
"Psychological service providers...

1. Recognize cultural diversity;
2. Understand the role that culture and ethnicity/race play in the socio-psychological and economic development of ethnic and culturally diverse populations;
3. Understand that socioeconomic and political factors significantly impact the psychosocial, political and economic development of ethnic and culturally diverse groups;
4. Help clients to understand/maintain/resolve their own socio-cultural identification; and understand the interaction of culture, gender, and sexual orientation on behavior and needs."

Source: Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic, Linguistic, and Culturally Diverse Populations, American Psychological Association, 1990.

"From the time the Gospel was first preached, the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with cultures » (Fides et Ratio, 70), for «it is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture» (Gaudium et Spes, 53). In this way, the Good News which is Christ's Gospel for all men and the whole human person, «both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed» (Fides et Ratio, 71), reaches them in their own culture, which absorbs their manner of living the faith and is in turn gradually shaped by it. For all culture «is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God» (1.) The decisive challenge of a pastoral approach to culture, for «a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived».

Source: Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture, Pontifical Council on Culture, 1999.

The Hmong in *Gran Torino*

One of the components of intercultural competence is knowledge. This section provides you with some background to the Hmong people and their culture. As you watch the movie, you will notice their living conditions and customs, family structure, changes in lifestyle related to acculturation to the American culture, intergenerational family relations and conflicts, and how Hmong adolescents and young adults navigate two worlds, the reality of the American culture and the worldview of Hmong elders. Please read the following section with the following questions in mind:

In your view, did these Hmong values, beliefs, and cultural practices contribute to Walt's misunderstandings and "culturally encapsulated" relation with the Hmong neighbors?

How does knowing about a culture may increase intercultural sensitivity?

Ψ

The Hmong are one of those ethnic groups that make up the diverse population of the United States. There are approximately 170,049 Hmong in the United States, which is 0.06% of the entire United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The Hmong, unlike many other immigrants in the United States, did not come to the United States voluntarily; instead, they came as refugees after the United States withdrew from the Vietnam War in 1973 (Fadiman, 1997). The first wave of Hmong refugees, which consisted of 3,466 Hmong, came in December 1975 to the United States after having spent some years in Thai refugee camps (Chan, 1994).

In the United States the Hmong had to modify a majority of their practices and lifestyles. It became apparent to the Hmong that life in the United States was dramatically different from the life they once lived in Laos. Back in the mountains of Laos, many of the Hmong were farmers who grew rice (Brittan, 1997). The common practice of slash-and-burn agriculture, which meant burning down and cutting forests to make land for agricultural purposes (Chan, 1994), was no longer appropriate in the new land

of America. In addition, many Hmong were no longer able to live with extended family members due to health and fire department codes, which only allowed a certain number of people to live in an apartment or household. Many of the cultural and traditional practices were also restricted such as practices that required sacrifices of animals (Chan, 1994). As a result, many Hmong were unable to perform full ceremonies as they used to when they were in Laos. Furthermore, the lifestyle that many Hmong elders were used to when they were growing up changed drastically when they entered this new world; therefore, Hmong elders may not be able to completely understand the challenges faced by many of their children having to grow up in two cultures and being exposed to clashing norms and values, especially during the adolescent years where opposing views of “adolescence” from the Hmong and American’s perspective collide.

Adolescence

Although there have been studies conducted on the Hmong population, many have focused on Hmong college students. There has been a lack of research specifically on Hmong adolescents. Adolescence is a time in life where individuals start to diverge from their parents by creating their own identities and values, and start seeking peers for support (Lee & Liu, 2001). Adolescence, in a sense, becomes a time of change for many young individuals. They strive for the ability to make their own decisions and choices, even in the presence of their parents’ disapproval. A new form of thinking emerges and adolescents start to question the ideas and values previous held (Xiong, 2004).



Many start to refuse to adopt the rules, values, and set of beliefs set forth by their parents. In the process of forming an identity, many start to conform to peers. Several start to search for belonging and acceptance among their age group. Additionally, adolescence becomes a time period where many individuals start to adopt values and beliefs similar to their peers (Xiong, 2004). As the developmental changes occur, many adolescents start to spend less time with their parents and families. They become more independent

and start spending time with peers. These developmental changes may be incompatible with the traditional Hmong view of an adolescent.

