We sit on the cusp of a historic period in American history—the administration of our nation’s first non-White president. As it was throughout the Obama primary and presidential election campaigns, race is a continual undercurrent in U.S. society. In Philadelphia, on March 18, 2008, in the wake of furor surrounding the racial commentary and sermons of his outspoken and controversial pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama gave a stirring speech on race, entitled “A More Perfect Union.” In that speech, Obama (2008) addressed ways in which race had been an issue in his campaign, saying:

At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either “too black” or “not black enough.” We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well. (p. 2)

Obama went on to say that the United States cannot afford to ignore issues of race but must face them without the simplifying stereotypes that amplify negatives and distort reality. Obama (p. 3) framed these issues as “a part of our union that we have yet to perfect,” and called on U.S. citizens to face these issues squarely rather than retreating. He traced several pressing contemporary problems to America’s history of racial injustice. In so doing, he validated both “Black anger” and “White resentment” in a way that vilified neither. He pointed out that our past inability to face these issues has distracted us from pressing issues that affect everyone, and that to heal and unify, we must understand and face our racial history. Obama explained that

the anger [of Black Americans] is real; it is powerful; and to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.... Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the
real culprits of the middle class squeeze—a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices, and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns—this too widens the racial divide, and blocks the path to understanding. This is where we are right now. It’s a racial stalemate we’ve been stuck in for years.... But I have asserted a firm conviction—a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people—that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union. (pp. 4, 5)

Obama (2008) mentioned several significant events (e.g., the O. J. Simpson trial and Hurricane Katrina) that have focused national attention on race. Such occasional events and acts of violence, such as the Rodney King beating and the James Byrd slaying, bring thorny problems of race to the surface of everyday conversation and public commentary, but the furor soon recedes to the discursive background, where it simmers, ready to erupt. Daily newspapers routinely report local eruptions: crimes that are racially motivated (e.g., Rucker & Wan, 2006), the racial “achievement gap” in public education (Strauss, 2006), and racist remarks made by politicians whose attempts to repair the damage done to their careers only offend even more people (e.g., Shear, 2006). Obama’s election has been accompanied by an unprecedented sense of racial unity, but it also has elicited racially motivated hatred. In the pre- and post-election period, Barack Obama received more death threats than any other president-elect in American history (Washington, 2008). Cross-burnings, hangings in effigy, shouts of “assassinate Obama” (some from children as young as 7 years old), boxes of human feces left at the door of a home with an Obama sign displayed, and threats and attacks against Obama supporters—all stemming from rage at the election of a Black president (Pardington, 2008; Washington, 2008). According to Washington (2008), specific incidents include:

- Four North Carolina State University students admitted writing anti-Obama comments in a tunnel designated for free speech expression, including one that said: “Let’s shoot that (N-word) in the head.”
- At Standish, Maine, a sign inside the Oak Hill General Store read: “Osama Obama Shotgun Pool.” Customers could sign up to bet $1 on a date when Obama would be killed. “Stabbing, shooting, roadside bombs, they all count,” the sign said. At the bottom of the marker board was written “Let’s hope someone wins.”
- Racist graffiti was found in places including New York’s Long Island, where two dozen cars were spray-painted; Kilgore, Texas, where the local high school and skate park were defaced; and the Los Angeles area, where swastikas, racial slurs and “Go Back To Africa” were spray painted on sidewalks, houses and cars.
- Second- and third-grade students on a school bus in Rexburg, Idaho, chanted “assassinate Obama,” a district official said.
- University of Alabama [communication] professor Marsha L. Houston said a poster of the Obama family was ripped off her office door. A replacement poster was defaced with a death threat and a racial slur. “It seems the election brought the racist rats out of the woodwork,” Houston said.
- Black figures were hanged by nooses from trees on Mount Desert Island, Maine, the Bangor Daily News reported. The president of Baylor University in Waco, Texas said a rope found hanging from a campus tree was apparently an abandoned swing and not a noose.
Crosses were burned in yards of Obama supporters in Hardwick, N.J., and Apolacan Township, Pa.

A black teenager in New York City said he was attacked with a bat on election night by four white men who shouted ‘Obama.’

In the Pittsburgh suburb of Forest Hills, a black man said he found a note with a racial slur on his car windshield, saying “now that you voted for Obama, just watch out for your house.” (¶ 18–26)

Despite these events, Obama’s election has been heralded as the country’s entry into “post-racial” America. President Obama has commented at length on the social meaning of his racial identity as a potential harbinger of racial unity and national transformation (Fletcher, 2009). To understand this shift in language and thinking, and to facilitate progress toward transformation and unity, we need to understand race and racially motivated hatred. Racially motivated hatred and associated problems cannot be attributable to “race” itself, because “race” is neither a material “thing” nor a fixed idea. Rather, these problems are attributable to the ways we, as citizens and scholars, think (and fail to think) about race. Moreover, this explanation begs the question of what applied communication scholars can do about the ways in which we think about race.

This chapter organizes theoretical and empirical literature into a general conceptual framework that provides an agenda for the study of race in applied communication scholarship. We first establish a foundation from which to understand race as a social–political construction. We then review and critique a small body of applied communication literature that examines race. The selection of that literature was inherently problematic, but we found ourselves in good company, for as Hall (1980) claimed, “attempts to deal with the question of ‘race’ directly or to analyze those social formations where race is a salient feature constitute, by now, a formidable, immense, and varied literature, which is impossible to summarize at all adequately” (p. 305). There is much written about race, but determining what constitutes “communication” and “applied” research was daunting. Literature is included that supports a theoretic construction of race as an interactive phenomenon or that focuses on practical problems related to race. Some of the most fruitful work on race in the field of communication is rhetorical, but a full review of that literature is beyond the scope and outside the focus of this chapter. Finally, we provide a model to organize the literature, ground it in a social constructionist understanding of race, and offer a framework to guide the study of race in applied communication scholarship.

Race as Socially Constructed

Race is a major source of domination (Nkomo, 1992), but “the poverty of our racial attention span” (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003, p. 32) is pervasive in the field of communication. In response, we promote herein a view of society and communication as raced. Theorists across social disciplines broadly agree that “race” is a social or cultural construct. As Haney Lopez (2000) explained, “Race must be viewed as a social construction. That is, human interaction rather than natural differentiation must be seen as the source and continued basis for racial categorization” (p. 168). Furthermore, “the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). Race is a repeatedly regenerated ideological construct: Interaction reifies race, creating and re-creating race as a set of categories that structure interaction (Miles, 1982, 1989). For example, race signifies and symbolizes social conflicts “by referring to different types of human bodies”; the selection of physical human features for the purpose of racial signification is “necessarily a social and historical process” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55).
Haney Lopez (2000) argued that “race is not determined by a single gene or gene cluster.... The data compiled by various scientists demonstrate, contrary to popular opinion, that intra-group differences exceed inter-group differences” (p. 166). Evolutionary biologist Lewontin’s (1972) comprehensive global study of genetic diversity within and between ethnic populations and races concluded that racial classification has “virtually no genetic or taxonomic significance” (p. 397). Biologically, individual human variation is immense, and most of that variation is not culturally attributed to “race” (Lewontin). Biologists and geneticists can identify patterns of genetic mutation and adaptation in human populations, but the differences are small and linked mostly to geography (Jorde & Wooding, 2004).

