 2002, p. 397). The fourth and final concept is typicality and involves a “pleasant interaction among ingroup and outgroup members [that] can be effective in reducing intergroup bias only if the outgroup members typify their group” (p. 398). If individuals adhere to this approach to interracial interactions, they perceive the outgroup members to “fit the stereotype of their book,” and if they don’t, “they will be perceived as an exception and intergroup attributional bias will remain intact” (Miller, 2002, p. 398).

Regardless of our orientation toward racial identity, we have been socialized to think of racial differences as being a significant way of categorizing people, which ultimately shapes how we interact and communicate with each other. For some, differences are framed as something to be avoided, either out of fear, uncertainty, or resistance. For others, those same differences are perceived as an unavoidable human quality that exists, is “just there,” and has no impact on human interaction. The final orientation involves a recognition and appreciation of racial differences that fosters positive interracial communication between an ingroup and outgroup member; while their differences are acknowledged, individuals are able to identify those moments when race does matter and those times when it does not. The latter orientation is obviously the ideal approach we should use in our interracial interactions, but there are those times when interactants reach an impasse. For one reason or another, our different orientations because of our race, gender, class, or sexual identity, among others, cause us to see each other in a different way, which may result in miscommunication.

This theory hypothesizes that these differences that sometimes create barriers in our interracial interactions can be overcome by frequent, regular intergroup (or interpersonal) contact between individuals from differing racial and ethnic groups. Studies designed to test the theory have found that a change in interaction pattern or environment does create opportunities for interracial communication; however, the more salient issue or problem concerns the quality of these interactions. Before we explore the criticisms or pitfalls of this theory, we will first establish a brief overview of its history and evolution and how the contact theory has changed to become an appropriate framework for exploring how these interactions can facilitate positive interracial communication and friendships. In the following paragraphs, we will provide a summary of the general assumptions posed by prominent scholars who have used the
contact hypothesis as a theoretical umbrella under which they have posed their own questions about intergroup relations.

T. F. Pettigrew’s (1998) approach to intergroup contact has directed attention toward the personal and intimate nature of these and future interactions. This is referred to as the “generalization of benefit” and obviously refers to the overall benefits that result from interracial communication. The three levels of contact are not posed as sequential in nature or dependent on each other to move a person toward optimal communication with racially different others. Rather, they are presented in no specific order and describe three types of contact that demonstrate varying degrees of intimacy or familiarity an ingroup member has with people outside of their racial group. The first level of contact is most likely to happen and involves multiple interactions with one individual in other new contact settings. An example of this is Seneca (African American) who has had very little interaction with Native Americans (also referred to as First Nations People) until she met Linda in her communication theory class. The stereotypes or inaccurate beliefs she had about Native Americans were dispelled as she got to know Linda in class and in other social settings.

The second level of contact differs from the first level in that a person has several interactions with other people who share the same social category as the original person. In this case, Seneca has a variety of personal interactions with Linda as well as other people of Native American ethnicity, thus providing her with several reference points concerning interracial interactions with people from this group. The last and final contact is least likely to happen and involves continued interaction with a variety of people from multiple, other outgroup categories. T. F. Pettigrew (1998) suggests that these occurrences are infrequent because most people do not typically have a multiracial friendship network, thus making this the least likely scenario describing typical interracial interactions and friendships. Nevertheless, in order for a person to seriously understand the nature of their friendship relationships, they must reflect on the interracial interactions they have had and how diverse and numerous they have (or have not) been thus far in their life. Doing so will challenge them to gain introspection concerning the extent to which their own and/or societal perceptions of racial difference and interracial interactions have influenced their friendship selection process.