“Adolescence,” taken from a traditional Hmong culture point of view, does not exist. When a Hmong child turns thirteen years of age, he or she is expected to take the roles and responsibilities of an adult (Xiong, 2004). As a result, many elders of the Hmong culture may not understand what their child is going through in this foreign country of America where there is a strong belief in an adolescence development period.

Generally speaking, many individuals who start to become assertively independent also encounter more family conflicts and less unity with their parents, resulting in negative effects on their psychological well-being (Fulgini, 1998). For many ethnic minority individuals, intergeneration family conflicts are comprised of cultural differences in values and lifestyles as well (Lee & Liu, 2001). In general, immigrant children tend to adapt and acculturate faster compared to their immigrant parents (Portes, 1997). Lee and Liu (2001) found that Asian Americans parents and children who share similar cultural values have fewer family conflicts.

In respect to the Hmong, their psychological well-being may be threatened due to elders having difficulty in acculturating (Waller, 2002). Ying and Akutsu (1997) found that the best predictor for the psychological adjustment among the Hmong was a sense of coherence (i.e., perceiving one’s life as comprehensive, manageable, and meaningful).

Culture and Values

Collectivism versus Individualism

One major switch for the Hmong after they settled in America was the exposure to the individualistic culture of America. The Hmong culture is a collectivistic culture (Her, 1998). The defining characteristics of a collectivistic culture include (a) concern about how one’s actions might affect other members and the group as a whole (b) sharing of resources within the group (c) interdependence among members (d) involvement with other members (e) concern of self-presentation and loss of face (f) and the willingness to accept opinions of other members (Hui & Triandis, 1986). An individualistic culture, unlike a collectivistic culture, values such characteristics as (a) inner direction (b) self-orientation (c) less consideration with consequences of one’s behaviors on others (d) and emphasis on independence and focus on one’s needs, interests, and goals (Triandis, 1995). In a sense, collectivism and individualism are two concepts used to describe how an individual relates to members within a culture. Collectivistic cultures adopt a distinctive concept of the self and place emphasis on the ties an individual has with other members. Individualistic cultures, on the other hand, place emphasis on preserving a sense of independence and focus on individual

objectives (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The clashing of the collectivistic culture in which the Hmong live in and the individualistic culture of America may cause conflicts for Hmong refugees.

Collectivistic Values among Hmong

As a collectivistic culture, the Hmong culture is driven by the value of interdependence. The rule of reciprocity, helping others with the expectation that others will return the favor, is strongly held by the Hmong (Her, 1998). This interdependence among each other is heavily based on the strength of connection among the members. An individual within the group sees oneself as being a part of a larger group, where one's behavior can produce consequences for the whole group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Within a Hmong family, children are taught that their lives are interconnected with the lives of others around them (Her, 1998).



The actions they take do not only affect themselves, but they also affect those around them. It is expected for children to know that independence and goals for oneself are not a priority and are heavily discouraged. Rather, Hmong children are expected to follow assigned roles, duties, and fulfill obligations (Lee, 1990). These values conflict with individualistic values where independence is highly encouraged. As Hmong individuals expose themselves to the individualistic American culture, their collectivistic values may become incompatible. An individual may have to decide which values to take and learn to adapt to both cultural environments, which is one of the challenges many Hmong adolescents are faced with when acculturating to the new culture.

Adaptation and Acculturation

Individuals who immigrate to foreign countries face the issue of adapting to a new culture. Adapting to a new culture means an individual or group changes as a result of demands from the environment (Berry, 1997). Adapting for many individuals means acculturating to the new culture. The acculturation process consists of four possible routes: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Based on Berry's (1997) acculturation model, assimilation occurs when individuals do not maintain their own cultural identity and instead identify with the dominant culture. Separation, in contrast, occurs when individuals identify with the culture of origin and do not seek interaction with the dominant culture. When

individuals take interest in and identify with both their original culture and the dominant culture, then integration has taken place.

Finally, marginalization occurs when individuals have a low identification with both their culture of origin and the dominant culture.