The physical characteristics used to categorize human beings into “races,” of course, are determined genetically. Socially, it is agreed that if a person has particular characteristics, he or she belongs to a particular racial group, but that does not make those characteristics useful for genetic taxonomic purposes. The enormous genetic variation that exists within populations labeled as “races” precludes such genetic categorization. Simply stated, racial categorization of social groups is based on physical features of appearance, not vice versa. In fact, geneticists do not equate “race” with biology. For such things as identifying and treating disease, and susceptibility to disease, individual genetic makeup is a far more useful application of genetic science than is racial categorization (Tishkoff & Kidd, 2004). Disease is associated with groups due to common genetic history, some of which also gets labeled “race,” but susceptibility to disease for certain human populations is not determined by “race.” For example, all Black people do not get sickle cell disease, and all people who get sickle cell disease are not Black. Disease, therefore, is not a racial marker. Biological and genetic factors certainly contribute to diseases, but that does not mean that they define a racial group. Geneticists explicitly define “race” as a social category (Royal & Dunston, 2004), and that should be our most compelling reason to follow suit.

Although geneticists reject the construct of “race” as a useful taxonomy for categorizing human beings, the idea of race is not going away any time soon. Certain characteristics of human appearance (e.g., skin hue, eye shape, and hair texture) tend to be used as racial markers, but not other visible variations between human populations (e.g., height and ear size). The fact that racial categorization is not defensible by biological or genetic evidence is less important than the implications of this fact for the cultural meanings imposed on these categorizations. In fact, because it is based on phenotypical difference, racism discovers what other ideologies have to construct: an apparently “natural” and universal basis in nature itself. Yet, despite this apparent grounding in biological difference, outside history, racism, when it appears, has an effect on other ideological formations within the same society, and its development promotes a transformation of the whole ideological field in which it becomes operative. It can, in this way, harness other ideological discourses to itself—for example it articulates securely with the us/them structure of corporate class consciousness. (Hall, 1980, p. 342)

Race, thus, is a classed phenomenon, but in the field of communication, few scholars outside of rhetoric work to theorize that notion.

The term race entered the English language in the 16th century to denote lineage, but it was “during the 18th century, with the scientific assertion of the existence of biologically constituted races, [that] the term ‘race’ came to mean discrete categories of human beings, based on phenotypical differences, and ranked with psychological and social capacities [italics added]” (Torres & Ngin, 1995, p. 57). This explicit ranking in the
racial taxonomy reveals the deliberate notion of superiority/inferiority in the political agenda behind the “science.” These racial designations (Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid), the fundamental basis for our contemporary category system, were created by 18th-century European scientists for the overt purpose of class oppression.

In the 19th century, the “scientific” discipline of “ethnology” sought to discover biological criteria by which to define race. DuBois (1940) documented how “race dogma” taught at Harvard University, under the guise of “science,” sought empirical evidence of White superiority. Of course, one of the primary aims of ethnology was to provide a biological basis for the continued enslavement of African Americans. A narrative based on the “science” of ethnology published in the Southern Quarterly Review in 1851 designated “savagism…and its natural result bondage” as the “native state” or “being” of the “Negro,” and “further that he enjoys more pleasure in a savage state, or in bondage, than in civilized freedom” (Browne, 2000, p. 271). Ethnology failed to find scientific criteria to define racial categories by which to privilege some over others. In fact, 19th-century African-American scholars easily refuted the historical arguments of ethnologists (Browne, 2000). Still, although social scientists, geneticists, and biologists reject the notion of race as biological, “few in society seem prepared to relinquish fully their subscription to notions of biological race” (Haney Lopez, 2000, p. 167). We are culturally taught that race is biology, but it is not. Haney Lopez (2000) defined “race” as a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry…. Race must be understood as a sui generic social phenomenon in which contested systems of meaning serve as the connections between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics. In other words, social meanings connect our faces to our souls. Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions…. The referents of terms like Black and White are social groups, not genetically distinct branches of humankind. (p. 165)

Haney Lopez (2000), writing from a legal standpoint, developed a theory of racial fabrication that provides the basis for the conceptual framework we build here. This theory goes beyond the idea of “racial formation” used by others (e.g., Omi & Winant, 1994) to emphasize social construction and expose “race” as a plastic and inconstant construct. As Haney Lopez argued:

First, humans rather than abstract social forces produce races. Second, as human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations. Third, the meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly. Finally, races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation. Fabrication implies the workings of human hands, and suggests the possible intention to deceive. (p. 168)

The theory of racial fabrication is an excellent foundation for communication scholarship, for the processes emphasized by Haney Lopez are the very stuff of communication theory: interaction, social context, shared meaning, and relationship. We emphasize further that the social fabrication of race is a discursive hegemonic process that upholds the societal political structure of unearned White privilege (van Dijk, 1987, 1993a, 1993b). Given this understanding of “race,” we now examine how race has been treated in applied communication research.
The Treatment of Race in Applied Communication Scholarship

Problems associated with race are ripe for analysis by applied communication scholars, but most scholars have not adequately dealt with the construct of race itself. Furthermore, there has been no systematic delineation of the complex practical problems engendered by the complexity of race. We organize the literature to create a systematic set of arenas under the umbrella concept of “applied communication and race.” Having introduced the idea that race is a cultural–political construct, it is important to construct through this lens a typology of distinct ways in which race is treated in applied communication research. We find it far more useful to categorize the relevant literature based on the practical problems addressed, rather than on contexts, because what defines applied communication research is its focus on practical problems. From an examination of the literature, we identified four primary arenas of problematic issues of race examined by applied communication scholars: identity, racism, discrimination, and diversity. These arenas, of course, overlap; many studies address more than one arena, and, therefore, could have been categorized differently, but the category scheme serves as a useful organizing framework.

Prior to reviewing that literature, we discuss our understanding of each area, which later translates directly to a theoretic model we propose as a framework to guide the applied communication study of race. Most, but not all, applied communication scholars acknowledge neither implicitly nor explicitly the social construction of race as a fabrication. Consequently, race is not generally understood as a meaning system that is humanly produced, interactively created and woven into the social fabric, along with gender and class, constructed and reconstructed interactively to change the meanings ascribed to it, and constructed relationally among racial groups with one defined against another.

Problematic Issues of Identity

Race often is treated by communication scholars as operating in isolation from other social-identity factors and relevant only in discussions of cultural differences (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Under this logic, difference is treated at a surface level, cultural identities are essentialized, and Whiteness becomes “an invisible, homogenous standard” (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003, p. 15). The communication literature on identity shows no consistent use of the terms race, ethnicity, and culture, resulting in confusion and an inability to articulate that which we purport to understand (Jackson & Garner, 1998). We add that a prevalent reduction of “race” to “Black-White” in that literature further obfuscates the issues. The applied communication literature is no exception, for most often, racial categories are imposed, implicitly essentialized as identity, and explicitly treated as a primary identifying factor leading to presumed similarities within and differences between groups. Applied communication scholars only rarely acknowledge that racial identity is culturally wrought. In fact, most of that research treats identity as synonymous with racial classification, typically selected by participants from among a set of labels imposed by researchers, which is true of many studies in the other three categories as well.