In a similar vein, M. B. Brewer and Miller (1984) describe these similar contact experiences in the following ways. Category-based responding occurs when an entire outgroup is perceived as being monolithic or “relatively undifferentiated, tightly bounded, and distinct from the ingroup (differentiated)”; the self is seen as prototypical of the ingroup. Prior to her friendship with Linda, Seneca thought that all First Nations People were alike. The **differentiated model** transitions a person from this way of thinking to seeing some distinctions between ingroup and outgroup members. This level of contact presents members as being atypical, thus allowing a person to see variability within the group. The final level of contact is personalized interaction, which can be described as observations and perceptions of similarities between the self and outgroup members and higher levels of dissimilarity between self and ingroup members. This can also be described as decategorized interaction wherein a comparison is made between self and other, thereby facilitating the opportunity for reduced prejudice and stereotyping.
Yet another articulation of the contact hypothesis is Hewstone and Brown's (1986) mutual intergroup differentiation model. Consistent with the theory, they argue that “positive contact w/individual outgroup should result in positive behavior and reactions toward individuals but not the entire group because the person is perceived as being ‘atypical’; therefore, interventions must be made at the intergroup not interpersonal level.” Consistent with other critical approaches to the theory, Hewstone and Brown highlight the fact that intergroup interactions will not always result in a change in attitudes toward racial/ethnic difference. Instead, the outgroup member is perceived as an “anomaly” or someone who is not representative of their racial group. Because they do not conform to that person’s preconceived notions of what it means to be a member of that racial group, interactions with this outgroup member, albeit positive, fail to challenge those preexisting beliefs or assumptions.

The final interpretation or modification of the contact hypothesis is the common intergroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). This model presupposes the following:

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BOX 7.4

STUDENT REFLECTION

As we wrap up the semester, I have begun to realize a lot of things about myself. [Through] working on the diversity workshop . . . not only did I learn a lot about numerous countries, I learned a lot about my teammates. After we gave our presentation, we all said that we would go to dinner so that we could all get to know each other a lot better. I was quite surprised about the bonds that I had formed with all of these ladies that it made me do a lot of thinking. What is very surprising to me is that they are all White! Spending so much time with all of my White team members these last couple of weeks has made me see them as people, and not as races. The biggest problem that I had with my White friends in the past was gossip. I used to work with a White girl and through us working together, we became really close friends. She would always compliment me on my hard work and she would be the first to tell me how cute I looked each day. Then one day, my manager tells me that she needs to speak with me. I was nervous but I knew that I hadn't done anything wrong.

My manager tells me that I needed to make sure that I was not accidentally ringing up people's sales as my own sale. . . . It was a nice way of saying, “quit stealing people's sales.” I asked her where she got the idea that I was stealing sales from, and to my surprise, she said that one of my coworkers had come to tell her. [It was] the one person in the store that I thought was a good friend of mine. That experience completely changed my views of White people. I have come a long way since that day, and I am very happy that I have let that pain and anger go. When Jessica told me about the situation with her dad, it completely took me back to this particular day. I felt betrayed! Well after you (Dr. Harris) told me what you did about Jessica caring about the friendship, it completely changed my mind about her. . . . I think that I have reopened the door to letting her back in. Jessica is a great friend and I am glad that I met her. She has made me rethink my opinion about some White people!
Bias toward outgroup members is reduced by changing a person’s perceptions of an intergroup context from one that involves members of different groups to one that involves members of a single common or superordinate group. Former outgroup members are recategorized as ingroup members within a superordinate category that they respectively share with one another. (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, p. 394).

As the name of the model suggests, an ingroup member begins to recognize the common ground or similarities they share with the outgroup member. Instead of allowing racial differences to function as barriers to their interactions, the ingroup member, through frequent interracial interactions, is reconceptualizing the way they perceive this person and the racial group. Their racial identity is then foreshadowed by the identities that are common between them.

Consider the following scenario. Neal (European American) was very disturbed by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States (as were/are millions of others). Prior to this moment in history, he had limited knowledge of Middle Eastern culture or the Muslim faith, although he is friends with Saliq from college (they are in the same political science class). After the attacks, his perceptions were informed by the heinous act of a few members of this racial/ethnic group. Neal was very angry and confused and began to have misgivings about Middle Easterners in general. His feelings surfaced when he and Saliq got into a heated debate about politics. Neal “slipped” and made a racial slur against Saliq and his ethnicity, and suffice it to say, Saliq, in turn, became angry and highly offended by his friend’s behavior. A few days after the mêlée, Neal shared with his father the incident and how angry he was toward his Middle Eastern friend. Noting this visceral and inappropriate response to a seemingly innocent interaction, Neal’s father expressed concern to his son that he obviously had an unhealthy attitude toward an entire racial/ethnic group because of the September 11 attacks and had misdirected his frustrations and unleashed them on his friend, an innocent bystander. Once he got through the denial, Neal finally acknowledged his attitude and realized that his feelings about the terrorist attacks were legitimate; however, he had been in error in choosing his friend as a target for venting those frustrations merely because of his friend’s racial/ethnic group membership. Neal made concessions to his friend, asked for forgiveness, and made every attempt to restore their relationship. Fortunately, Saliq and Neal found their way back to the common ground that forged their relationship in the first place: family values, major, political science, and friendship.