The Hmong, as with many other cultural groups who migrate into a different culture, are faced with the decision to assimilate (identifying and accepting the values, beliefs, and norms of the dominant culture and discarding the cultural identity, values, beliefs, and norms of one's native culture), integrate (identifying and accepting the values, beliefs, and norms of both the dominant culture and one's native culture), separate (identifying and accepting only the values, beliefs, and norms of one's native culture and disregarding those values, beliefs, and norms of the dominant culture), or marginalize (not identifying or accepting the values, beliefs, and norms of either one's native culture or the dominant culture) (Berry, 1997). According to Berry (1997) those refugees or cultural group members who have taken the integration route tend to have more positive adaptations to the new culture. Conflicts may arise when shifts in behavior, which may involve learning new cultural values and behaviors, are required from an individual in a new setting. Stressors may arise from daily shifts from one cultural context to another, which may require the use of coping skills to avoid acculturative stress that could lead to psychopathologies (Berry, 1997).

Furthermore, refugees with high levels of acculturative stress may be at higher risk for depression and anxiety related symptoms (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008). The Hmong in particular may be faced with this issue, since the population has been found to be the most traditional of all Southeast Asian immigrants (Ying & Akutsu, 1997). Being unable to develop effective coping strategies to deal with the new cultural context, many Hmong are at risk for developing psychopathologies and mental health related problems.

As Hmong individuals begin to acculturate and move further and further away from their own cultural practices, family conflicts may arise as parents attempt to instill cultural customs into them. What had once been a simple life of living among fields of rice and livestock has been replaced with a life dominated by technology. The change has especially impacted the Hmong elders since they were used to the farming lifestyle, which makes it difficult for them to transition into the United States. In addition, many of the elders in the Hmong community are not acculturating to the American culture due to many difficulties such as the inability to learn English (Waller, 2002). Many of the elders are choosing to keep the traditions and customs of the Hmong culture. As a result, Hmong youth have to adapt to both cultures as they cannot escape the traditions and customs in their home environment. In other words, biculturalism of Hmong youth is expected among the Hmong community (Adler, 2004). Many Hmong individuals have to find ways to adjust to both existing cultures. A study conducted by Mouanoutoua

(1993) with 132 Hmong individuals (ages 18-62) suggests that Hmong individuals who have higher adjustment problems to both cultures also have a higher level of distress and unhappiness. It is important to note that the study, as with many studies done within the Hmong population, does not focus on Hmong adolescents; therefore, the findings may not be generalize to Hmong adolescents.

Cross Culture Code Switching

Children of refugees or immigrants are left to learn how to adapt to both their native culture and the new culture. Many who attend school find that half of their day is governed by rules and norms of the new culture, and that the other half is governed by rules and norms of their native culture. Many have to use cross cultural code-switching when moving from one cultural environment to a new cultural environment. Cross cultural code-switching is “the act of purposefully modifying one’s behavior in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior” (Molinsky, 2007, p. 624). Cross cultural code-switching is a part of the acculturation process that many Hmong adolescents go through.

Some of the values and norms in the new culture may conflict with the native culture, which may lead to failures in certain aspects of an individual’s life. Many of the children have to learn how to be successful not only in the new culture, but also in their own culture. This may give rise to such problems as self-esteem. In general, identification with White Americans positively predicts self-esteem in Asian Americans (Gong, 2007).

Furthermore, the constant switching between cultures may become draining as it takes a toll on an individual’s psychological health (Molinsky, 2007). Mental effort is required when switching from one cultural context to another, as norms and rules changes. Cross cultural switching may threaten a person’s sense of efficacy and may result in embarrassment. Switching may also be difficult to perform sometimes because it may contradict an individual’s values, which may result in feeling guilty, stressed, and anxious (Molinsky, 2007). For biculturals, which includes the U.S. Hmong population in general, having to switch from the cultural home environment to the new culture when they leave home may build up stress and heavily impact their psychological well-being. Effective coping strategies may be needed as a way to prevent Hmong individuals from being overwhelmed with the psychological distress.