The studies reviewed here are divided into two basic types: those that essentialize race as identity and those few that explicitly examine identity (which we consider to be exemplars for a fruitful understanding of problematic issues of identity). To understand the first type of studies, consider the multitude of racial category labels generated over time. Although the 18th-century European three-category scheme has expanded, some labels have changed, and some labels have developed associated subcategories, the category system remains essentially the same. We have known Americans of African descent as Negroes, Colored, Blacks, Afro-Americans, and now African Americans. Similarly,
those who were once Mongoloid became Oriental, but there now are several categories of Asian. A category was added for Indians, who became American Indians and then Native Americans. A cross-racial ethnic designation was created for Hispanics, some of whom are known as Chicano/a, but all of whom may soon become best known as Latino/a. It is interesting to note that the original term Caucasian still is used interchangeably with White, and as evidence of its inherent implication of superiority, the term still is free of the degrading connotations attached to Negro or Mongoloid. Belying the political nature of these terms (Niven & Zilber, 2000), they often are hotly debated and sometimes overtly rejected by those who would be identified by such a label (e.g., Sigelman, Tuch, & Martin, 2005).

The presumption of racial classification based on skin color as integral to identity has become so uncritically accepted that the labels are applied without recognition that the entirety of their meaning is culturally/politically assigned, a point West (1993) made in his seminal work, Race Matters, when he suggested that the identity construct of “blackness” has no meaning outside of a cultural system of race-conscious people and practices. Currently, the term persons of color, used for all non-Whites, seems, on the surface, to be inclusive, but it serves to establish “White” as the standard and to reify skin hue as a “natural” basis for human social categorization, just as the term minority serves to reify dominance by a majority.

Individuals assigned to the same racial group are assumed to identify more readily with one another than with members of other racial groups (e.g., Chambers et al., 1998; Dutton, Singer, & Devlin, 1998). Moreover, the link between race and identity is essentialistically assumed in most applied communication research. It is assumed, for instance, that racial grouping is an appropriate and effective way to examine, for example, the effects of health communication campaigns (e.g., Alcalay & Bell, 1996; Bates, Poirot, Harris, Condit, & Achter, 2004), patterns of medical information seeking (e.g., Matthews, Sellergren, Manfredi, & Williams, 2002), consumer use of and response to entertainment media (e.g., Oliver, 1996), and patterns of mentoring relationships (e.g., Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). Studies of such intergroup “race” differences abound, but the deep cultural, political, and historical meanings of racial identity usually go unrecognized. Warren (2001), thus, argued that there is need for a more “performative reading of racial identity—where the presence of race does not get reduced to a reading of an essentialized raced body, nor is the body divorced from racial identity, creating a false separation” (p. 92). In a similar vein, Berard (2005) found that politically salient categories, such as racial group, are not always relevant in particular contexts, stating:

Even when they are, their relevance cannot properly be understood without an appreciation for the multiplicity and diversity of identities which become relevant in particular contexts and courses of action.... Identity can be respecified more widely and more finely by situating identity within natural language use and social interaction. (p. 1)

Simply put, culture, community, and self-identifications are more salient than color (apparent racial category), which, when it is meaningful, is just one part of social grouping. Hence, when researchers implicitly assume that racial group category is an important and primary identifying factor warranting generalization, and assessed by forced-choice racial group identification, they ignore numerous factors (e.g., personal background factors, current political climate, education, income, and regional culture and history) that create enormous variance within “racial groups.” The extent to which these factors are ignored leads to misplaced and inaccurate conclusions about “race.” This tendency is not an indictment of the social-scientific approach per se but, rather, an observation that,
with regard to race, such science has not been carefully executed (Davis, Nakayama, & Martin, 2000; Martin & Davis, 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

Appiah (2002) offered an excellent example of examining phenotypical racial group not as an essentializing category but as an identity factor, examining the links between strength of ethnic identity and response to Web-based media. Appiah found that Blacks with strong ethnic identities spent more time looking at Web sites targeted toward Blacks and responded more favorably toward those sites, whereas Blacks with weak ethnic identities showed no difference in the amount of time looking at a Black or White-targeted Web site, and did not favor one over the other. This racial categorization, however, is a deeply political issue, for to be an “authentic” Black or a Black who “keeps it real” means to identify with certain market forces that are designed specifically for Blacks (Coleman, 2003). Coleman (2003) defined “keeping it real” as remaining true to one’s “historical, cultural, and...racial roots,” and referred to this term as an “identity politics position [that] relies on an illusory racial prism, co-mingling essentialist, biological race categories with constructionist cultural claims” (p. 59). Jackson and Heckman (2002) noted that “identity negotiation is already intricate; race complicates the discursive equation and invokes polarity, skin color politics, normativity, and perhaps most of all, liability” (p. 435). As Coleman (2003) explained:

Naming that which is linked to the Black experience as “Black” serves as an identity politics maneuver where claiming an identity—what it means and how it is produced in the social discourse—particularly an oppressed or marginalized identity, becomes a point of political departure in which the group is mobilized to celebrate the uniqueness and contributory nature of that identity. (p. 56)

Jackson (1999) powerfully documented ways in which African-American and European-American college students communicatively negotiate racial identity. He argued for a conceptualization of race that is both biological and sociological, basing the biological component on the phenological differences that mark racial groups. Themes of identity for European Americans included social adjustment or no concern at all, whereas themes for African Americans included a complex set of factors related to causes and effects of cultural identity negotiation, the necessity of a defined cultural identity, and the importance of African-American identity and distinctiveness (for more detailed treatment, see Jackson, 2006; the special journal issues edited by Jackson, 2001, 2002, and by Jackson & Hendrix, 2003).

Several scholars have illustrated how racially based constructions of identity are a primary force defining things such as the classroom experience (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003), the workplace (Hegde & DiCicco-Bloom, 2002; Parker, 2002), and interracial personal relationships (Diggs & Clark, 2002; Foeman & Nance, 2002). In these contexts, race, gender, culture, and class intersect to make identity at once a deeply personal and deeply political process (Macinlay, 2003). Together, these studies powerfully demonstrate the fluid, relational, personal, and political nature of racial identity; the complex constitution of identity and meaning negotiation; and the operation of the frameworks of race, class, and gender. Indeed, race, class, and gender are “key intersectional dimensions” (Avant-Mier & Hasian, 2002, p. 393) that influence the formation of identities. Race, thus, is an “organizing principle” (Avant-Mier & Hasian, 2002, p. 393) that structures interactions (Parker, 2002; for more in-depth treatment of these issues, see Parker, 2001, 2003, 2005).

Perhaps the most careful treatment of race can be found in Bell and Nkomo’s (2001) study of Black and White professional women’s experiences, which explored ways in which class, race, and gender intersect to exert profound influence on the development
of professional identity. The researchers’ understanding of race is embedded in culture, which is embedded in history, leading them to explore participants’ formative life and professional experiences, and culminating in a work that is insightful for understanding issues faced by Black and White women in professional contexts.

Problematic Issues of Racism

Many applied communication scholars focus on racism. To frame our critique of this literature, we follow Omi and Winant’s (1994) conceptualization of *racism* as practices that create and reproduce “structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (p. 71). From this perspective, divisional societal power structures (e.g., government institutions, educational systems, and employment arenas) mutually create and sustain racism, with access to these structures and their privileges determined, in part, by the political imposition of racial categories. The contemporary cultural meaning of race, thus, is rooted in a history of racism (for a thought-provoking essay about the difficulties and political posturing that occur in defining racism, see Barker, 1981).