Educational Institutions as Sites for Interracial Alliances

Elementary schools, high schools, and, more recently, colleges are sites where interracial friendships (also referred to as interracial alliances) have the opportunity to develop (Collier, 1988; Goldsmith, 2004; Kohatsu et al., 2000; Stearns, 2004). It is during these stages of identity development that individuals are becoming aware of how complex this process of growth is and how critical a role their relationships with others play in facilitating this knowledge and understanding. According to Goldsmith (2004), intergroup relations and racial compositions of high schools (as well as other educational contexts) are two factors that influence “interracial friendliness” and
“interracial conflict.” It is in these contexts that individuals have an increased likelihood of interacting with racially different others. Considering the conclusion for U.S. Census 2000 data predicting a significant shift in our racial landscape in the very near future (by the year 2050; Bergman, 2004), it is imperative that we use the findings from such studies as guidelines or signposts for equipping ourselves and future generations for positive race relations in these educational contexts as well as other social settings.

In their study of interracial contact among Asian Americans, Kohatsu et al. (2000) found that despite the fact that the student participants were members of a culturally diverse environment, there were still societal boundaries that dictate how racial groups should (or should not) interact with each other. They specifically found that Asian American and African American students at this particular school had “low to moderate levels of intergroup contact” (p. 339), which is very problematic. The findings are surprising, yet demonstrate that social boundaries regarding interracial communication exist. More specifically, the results reveal that these “restrictions” on interactions between these two racial groups can potentially have “an adverse effect on meaningful racial contact” (Kohatsu et al., 2000). Though not addressed in their study, there is the possibility that the Asian American and African American students were socialized by their respective interpersonal networks, society, and the media to perceive each other as so dissimilar that their outgroup member status is foregrounded as a deterrent to interactions between them. Ideally, being in close proxemics to one another in such a natural, real-world setting should facilitate a plethora of opportunities for interracial communication; however, as this study suggests, being physically close to racially different others doesn’t necessarily decrease or reduce the social or psychological distance that exists.

Within the last 10 years, racial diversity in educational institutions has become a growing area of interest for lawmakers, educators, social scientists, and communities with a vested interest in the education of our current future generations (Stearns, 2004; Welner, 2006). Whether the strategy is to make race-conscious student assignments to school districts (Welner, 2006) or to create opportunities for increased intergroup interactions (Carlson et al., 2003), providing students from all racial groups with equal educational opportunities is the primary concern of most schools and invested parties. According to Welner (2006), “this is also an effort to ‘avoid a segregated educational environment,’ which should result in “reduced negative racial stereotypes among young children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 352). After thorough research on race–school assignments for K–12 in the United States, Welner discovered several benefits that come with a racially diverse school. If they are open to them, students who are enrolled in such schools receive the following benefits:

1. Development of interracial friendships
2. Greater civic engagement
3. Greater likelihood of residing in integrated neighborhoods and of maintaining regular interracial contacts
4. Increased likelihood of working in an integrated environment and of having positive experiences in the integrated workplace
5. More positive intergroup attitudes in general

6. The potential for a “critical mass” enabling students to learn racial tolerance by building cross-racial relationships

As the list suggests, being in a school environment that is full of racially and ethnically diverse students creates an environment full of learning possibilities that are not restricted to classroom instruction. Interactions with students, faculty, and administrators with outgroup membership status have the potential to be enriched. Through these interpersonal encounters, members of this institutional environment may even begin to rethink their biases and prejudices regarding racial difference, which might spill over into other areas of their lives.