Identity

Bicultural Identity

As individuals in the Hmong population start to acculturate or not acculturate to the American culture, many identities can be formed. Being exposed to two cultures, Hmong adolescents who have adopted the ideas and values of the two cultures (Hmong and American) have developed a bicultural identity. In other words, those who have decided to take the integration route in the acculturation process have

developed two cultural identities. Those who have learned English as a second language can be termed bicultural bilinguals: individuals who have immersed themselves in two cultures and who speak the languages of the two cultures (Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio, 2008). For many Hmong individuals and other biculturals, maintaining a bicultural identity may be difficult due to the many skills needed.

LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) proposed a series of skills required to develop and maintain competence of a bicultural identity: (a) understanding the cultural values and customs in the two cultures (having knowledge about the history and practice of both cultures); (b) possessing positive mind sets and strong attachment to both cultures (comfortable when interacting and being a part of the two cultures); (c) being self-efficient in both cultures (developing confidence in competence in both cultures); (d) effective communication (learning the language of both cultures and being able to interact effectively with members of the two cultures); (e) adaptive role repertoire (increasing the range of behaviors suitable for various cultural groups or circumstances); and (f) groundedness (instituting social networks to reduce stress resulting from acculturation). LaFromboise et al. (1993) suggest that developing and maintaining the skills are imperative in improving physical and mental health among biculturals. Generally, biculturals can benefit from being involved in the two cultures as long as they do not immerse themselves with the conflicts that arise between the two cultures (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). What this means for many Hmong individuals is that maintaining a bicultural identity is possible, but a strong sense of control is required to prevent oneself from being caught up in the conflicts that may arise between the two cultures. In regard to the skills proposed by LaFromboise et al. (1993), it is essential for many Hmong to develop competence in the American and Hmong culture. Many will find themselves changing behaviors as they move from one cultural environment to the next. The behaviors and norms expected from a cultural Hmong setting, such as a spiritual ceremony, may not be appropriate as Hmong individuals move into a cultural American setting.

Walt's Intercultural Competencies

Communication styles are strongly correlated with race, culture, and ethnicity. Differences in communication styles may trigger certain preconceived notions, stereotypes, or beliefs counselors have about various minority groups. Differences in communication styles may have implications for psychologists and formators.



- What are the differences in communication styles shown in the movie?
- Why do you believe ethnic minorities often rely more on nonverbal than verbal communication?
- As in the case of this movie, what are the positive and negative aspects of relying on nonverbal responses in the situations depicted?
- What are some high-low context communication styles depicted in the movie?
- What examples of each did you notice in the movie and how can they lead to misunderstanding in intercultural encounters?
- What are the acculturation differences among the Hmong family members, and how would you approach them?
- What level of intercultural competence does one need to effectively work, or minister to culturally different families or groups? How can one overcome stereotyping?

Values, belief systems, and intercultural competencies can be formed in our families of origin. This is particularly important for individuals from highly relational, collectivistic, and group centered cultures.



- What are some of the challenges faced by psychologists if they work with Hmong families in the expected roles of consultant, change agent, facilitator, and participants in outreach roles? What

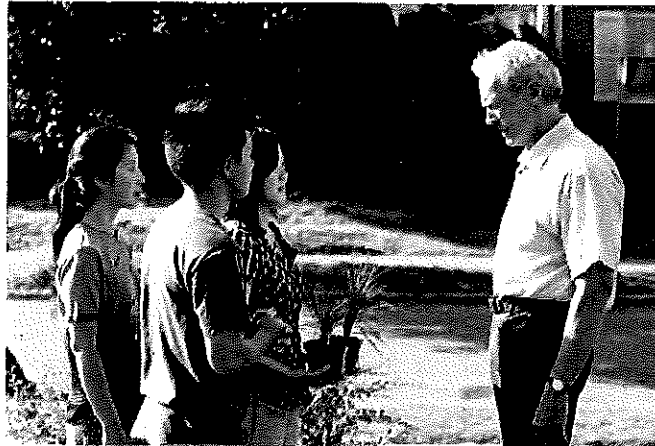
competencies would a formator need to understand a seminarian from a Hmong family with different levels of acculturation?

- In the case of Walt and his interactions with the Hmong family, what are some of the areas of misunderstands that occurred?
- What are some of the characteristics of the two family systems (Hmong and Euro American) in terms of communication and structures that were the most salient?