Representing a growing body of scholars across disciplines (e.g., Coleman, 2002; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Gandy & Baron, 1998; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001; Pan & Kosicki, 1996; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; Valentino, 1999) who are examining ways in which public opinion regarding race is systematically framed by communication in the public sphere, Domke (2001) conducted an experiment in which participants were given newspaper articles that framed political policy issues with or without racial cues. Domke found that “the presence or absence of racial cues in political discourse, by priming participants to focus on some considerations and relationships and not others, influences the nature of the associations among individuals’ racial perceptions, political ideology, and issue evaluations” (p. 788). Domke also was sensitive to issues of class, but only on a surface level, noting that his sample, although racially diverse, represented an educated, middle-income segment of society. Although Domke essentialized race and ethnicity, and did not attend theoretically to the notion of class, he brought much-needed attention to linkages among public communication, politics, race, society, and racism.

Richardson (2005) also examined the impact of media framing, but with an overt assumption of race as socially constructed. In a study of White, non-Hispanic participants, frames (diversity, remedial action, both, or neither) were embedded in editorials supporting an affirmative action case in higher education. Although frame variation had no effect on feelings toward affirmative action, the diversity frame was linked to more positive perceptions of Blacks.

Other scholars have examined popular entertainment media as a significant site of public communication on race (e.g., B. Cooper, 1998; Entman, 1990; González & González, 2002; Gray, 2001; Harris & Donmoyer, 2000; Meyers, 2004; Prosise & Johnson, 2004; Rockler, 2002; Tan, 2000). Although these studies attend to cultural and political meanings that perpetuate racism, they do not treat racial identity as socially constructed and tend to essentialize racial groups.

Research on racism in the educational system also tends to utilize essentialistic categorization (e.g., Cooks, 2003; Harris, 2003; Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Mackinlay, 2003), sometimes paying no attention to racial categories beyond Black–White (e.g., Artz, 1998; E. Cooper & Allen, 1998; Priest, 2000). Except for Patton’s (2004) thoughtful consideration of political-hegemonic structures and Jackson and Heckman’s (2002) discussion of racism on a college campus, “racism” is not generally acknowledged as a social construction. Patton (p. 61) differentiated between three types of racism—overt, denied, and
inferential: “overt racisms refers to those actions that we can point to and say, ‘that’s racist’”; denial of racism “is the belief that racism does not exist or that only a few ‘bad people’ practice racist behavior”; and inferential racism, which is the most dangerous form of racism, in that it is not overt and, thus, harder to identify because it involves ways in which racist assumptions and practices, usually unknowingly, rest on invisible taken-for-granted presumptions of what seems to be a natural order. As Patton explained about inferential racism:

These “isms” are often entrenched in higher education through policy and the inadvertent actions of administrators, faculty, staff, and students.... Hegemonic civility is so ingrained that it shows up everywhere, even in semi-private journal entries crafted to be read by a visibly non-White professor. (p. 62)

Jackson and Heckman’s (2002) treatment of hate crimes on college campuses reveals the connection between overt and inferential racism. As Jackson and Heckman explained, racial hate crimes “almost seem endemic to academic institutions, where freedom of expression is celebrated and incivility is often mildly penalized” (p. 435). Moreover, Jackson and Heckman argued:

Within an episode where racism is communicated, the dialectical exchange between interactants is immediately engaged by the instrumentation of race—its corporeal visibility, instinctive historical gaze, profound modernist obsession, and signifi catory political meaning.... Instantaneously it calls White identities into question for two reasons: fi rst, because racism is a power-laden activity meant to sustain privilege, and second, the logic of race equates White identities with White privilege. (p. 425)

In perhaps the most practically applied study of racism, Williams and Olaniran (2002) powerfully documented a 1998 incident in which Hampton University’s head basketball coach, her husband, and an assistant coach were falsely accused of running a scam at a Wal-Mart store in Lubbock, Texas, during a visit for a game against Texas Tech University. The scam was reported to the Lubbock city police, who detained these three people for several hours. The victim identified one of the coaches as the con-artist, but security tapes clearly exonerated them. The accused individuals were released, but their game was cancelled, and the coach later fi led an unsuccessful civil rights lawsuit against the city of Lubbock, claiming that the arrests were racially motivated. Williams and Olaniran concluded that Lubbock’s offi cial response—a limited apology and an attack on the accuser—was successful, but risky. This analysis, however, would have profi ted from a view of race as a social construction. Because the basic assumption of what race means—culturally and politically—was not established by the researchers, any recommendations for change could only be given at a surface level. The potential for using this and other such incidents as “teachable moments” about racism and its political bases goes unfulfi lled without a treatment of race and racism as socially fabricated.

**Problematic Issues of Discrimination**

Discrimination is directly related to racism, but their levels of abstraction distinguish them: Studies about racism focus at the level of racist belief systems and may or may not consider their practical implications, whereas studies about discrimination focus specifi cally on mistreatment, particularly denial of privilege or opportunity, and implicitly or explicitly presume that such treatment is the result of an underlying racist ideology. As
done previously, we first frame our discussion of applied communication scholarship with our understanding of “discrimination.”

Individuals often experience their race through the construct of systemic mistreatment—as a target or perpetrator of that mistreatment, or as an observer. Race discrimination has become so culturally ingrained that race-discrimination lawsuits are common, with firmly established bureaucratic structures to process them. According to data compiled by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s (EEOC; 2005) national database, since 1992, the number of charge receipts filed and resolved under Title VII alleging race-based discrimination has remained steady—typically, about 28,000 cases annually; in that same time period, the monetary awards of these cases doubled, not including monetary awards gained through litigation. For many, the term race most powerfully has meaning when it is associated with illegal acts of “discrimination” (for a critical history of affirmative action and the politics of racism in the United States, see Marable, 1995).

Although communication researchers have examined the relationship between discrimination and gender (e.g., Buzzanell, 1995; Clair & Thompson, 1996; Hutton, 2005; see also Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Sterk, & Turner, this volume), few have looked at the relationship between discrimination and race. Becker, Lauf, and Lowrey (1999) noted that among journalism and mass communication graduates, race and ethnicity are associated with lower employment levels; indeed, in every year from 1990 to 1997, being Black “was negatively associated with getting a job offer in the field of journalism and mass communication” (p. 640). Hispanics in the United States also report experiencing racial discrimination to a significant degree (Becker et al.), most commonly in work and school contexts, followed by public contexts, with young, affluent White men being the most likely to practice discrimination (Korzenny & Schiff, 1987). According to Pride (1999):

> Explanations for racial inequality in the United States vary considerably and have varied over time. For example, some have attributed inequalities to attributes of Black people themselves, while others have seen African Americans as victims of White discrimination or oppression, past or present. (p. 149)

Race, thus, can be viewed through the effects of racial discrimination. Because these effects often are negative, race often is conceptualized negatively; hence, the meaning of the term discrimination gives cultural meaning to the term race.