This is what Welner (2006) refers to as societal benefits, which have the potential to reduce segregation and to break the cycle of racial segregation, whether it is imposed legally or socially. Welner further describes this as a “lifelong and even inter-generational, self-perpetuating process of segregation that institutionalizes inequality” (p. 352). In other words, we as a society must be more proactive in our efforts to remove most, if not all, semblances, of racial segregation from our institutions. One form of separation by race is what Tatum (1997) identifies as self-segregation, which typically occurs when students of color are in the minority in a given social context (e.g., school). Because of their experiences with being one of a few (if any) students of color at their school, they will oftentimes seek each other out as a form of social support not offered by their interactions and/or relationships with students of the majority group. So, sitting at a cafeteria table or being involved in student organizations targeted to their own racial/ethnic group is a form of retreat from the larger institution and the isolation they experience because of their marginalized status. Some may argue that self-segregation is a form of racism; however, we must consider the fact that this a phenomenon that occurs when certain individuals are numerically in the minority, have daily experiences that remind them of their racial identity, and rarely have people of the dominant group demonstrate interest in them as individuals beyond the color of their skin. Thus, it stands to reason that students of color seek solace, comfort, and intimacy with each other, thereby allowing their racial affiliations to serve as a respite from their daily lives.

Intraracial or same-race relationships are, in general, healthy and good for a person’s psyche; however, having a relationship with outgroup members is also equally beneficial. In fact, as Carlson et al. (2003) suggest, these interracial friendships can occur in racially diverse contexts, but the racial composition of the student body is the one ingredient that can really determine if these relationships will take place at all. They are essentially positing that the more diverse an environment (possibly with equal numbers of people from each racial/ethnic group), the increased likelihood of interracial contact and, ultimately, interracial relationships. Carlson et al. (2003) found this to be true in their study of Hispanic students and intergroup relations. They learned that although cross-race or interracial friendships “were a significant predictor of other-group orientation, this variable contributed little variance compared with both school racial composition and perceived comfort of close friends with cross-race social interaction” (p. 215). Hispanic girls were noted as having a significantly high
number of interracial friendships, were very comfortable with interracial interactions, and scored high on scales measuring other-group orientation.

We learn from this study that Hispanic female students felt comfortable enough in their multiracial or multiethnic respective schools to communicate and have relationships with students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds, specifically European American and African American students. Jaasma’s (2002) research on “interethnic encounters” yielded very helpful data that can aid in our understanding of actual communication behaviors individuals use to negotiate and manage their interracial friendships. Analysis of 906 interviews with sixth graders revealed a total of 19 responses to interethnic relationships. Students were asked to describe a positive and a negative experience with interethnic (interracial) friendship.

The eight categories of positive responses included the following: (1) Becoming Friends—friends perceived their ethnic differences as positive qualities; (2) Shared Activities—friends play and talk together; (3) Going Places—friends participate together in an activity that takes place in a specific location (e.g., skating at the skating rink); (4) Sharing Culture—friends exchange knowledge about each other’s ethnicity (or culture) (e.g., “learning each other’s language, sharing ethnic food, and learning about religions and holidays” [p. 161]); (5) Cooperating—“getting along with each other, helping each other, especially with school work” (p. 161); (6) Sticking Up For—coming to a friend’s defense by protecting him or her or intervening when people verbally (or physically) attack the friend; (7) Romancing—developing an interest in or an actual romantic relationship with a racially/ethnically different friend of the opposite sex; and (8) Nothing Happened—a positive interethnic or interracial experience did not happen.