This literature shows two important things. First, precious little applied communication research deeply examines racism or racial discrimination. Second, with just a few notable exceptions, that research is grounded in a limited understanding of race. An understanding of race as a humanly produced meaning system rooted in class oppression potentially leads to promising solutions to problematic issues of racism and racial discrimination.

**Problematic Issues of Diversity**

Finally, we categorize the remaining research to be reviewed as focusing on diversity. As done previously, a critique of this literature is framed by our approach to the concept of “diversity.”

The term diversity has become a part of the linguistic mainstream, with applied communication scholars and the general public alike generally thinking of diversity in terms of “representation.” Federally mandated EEOC policies to have a population of
employees who are “representative” of societal racial demographics have fostered the notion that if there are “representative numbers” of “representative races,” diversity is achieved. Similarly, applied communication scholars often treat “diversity” as little more than an offshoot of “discrimination,” in that conceptualizations of diversity usually go no further than group representation and tolerance of that representation by the “dominant culture.” In our view, representation simply is a way of experiencing opportunity: One has to be present to be involved, and if members of a particular group are not present, then opportunities are denied to them.

Overall, the tone of the applied communication literature is that diversity is inherently difficult. As Allen (1995) noted:

Differences in employees’ racial-ethnic backgrounds can affect formal and informal organizational communication processes: stereotypes and expectations based upon others’ race-ethnicity may impede effective interaction; and differences in value systems and cultural norms may influence attitudes, expectations, perceptions, and language behaviors. (p. 148)

Many communication scholars similarly assume that diversity is defined by racial categories (e.g., Carrell, 1997; Gross, Craft, Cameron, & Antecol, 2002; Halualani, Chitgopekar, Morrison & Dodge, 2004; Mellinger, 2003). A number of studies examine diversity management, intercultural interaction of racial groups, and managerial responses to diversity issues, belying an implicit assumption that cultural misunderstanding at the individual level is the root cause of interracial disharmony. These scholars define diversity in numeric terms, with race defined through traditional categories of ethnic group membership, thus treating diversity as racial representation and tolerance (e.g., Amason, Allen, & Holmes, 1999; Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Kossek & Zonia, 1994). Some research using this approach also includes other factors, such as gender, age, education, and sexual orientation, as categories of “difference” (e.g., Meares, Oetzel, Torres, Dekarcs, & Ginossar, 2004).

Although they implicitly define diversity as the numeric mixture of racial groups, several applied communication studies enrich our understanding with a focus on the viewpoint of the “minority” group. Foeman and Pressley (1987), for instance, identified interpersonal skills that African Americans bring to organizations as including forthrightness, ethical awareness, a “highly engaging style” of communication, group identification, and a “unique use of language” (pp. 299, 300). These “Black styles” (Foeman & Pressley, 1987, p. 297), linked to cultural patterns, were distinguished from skills that Whites bring to organizations. Martin, Moore, Hecht, and Larkey (2001, p. 5) examined how African Americans negotiated “interracial communication in daily organizational life,” finding a number of conversational strategies, including friendliness and avoidance. They also found that accommodation strategies were employed in both interpersonal and intergroup communication, but in intergroup communication, only divergent strategies were used. Orbe (1994) examined African-American males’ communication using a phenomenological approach and found six emergent themes: (1) the importance of communicating with other African Americans, (2) learning how to interact with non-African Americans, (3) “playing the part” when communicating with non-African Americans, (4) keeping a safe distance from non-African Americans, (5) testing the sincerity of non-African Americans, and (6) an intense social responsibility. In another study, Orbe and Warren (2000) examined perceptions of intercultural conflict by race and gender. The European-American female focus group defined “intercultural conflict” in terms of gender, whereas the African-American female focus groups defined it in terms of race. The
diverse groups (by gender and race, also including three Latinos, an Asian, and a Native American) defined such conflict primarily in terms of race, but then discussed other issues as well. The European-American male group attributed such conflict primarily to personal differences, whereas the African-American male group attributed it to race and personal differences. Orbe and Warren concluded that differences in “perceptions of conflict can be understood within the different standpoints of racialized/gendered groups” (p. 55). Although all of this research might be criticized for essentialism in racial grouping designations, such criticism is misplaced, for those studies focused specifically on the sociopolitical viewpoint that stems from being so grouped societally.

Orbe’s (1995, 1998a, 1998b) research employing cocultural theory based on standpoint analysis promotes a promising approach to diversity through a focus on culture and cultural designations of a person’s place in society rather than on color. Warren (2001) argued that “scholars who focus on the body as a racial representation—a physical text that people will read and interpret—many times fail to account for how that body comes to have meaning in the first place” (p. 91). Although T. H. Cox (1993, p. 6) defined “cultural diversity” rather simplistically as “the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance,” he did focus on interaction and the potentially positive contributions of culturally different ways of thinking and acting. Studies that take this more theoretically complex approach result in rich outcomes that reveal the positive potential of the diversity experience. For example, Teboul (1999), after studying the socialization of different ethnicities/races in the workplace, called for research on cultural traits, immigration status, and language proficiency as explanations for newcomers’ organizational adaptation. Similarly, Buzzanell (1999) found that “non-dominant members” may not receive fair treatment when “routine employment interview practices restrict the introduction of information needed by both parties to be comfortable with each other and to achieve desirable goals” (p. 149). Buzzanell went beyond the inclusion of race/ethnicity to focus on other cultural attributes that can account for difference, including class, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. She recommended that human resource managers and communication specialists reconsider their selection of interviewers and trainers, consider more fully how interpersonal styles are discussed and evaluated, and develop flexibility in evaluations to prevent cultural misunderstandings. Jackson and Crawley (2003) applied this same thinking to the classroom of the Black professor with White students, stating:

The reality is that universities are culturally diverse, although the faculty and curriculum do not always reflect that. The classroom can be transformed by sensitivity to cultural difference and differing levels of cultural consciousness. Although race has been socially constructed to mean negative difference, it is refreshing to know that even those negative experiences can be positive once we get beyond premature and prejudiced attitudes about the race and gender of Black male professors. (p. 47)

Although not about race per se, Cheney and Barnett’s (2005) collection of international and multicultural organizational communication case studies touched on several issues that are germane here. Cheney and Barnett framed their discussion of multicultur-
assimilation” (p. 13) In so doing, Hafen illustrated the interconnectedness of race, identity, political power structures, racism, discrimination, and diversity. In another chapter, Munshi (2005) looked specifically at the mechanism of control in the concept of “managing diversity,” compellingly revealing ways in which that metaphor has led to practices that discursively reify a “norm” that excludes racial “others” (read: non-White). She illustrated how “diversity management” is neocolonially practiced as “managing the other,” grounding her understanding of diversity management in a rich critical treatment of organizational power structures. Munshi concluded with a call for “polycentric multiculturalism,” a multidimensional approach to diversity that is interactively based and breaks down “the historical asymmetries in the configuration of power and culture and managerial hierarchies” (p. 66). Finally, Houston and McPhail (2005) addressed diversity and dialogue in a study of the organizational coherence of the Million Man March, advocating a self-organizing systems approach to diversity and claiming that “a variety of diverse interactions causes a ‘creative destruction’ of individual inputs and thereby generates a coherent unity. This process of creative destruction emphasizes underlying, nonlinear processes that rely on diversity to produce a self-organized unity” (p. 141). They argued for a reframing of organizations as fluid interactive processes rather than as discrete entities containing linear communication. Their analysis of identity and coherence demonstrated in the march revealed the potential for self-reflection to improve race relations. In particular, the ways in which they linked identity, and the transformation of identity, to race and diversity represented a promising direction for applied communication research of these issues.