The positive responses to their friendships demonstrate a concerted effort on the part of both friends to ensure that the relationship is mutually beneficial. These responses involve the friends engaging in regular communication with one another and exchanging ideas, thoughts, and experiences, as well as defending their friend (and quite possibly the relationship) from those external to the relationship itself. They even report actual activities that facilitate their interaction, which also serve to create opportunities for increased relational intimacy and connection. In contrast, the students also reported a variety of strategies they have used to respond to the negative interracial friendship experiences that stood out for one reason or another. These 11 categories of negative responses are as follows: (1) Because I’m Different—being excluded from play because of their ethnicity; (2) Can’t Understand—the friend’s inability to understand language differences; (3) Fighting—the use of physical aggression in response to “differences or slurs, problems with playing, dislike for each other, and disagreements in what was said” (p. 157); (4) Verbal Aggression—an argument or verbal attack triggered by the friends’ ethnic differences; and (5) Indirect Aggression—passive/aggressive strategies to alienate. The remaining six responses occurred in the presence of a third person from a different ethnic background: (6) Getting Mad; (7) Stealing; (8) Embarrassing Events—the friend created an event that purposely caused her or him to be embarrassed; (9) Getting in Trouble—found themselves in a troublesome situation with a student from another ethnicity; (10) Loss—an existing friendship or the opportunity for another friendship relationship was lost; and (11) Nothing Bad.
The fact that there were more negative than positive responses should not be inferred or interpreted to mean that interracial friendships are doomed from the outset. Instead, these findings and responses should highlight for us how important it is for friends to, first, have a high level of commitment to the relationship. Regardless of their racial identity, friends who are pretty compatible, trust each other, and enjoy each other’s company should figure out a way to deal with the difficulties that come with establishing a close and intimate relationship. Second, they should not let their racial or ethnic differences become a barrier or stumbling block to the friendship. While it is important for each friend to demonstrate sensitivity within the relationship, they should be sure that the stressors associated with having membership in a certain racial group or having little to no awareness of their own racial identity do not prevent the relationship from being maintained. Instead, the friends should commit themselves to engaging in open and honest discussions about these problems, which should reduce the frequency of miscommunications or arguments that are a barrier. This can be alleviated by each friend maintaining intraracial friendship, a third important point for friends to be aware of. As Diggs time and Clark (2002) note, these intraracial relationships can serve as a buffer to the interracial friendship. Having relationships with others from one’s racial/ethnic group can function to validate one’s racialized experiences (affirmation) and reduce stress caused by racism, prejudice, or discrimination, all of which relieve pressure and frustration that emerge from the friend from another race or ethnicity who honestly cannot empathize with their friend.

Just as a friend of color will experience a myriad of emotions because of societal oppression (e.g., racism, discrimination, and prejudice), the friend from the dominant group will experience feelings of frustration because of an inability to relate to his or her friend’s standpoint. The friend may be experiencing racial awareness for the first time and is finding it difficult to conceptualize how and why a person is discriminated against or has negative feelings toward a certain racial group. The friend of color may have legitimate reasons for having those feelings; however, the friend from the out-group can try to be supportive (e.g., letting the friend vent) and nonjudgmental as the friend tries to process her or his encounters with racism. Interracial friends will undoubtedly experience problems and stress that are independent of race, and it will be very important for them to recognize this reality. Doing so will make it possible for them to identify when those racial moments do occur and how to best help each other resolve them without creating undue stress or pressure on the friendship. Creating such a supportive climate will also help the friends deal with conflict between them that does deal with race. If one of them makes a racially insensitive comment or appears to minimize the salience of a racial moment, it is imperative that they each have the communication skills and knowledge necessary to resolve the conflict while preserving the relationship.

**Effective Communication Strategies**

As we have already discussed, there are a plethora of benefits to having a friendship with a person who belongs to a racial/ethnic group different from our own. While
we are not advocating the initiation, development, and maintenance of an interraci-
acial friendship for the sole reason of becoming more racially aware, we encourage
you to remove the blinders that have served as barriers to being friends with some-
one outside of your race. There is no handbook; we hope we have challenged you to
self-reflect and broaden your horizons when it comes to issues of difference. So, you
can begin by asking yourself why you may or may not have a racially diverse friend-
ship network. If you do, that’s great! If not, then you might want to begin to think
seriously about (1) to what degree your own attitudes toward race and ethnicity are
shaping your beliefs about interracial friendships, (2) if and how they have influ-
enced your opportunities to have friendships with people from different races, and
(3) whether you have had the opportunity to have such relationships. In either case,
it is our hope that we have at least planted a seed for thought concerning racial dif-
ference. We challenge you to consider the following suggestions for breaking down
the barriers that might be preventing you from having the most rewarding relation-
ships of your life!

In their essay on interracial friendship, Houston and Wood (1996) offer ideas that
might help us to initiate, develop, and maintain relationships with people who are dif-
ferent from us racially. First and foremost, we must come to the realization that we
may not completely understand the other person. Because people often have different
meanings for the “same” behaviors (Houston & Wood, 1996), we should assume our
definitions for terms are going to be the same. Instead, we should perceive these com-
municative exchanges as opportunities to learn about communication styles that are
unique to diverse racial/ethnic groups.

Another guideline for effective interracial communication is to avoid imposing
our standards on other racial/ethnic groups. Houston and Wood (1996) use the
media as an example of how individuals use their cultural standards to determine
the value of other social groups. In the United States, we are socialized to perceive
European behaviors and attitudes as the norm; therefore, when we encounter indi-
viduals from racial/ethnic and cultural groups, we impose these standards on them.
For example, Lozano’s (1997) research on cultural uses of space and body reveals
that in the United States, people are socialized to maintain a great deal of physical
space when they are in public settings. However, for Latino/a Americans, particularly
in Miami, Florida, space use has “transformed cultural practices.” In other words, a
cultural style of body expressivity is used that may not adhere to U.S. expectations
of behavioral norms.

We should also have a commitment to “respect[ing] how others interpret experi-
ence” (Houston & Wood, 1996, p. 54). If a Korean American friend comes to you and
shares that he has experienced racism in one of his classes, do not invalidate his expe-
rience. Your friendship will be enhanced if you empathize with him and understand
this dimension of his (racial/ethnic) identity. Additionally, we should provide support
and engage in active listening that communicates respect and acknowledgment.
Houston and Wood (1996) believe that friends from different races and classes should
avoid silencing or denying the other’s experiences from their standpoints (see Chapter 5).
They also suggest that we acknowledge but not totalize our differences.
Conclusion

The history of race relations in the United States was born from a system where racial differences have been foregrounded as incredibly problematic. Systemic forms of oppression such as desegregation in education, residential areas, and the workplace, among others, were introduced and designed to separate racial groups and perpetuate a racial hierarchy that has permeated our interpersonal relationships. It wasn’t until *Brown v. Board of Education* that racism was struck a serious blow. The legal barriers designed to preserve racial purity (see Chapter 8) were dismantled and created opportunities for people to examine their attitudes toward and beliefs about racism and racial differences. Interactions between European Americans and African Americans were strained, hostile, and tense, which made it incredibly difficult for the playing field to be leveled. At the very least, the possibility of effective race relations was seen as a virtual impossibility.

Our public and private spaces as such as public schools, colleges and universities, the workplace, and residential neighborhoods are becoming increasingly diverse, racially, ethnically, and culturally. This diversity is undoubtedly creating circumstances and situations where people from these different ingroups and outgroups will be interacting and communicating with each other to achieve a common goal. Whether they are in a class together, are working on the same ad team, or are next door neighbors, it is imperative that each person have the knowledge and interpersonal skills necessary if effective interracial communication is to occur. As Korgen, Mahon, and Wang (2003) note, universities that have been successful in diversifying their student bodies must also be equipped to aid those students in adjusting to the change in the racial landscape of the institution.

One approach has been to require that students take at least one multicultural course in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements. Enrolling in such a class is believed to increase student racial awareness and sensitivity to racial and ethnic differences. While such efforts are essential and imperative, it is our interpersonal interactions and relationships that can really serve as a context for achieving the goal of improving race relations (Antonio, 2004). Through the informal and natural evolution of an interracial friendship, we are able to gain a better understanding of not only racial/ethnic groups different from our own, but how we as individuals think about race, not to mention how we communicate and develop relationships with others. It is not until we examine ourselves and our relationships that we will begin to bridge the racial divide that continues to plague our interpersonal networks and society at large.

Although acknowledging differences can be productive, we shouldn't overemphasize them. A Latina woman is of a different race than an African American woman, but each of them is more than just her race. . . . To avoid ignoring or totalizing differences, we can recognize and learn from ethnic and class diversity that is part—but only part—of who we are. (Houston & Wood, 1996, pp. 53, 54)
There is no handbook to offer guidelines or rules on how to navigate through an interracial relationship; therefore, we present the following tips as a starting point. Regardless of your racial standpoint, each person in an interracial friendship must choose to work toward healthy communication with one another.