Applied communication research on diversity, therefore, is most fruitful when it overcomes the implicit presumption that representation creates a level playing field. Work that does not equate diversity, even implicitly, with a numerically representative mixture of racial groups opens the way for a cultural approach that examines interaction. Furthermore, work that presumes a deeply divisive political power structure inherent in racial category systems begins to reveal that a level playing field is relevant only to the extent that the players are expected to play by the same set of rules.

An Organizing Model for the Applied Communication Study of Race

The literature reviewed in this chapter perpetuates two important fallacies that have plagued applied communication research efforts. Earlier, we explained the first fallacy, that race is biological, a problem eloquently summarized by critical race theorists who elucidate the social construction of race: There is a tacit assumption that everyone knows what race is, and in that assumption, we fall prey to the biological fallacy. The second fallacy is that race is culture. We elaborate on this issue below as we present a fundamental conceptualization of culture, ethnicity, class, and race.

The Fallacy of Race as Culture

Jackson and Garner (1998) contended that “culture must be defined as something different than, but categorically inclusive of, ethnicity and race” (p. 51). Although both ethnicity and race are related to nationality, race is more obliquely related and, more important, the political frames of these two concepts are different. Ethnicity is marked by shared ancestral origins (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003), such as nationality or tribal membership, language, and religious traditions, and it is linked to a geographical origin (Hall, 1989). Although ethnicity is the primary basis on which race is constructed, we must consider class, which means we must confront political and economic power.
The examination of ethnic culture is inherently flawed if detached from historical and material contexts (Miles, 1982). Class division between ethnic groups is a primary political base for the ongoing racial fabrication process (Haney Lopez, 2000). Class oppression and the history of colonialism frame the processes by which culturally distinct group memberships (ethnicities) continually are socially fabricated as “races.” As DuBois (1940) maintained, “The economic foundation of the modern world was based on the recognition and preservation of so-called racial distinctions” (p. 103). Critical race theory (e.g., Darder, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Essed & Goldberg, 2002; Gates, 1997a, 1997b) convincingly argues that race is socially constructed as a means by which class structure, and its associated class oppression, can be maintained. West’s (1993, p. xv) description of him being passed over by nine taxicabs in Upper Manhattan only to stand by as a tenth stopped for a “kind, well-dressed, smiling female fellow citizen of European descent,” succinctly illustrates this point. This “fellow citizen” commented to West (1993, p. xv), “This is really ridiculous, is it not?” but she did not offer him the taxi, even though, obviously, he was there first. Political constructions and the social construction of race, thus, make possible the privileging of some ethnicities over others. Earlier, we emphasized the explicit ranking of the races by psychological and social capacities in 18th-century European science, which formed the basis of the category system in use today. “Race,” as we know it today, was born of the societal political power system. Hence, we must establish the conceptual distinctions and connections among several concepts: culture, ethnicity, race, and class.

Conceptualizing Culture, Ethnicity, and Race

In the extant applied communication research, race has been erroneously and tacitly assumed by many scholars to be synonymous with culture and with ethnicity. We contend that culture underlies norms, mores, values, beliefs, customs, rituals, ceremonies, morals, attitudes, practices, and other such concepts used by scholars in a variety of social disciplines to define culture. Such constructs are but manifestations of culture (Nicotera & Clinkscales, 2003). Following Chen and Starosta (1998), Nicotera and Clinkscales (2003) defined culture as “a negotiated set of shared symbolic systems that guide individuals’ behaviors and incline them to function as a group” (p. 26). This definition avoids essentializing culture, ethnicity, or nationality by identifying a shared pool of symbolic systems from which persons draw individually and collectively. Culture is the very way that individuals apprehend the world (through their learned symbolic systems). As Chen and Starosta explained:

We are programmed by our culture to do what we do and to be what we are. In other words, culture is the software of the human mind that provides an operating environment for human behaviors. Although individual behaviors may be varied, all members within the same operating environment share important characteristics of the culture. (p. 25)

Hence, people of different ethnicities and races may or may not be of different cultures, just as people with a common racial grouping may or may not be of the same culture. Culture develops as a shared symbolic meaning system rooted in repeated interactions of a group (manifesting in norms, values, etc.).

By this definition, the early development of different cultures arising from shared collective experiences precedes the development of ethnicity as a way of tracing people’s origin and identities, which, in turn, precedes “race” as a sociopolitical category system.
However, once constructions of race appear, they contribute to the ongoing development of culture because they produce yet another set of particular shared meanings by which the world is understood. Political constructions of race, thus, become embedded in cultural symbolic meaning systems. Race is not synonymous with culture; it is culturally created through the political class system and, then self-reflexively, embedded in culture as a set of political meanings.

In sum, a person’s ethnicity is traced ancestrally to a group that originally shared a symbolic meaning system (culture) and geographic location, regardless of whether the individual continues to share that symbolic meaning system in the present (Hall, 1989). Race is a fabricated (Haney Lopez, 2000) class system based on ethnic origin. Social groups of common racial identity then further engender the development of culture as these groups create meaning systems based on both ethnic origins and racial politics. Thus, ethnicity, race, and culture are not synonymous, nor are the relationships among them linear.

**The Importance of Class**

The relationships among culture, ethnicity, and race can be understood most fruitfully through a consideration of class. Here, we explicitly equate class with a political power system by which elite groups create, enforce, and maintain hegemonic political structures. Hence, class cannot be fully understood without reference to political power structures (van Dijk, 1987, 1993a, 1993b). Figures 9.1 and 9.2 represent our understanding of race. The figures use the term culture/s to depict both “culture” as a social process and the simultaneous existence of differing “cultures.” As members of groups interact primarily among themselves, cultures emerge. When members of these different cultures interact with members of other groups, social identity is traced to the home culture through the social construct of ethnicity (see Hall, 1989). Figure 9.1, thus, shows ethnicity as a form of social identity growing from culture, with the term ethnicity/ies depicting both “ethnicity” as a social process of identity construction and the simultaneous existence of differing “ethnicities” as social identities.

Simultaneously, out of cultures grow class systems, which we conceptualize as inherently hegemonic political–economic systems. Social hierarchy, economic and political power, unearned privilege, and oppression are reflexively part of culture itself (van Dijk, 1987, 1993a, 1993b). As Figure 9.1 shows, culture and class mutually define one another, with the politically and economically hegemonic class system actually being part of culture. As with culture and ethnicity, the term political–economic hegemony/ies depicts both the social process of class construction and the simultaneous existence of differing class hierarchies that comprise the political power system. Figure 9.2 shows the development of currently held notions of race in 18th-century Europe, when the social
construction of ethnic identity was filtered through class to create a hierarchical racial taxonomy. As described previously, “race,” as it now is socially employed, was invented as a social categorization system by which ethnicity could be used as a source of class oppression (O. C. Cox, 1959). Hence, consistent with Hall’s (1989) conceptualization of ethnicity as social identity and Haney Lopez’s (2000) theory of racial fabrication as a political process, we conceptualize race as a political identity process. Ethnicity is construed by the class system as race, which then becomes part of the cultural system itself—a cultural reality that is taught as a naturalized presumption of social order. This conceptualization of race as a form of political identity, closely linked to class and political hegemony, “expand[s] our approaches beyond the ethnicity-based paradigm that has implicitly dominated much of our research” (Nkomo, 1992, p. 507). Following O. C. Cox (1959) and Montagu (1997), race is embedded in and intertwined with class, with class being a political cultural construction.

**Problematic Issues of Race: Organizing Applied Communication Research**

Problematic issues of race represented in the applied communication literature, as stated previously, can be categorized into four basic arenas: identity, racism, discrimination, and diversity. Given the conceptual framework of race as a sociopolitical cultural construction (seen in Figures 9.1 and 9.2), we posit, based on the literature reviewed, a set of relationships among these problematic issues of race (see Figure 9.3).

*Identity* is placed in the center as the means by which ethnicity and race intersect. Each person’s self-identity in terms of race stems from and informs his or her cultural, social, political, ethnic, and racial identities. This view accounts for the dual identity of African Americans identified by DuBois (1903/1993) as problematic and commented on by many others. The model also allows for each individual’s cultural and political identities to be experienced differently depending on one’s position in society. Hecht et al. (2003) provided a thorough treatment of these issues, offering evidence, for example, that political and social identity are separate dimensions for African Americans but a single dimension for European Americans.

In the model, racism stems directly from race because the modern construction of “race” was politically motivated (Allahar, 1993; Bracken, 1973; Goldberg, 1993; McPhail, 2002; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; West, 1982)—racism being defined as class oppression based on ethnicity. A thick, double-headed arrow between class and racism illustrates our explicit conceptual connection between these constructs. DuBois (1940)
pointed out that “the income-bearing value of race prejudice was the cause and not the result of theories of race inferiority” (p. 129). Racism functions to protect the economic interests of the political and economic elites (Boggs, 1970). Discrimination, then, is the result of racism. Racism represents here a belief system of the inherent inferiority of a racial group; discrimination is the denial of opportunity that stems from that belief system. Finally, diversity, as we define it and advocate its study, is an outgrowth of ethnicity (social identity), but it cannot be divorced from the totality of cultural experience, and, consequently, a thick, double-headed arrow is drawn between culture and diversity. In this way, diversity can be defined as more than mere representation, which we view as a subset of discrimination. Diversity as related to race becomes a context of intercultural interaction among persons who draw on varied sets of cultural meaning systems that are rooted in the entirety of cultural experience, to include the cultural experience(s) of class, racism, and discrimination. Diversity, of course, does not grow solely out of ethnicity but because our focus is on race, its placement in the model emphasizes cultural differences stemming from ethnicity and from experiences related to ethnicity. The thickness of the double-headed arrow depicts the explicitness of this connection in our conceptualization.

The four problematic issues examined in this chapter—identity, racism, discrimination, and diversity—are mutually influential with culture (illustrated with thinner double-headed arrows) because culture is conceptualized as interactive. Identity also is mutually influential with class (itself a cultural construction), which has a direct influence on both racism and discrimination, which, in turn, reflexively provide the political system with
entrenchments of class-based systems of oppression on which structures of dominance are further developed.

Domke’s (2001) study is an elegant illustration of these reflexive relationships, as it showed that among his sample of educated middle-class individuals:

Racial cues in the political environment activate, in tandem, perceptions of specific racial minorities and one’s political ideology, and in turn, the dual activation of these constructs prompts individuals to become more ideologically distinct in race-related issue evaluations. For many individuals, racial and ethnic stereotypes become both cognitively embedded, as scholars have documented (e.g., Devine, 1989; Marín, 1984), and politically enmeshed. (pp. 789–790)

Domke revealed the social process of the creation of symbolic meaning systems, cognitive schema that result from these meaning systems, political communicative process by which social identity (ethnicity) becomes political identity (race), and ways in which the resulting racist assumptions reflect back into the political system.

Hence, as Allen (2004) argued:

Race is an artificial construction of social identity based upon an ideology of white supremacy, a belief in a racial hierarchy that places whiteness in the superior position. Various power sources have used communication to construct categories of race to reinforce and reproduce this ideology. (p. 92)

The “ideology of White supremacy” is part and parcel of our notion of “class as political hegemony,” and the elite (i.e., politically powerful) groups’ communicative construction of race to “reinforce and reproduce this ideology” is reflected in the double-headed arrows between class and race, between class and racism, and between class and discrimination. Our contention that constructions of race have become culturally ingrained and, thus, part of all societal members’ cultural experience, echoes Allen’s (2004) contention that persons of all races communicatively “envision and enact alternative perspectives on race” (p. 92). Allen’s observation of changes in racial designations over time further illustrates our point that once “race” is constructed, it becomes part of culture. Finally, just as race is born of the political class system, it reflexively politicizes and becomes politicized, driving class-based conflict even deeper.

Figure 9.4 completes the model by adding the construct “EEOC interventions” to acknowledge the cultural embeddedness of antidiscrimination law (Title VII), which has become central to the cultural experience of race in the United States. EEOC intervention is culturally driven—a legal solution to a cultural problem, embedded in the U.S. cultural system of legislative and judicial intervention. EEOC intervention, as a construct, however, also influences culture—again revealed by and revealing the interactive nature of culture. The EEOC system of intervention via lawsuit is the entrenched U.S. cultural understanding of how to best manage discrimination. The dashed lines in the diagram depict a reversing influence: EEOC intervention can neither eliminate nor prevent discrimination; it merely attempts to reverse its effects on a case-by-case basis.

In contrast, diversity has tremendous potential to subvert class oppression, dilute racism, and prevent discrimination. We conceive of diversity as more than an externally mandated or politically pressured shift in personnel demographics. A more promising definition of diversity begins with an interactive context in which individuals draw on multiple cultural meaning systems. Whereas “representation” is demographic, “diversity” is cultural. Cultural does not mean “ethnic” or “nationality” but the totality of
cultural experience—the cultural meaning systems that arise from the experience of raced, gendered, and classed identities. “Cultural diversity” takes into account the totality of cultural experience, not merely sets of values and norms conflated with ethnicity. To fully understand cultural diversity in this way is to come to terms with ways in which individuals of varying ethnic, raced, gendered, and political identities come to the table with unique individual and group cultural experiences, in addition to the ethnically based cultural meaning systems by which they apprehend the world. A “cultural self” is constructed from these cultural experiences, which include class oppression (or elitism), raced (and gendered) political experiences that deny or bestow privilege, racist ideology (from any angle), and discriminatory practices (whether as perpetrator, target, or observer).

Consistent with the most fruitful treatments of diversity seen in the literature, we believe that the conceptualization of diversity as interaction across salient cultural differences is most ripe for expansion by applied communication scholarship. As thinking about diversity shifts from the numerical status of color counts to something more holistic and organic, we move toward an understanding of diversity as a culture-building phenomenon. When culture building is considered, the focus is less on numbers and more on individuals as “cultural selves.” The cultural self includes values, traditions, beliefs, and attitudes rooted in culture as traditionally understood, but it also includes individual and group cultural experiences that stem from political meanings attached to social cat-

Figure 9.4 Organizing model for research of problematic issues of race.
categories, such as ethnicity and race (as well as gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, occupation, ad infinitum).