- If you do not have any interracial friendships, reflect on the reasons you believe this to be so. If given the opportunity, would you have a friendship with a person from another race? Why or why not?
- If you do have at least one or more interracial friendships, how you would say they compare to your same-race friendships? Are there many differences between them?
- Think about the various topics or issues you can talk about with your friends. Is there anything discussed in one relational friendship dyad that may or may not be discussed in the other? Why or why not? Reflect on whether your racial differences or experiences are contributing to this.
- Be willing to communicate openly about the topic of race and your racial differences within the relationship.
- Challenge yourself to leave your comfort zone and develop an interracial friendship.
- Are you and your friend from a different racial/ethnic group able to self-disclose freely? What barriers, if any, are preventing this communication from occurring? If you can speak openly, then describe how the two of you have created a supportive climate in which to do so.
- Do not use (exploit) interracial friendships for the sole purpose of understanding racial/ethnic differences. Your actions will be perceived as insincere and offensive.
- Be willing to be educated and to educate each other about racial difference when opportunities for learning present themselves.
- Determine an effective way to maintain racial equilibrium in the relationship, where you are able to discuss issues of race but purpose not to allow them to overburden the relationship.
- Do not assume that you or your friend will be a spokesperson for your racial/ethnic group.
- Be sensitive to the validity and reality of a friend’s experiences with racism and prejudice.
- Engage in honest communication if, and when, racial differences become problematic. Choose to benefit from this conflict/learning opportunity.

1. Do an Internet search of the phrase “interracial friendship.” As you view several sites, compare and contrast how nonacademic/nonscientific Web sites and social networking sites are devoted to understanding how these relationships function. Then, view articles from another search on the keywords contact hypothesis. From the articles, determine what factors are suggested as promoting relational intimacy. Make a list of similarities and differences these relationships have in comparison to intraracial friendships.
What topics and relational issues may be discussed or avoided? Consider how this might compare to intraracial friendships.

2. Generate a list of your best/closest friends. List descriptors (e.g., honest, funny, caring) for each friend that best describes the qualities you most appreciate about them and your friendship. In examining your list, consider whether or not those relationships are racially/ethnically diverse. Explore what role family, friends, and society might play in socializing you about the relationship selection process. This activity provides you with the opportunity to be self-reflective of your friendship experiences and to further understand what qualities constitute “true friendship.”

3. In groups of five, have the students create a template for identifying barriers they believe exist and prevent interracial friendships from occurring. The discussion should involve any racist behaviors. Using the racial tirades as an example, the student groups should provide exemplars of behaviors that have racial (blatant) overtones and (subtle) undertones. Please refer to the concepts intentionality versus emotionality in Chapter 7. The list should include familiar and unfamiliar phrases or terms that serve as verbal markers of such behavior.

4. Think about how friendships and race are portrayed in the media. For example, the movie industry has produced a series of interracial buddy films, *Rush Hour* (1 and 2) and *Lethal Weapon* (1–4), starring men of color. In small groups, compare and contrast how the media represent the communication styles, content issues (e.g., being masculine and/or racialized in law enforcement), styles of humor, and identity issues relative to the racial/ethnic audience members targeted. Considering gender, generate a list of comparable movies depicting interracial friendships involving women from differing racial groups and how their relationship, communication styles, and racial identities are portrayed.

5. In class and in small groups of five people, create an Action Plan for the development of interracial friendships. This Action Plan is a list of guidelines an individual can follow or use to be proactive in bringing about change in “the real world.” Develop a list of realistic goals or strategies a person can use to diversify his or her interpersonal network.

6. Assemble a group of friends who are interested in being part of a book club. (The book club could be long term.) Hopefully book club members will be from diverse races and ethnicities. Read the book “*Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendship*” by Emily Bernard (2004) and plan a series of meetings to discuss the book. At each meeting, plan to have open and honest dialogue about the book’s content, its influence on your thinking about interracial and same-race friendships, and similar and different barriers these two kinds of relationships face.