**Applications of the Model**

It is our hope that applied communication research on race can make use of our model to not only avoid but also to subvert the erroneous implicit assumptions that generally pervade academic and educational discourse (van Dijk, 1993a, 1993b). We hope that as applied communication scholars address the issues of racial identity, racism, discrimination, and diversity, they do so with a careful and holistic consideration of their conceptual intersections, as recommended below.

**Racial Identity**

Applied communication scholars and practitioners should strive to treat race not as a separate and singular social identity factor but as intricately tied to culture, class, and sociopolitical forces. The tendency to conflate race with culture and essentialize race as ethnic group membership should be replaced with a richer and, thus, more accurate treatment of race as a politically structured interactive phenomenon. Interpretive and critical scholars are best poised to explore the process of racial social construction, but this does not preclude the potential contributions of the social-scientific approach. Indeed, Stephan and Stephan (2000) argued that the individual and societal importance of racial categories creates for social scientists an “obligation to understand these classification systems and the effects of their usage” (p. 545).

The most important implication of our model is that it illustrates why racial issues in communication are not reducible to intergroup “cultural difference” but are deeply embedded in systems of social and political power, and need to be treated as such. As stated previously, culture, community, and self-identifications are more salient than racial category, which is only one part of social grouping and only sometimes meaningful. Hence, researchers should take great care to avoid implicitly assuming that racial group category is an important and primary identifying factor warranting generalization. Sampling by forced-choice racial group is easy and convenient—and method-driven. Race, in all its complexity, first must be explicitly and theoretically established as a salient factor for the social process of interest; then, it should be treated not as a classification variable unto itself but as one small part of a complex set of factors comprising identity and community that allows us to identify theoretically meaningful social or cultural groups warranting generalization. Once meaningful groups are identified, there must be (1) explicitly defined populations to which we might generalize, (2) a compellingly argued and theoretically based rationale for the purpose of doing so, (3) systematic sampling of those populations, and (4) reliable and valid measurement (Davis et al., 2000; Martin & Davis, 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

**Racism and Discrimination**

Applied communication scholarship is not exempt from depictions of the presumptive Whiteness that characterizes the field of communication (Nakayama & Martin, 1999). Our understandings and treatments of race are rooted in generations of elite academic discourse that renders “other” ways of being and thinking invisible. Once the implicit ranking in the racial taxonomy is made apparent, racism is laid bare as the fundamental historical purpose and outcome of that categorization. Applied communication scholars
examining race, therefore, have an obligation to acknowledge ways in which their treatments of “race” unintentionally perpetuate the implicit political purposes of the category systems currently in use. Racism has been defined in this chapter as class oppression based on ethnicity, as a belief system based on the inherent superiority of some racial groups over others, and as practices that create and reproduce “structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 71). One of the most immediate applications of our model in applied communication research, consequently, is the explicit recognition of the inseparable natures of contemporary racial category systems, racism, and discrimination, the latter of which is defined as the denial of opportunity that stems from racist belief systems. Thus, racism and discrimination must be treated as political and systemic discursive issues, and not blamed on the unfortunate opinions, biases, misunderstandings, and acts of individuals or rooted in uneven demographics, even as they are seen as manifesting there. This approach necessitates a direct confrontation with class—an issue that applied communication scholars thus far largely have ignored or, at best, treated merely as income level. Applied communication research has much to offer by documenting and explicating discriminatory practices, and the racist beliefs that underlie them, and proffering solutions to these problems based on a deep understanding of those practices and beliefs rooted in history and political constructions.

Diversity

Applied communication scholars might benefit from an approach to diversity that focuses on interactive processes and our construct of the cultural self. This approach advances understanding of diversity to include, but also to move beyond, blending, appreciating, and understanding differences (and commonalities). This shift may lead to ways of achieving true multiculturalism rather than “management of the other” (Munshi, 2005), maximizing the power of a diverse society. This potential is possible because this conceptualization embeds people not only in cultural groups but also in political social structures. In this way, this approach links diversity and societal contexts, which has heretofore been missing. The locus of diversity issues is removed from individual action and placed in a broader context of social, historical, and political constructions that influence the development of cultural selves and the performance of those selves in interaction.

When culturally different persons interact with an understanding of the cultural basis for the totality of their differences and come to appreciate their different cultural experiences (or at least understand that the basis for these experiences is, indeed, cultural), productive diversity might be achieved. Furthermore, when the cultural–political bases of racial categorization are laid bare, and the ensuing systems of class oppression revealed, individuals of all races begin to be freed from the political notion of the inherent superiority of one race over others. This deconstruction of the “naturalization” of race subverts hegemony and weakens it as a basis for racism and discrimination. As Wilson (1999) contended, “Neither biology nor racism’s hegemony can determine a person’s soul if a person understands and engages the surrounding discourse” (p. 211).

We advocate, in short, an approach to diversity that is embedded in an understanding of societal power structures, not shielded from it (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Anything less results in a strategy (whether scholarly, corporate, or civic) that maximizes the potential of diversity as damage control because anything less can focus only on avoiding the negative impact of “poorly managed” diversity. Our conceptualization of diversity, thus, is humanistic. When diversity among individuals is understood through the concept of the cultural self and, consequently, is seen as rooted in culturally constructed identities grounded in cultural structures related to (but not definable by) surface-level characteris-
tics (e.g., race, ethnicity, and gender), more fruitful applications can result (as exemplified by Cheney & Barnett’s, 2005, text).

Conclusion
The most basic implication from this set of ideas is the deep need for awareness and consciousness raising among applied communication scholars. The challenge is whether applied communication research, pedagogy (see Darling & Leckie, this volume), and other practices can provide the type of education that lays bare the politically constructed nature of race and “denaturalizes” racial hierarchies in social discourse. We do not pretend that this modest idea can produce research that eliminates the effects of centuries of class oppression. We do suggest, however, that problematic issues of race can be examined by applied communication scholars thoughtfully via a careful consideration of the ways in which these problematic issues are conceptually related. We have offered in this chapter a theoretic construction on which to base such consideration.

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Notes
2. West (1982) and Goldberg (1993) traced this sociopolitical history, Allahar (1993) and Nakayama and Martin (1999) argued that the history of contemporary racial categories is inherently oppressive, and McPhail (2002, p. 75) pointed out that “social negation based on skin color is a relatively new phenomenon” (for an insightful essay that questions this widely accepted historical account, see Stoler, 1997).
5. Handlin (1957) argued that racism should be treated as its own ideology, not just as one form of class oppression; for a critique of such Marxist accounts of racism, see San Juan (1989).
7. Essed (1991) defined racism as politically based power perpetuated in interaction as entrenched White domination. van Dijk (1993a, 1993b) traced racism in elite political, academic, educational, and media discourses to show its perpetuation in social and political systems, produced and reproduced in discursive forms such that it is naturalized and manifests as racism. In previous work, van Dijk (1987) examined the interpersonal enactment of racism, revealing how microlevel communicative practices reproduce ethnic prejudice stemming from and reinforcing a hegemonic political system.

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Towards a Theory of Communication and Social Identity

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Race as Political Identity