The Euro-American family and the Hmong families differ on the following dimensions:

- People-nature Relationship
- Time Orientation
- People relationships
- Preferred modes of activity
- Which one of these present the most challenges for intercultural communication and interaction?

Development models have been effective in demonstrating that Asian Americans, African Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and American Indians have a distinct cultural heritage and will move through different stages when forming a racial/cultural identity.

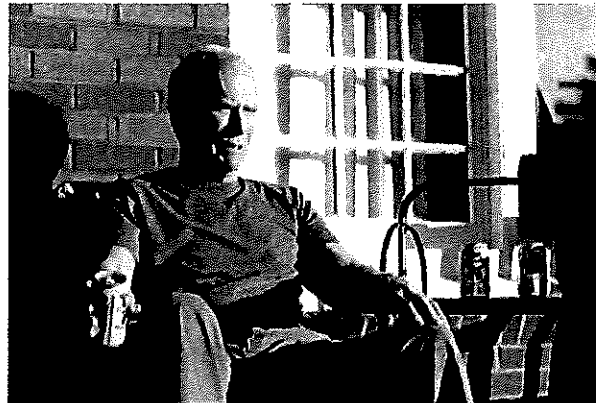


- How might identity development be similar or different for individuals living primarily in a White or ethnic community? What challenges did the Hmong family face interacting with a Euro-American neighbors? What challenges did Walt face and how did these impact his ethnic identity development?
- How does information on racial identity affect you as a White (ethnic identity) identified individual or as a person of color watching this movie?
- Think about some of the ways that ethnocentrism or “cultural encapsulation” has been evident in your own ministries or professions. How can our institutions move beyond these deficits in intercultural competencies?

- Compare and contrast the states of racial/ethnic identity development between Walt and the young Hmong members of the family?

Most Euro-Americans seldom consider what it means to be “White” in our society. This inability to identify and investigate White identity acts as an invisible veil that prevents people from acknowledging it as a cultural system. These beliefs, norms, and values are so interwoven into the mainstream society that White individuals are unable to step outside and understand that they have a racial identity.

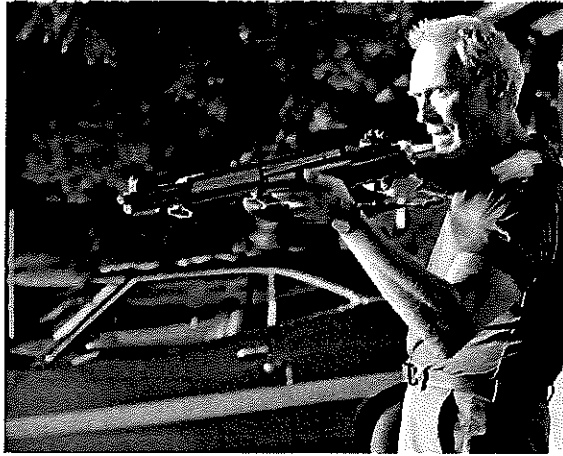
Several existing models have been developed to understand the various experiences of Euro-Americans (Whites) to describe their experiences with ethnic minority groups. Please take a look at the following models and their respective phases and attempt to understand Walt’s reactions and behaviors as you read the following phases.



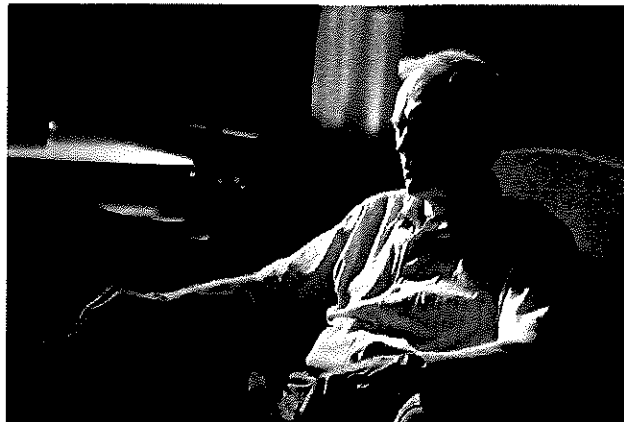
One of the earliest integrative attempts was formulated by Hardiman (1982). It was based on autobiographies of White individuals who had attained a high level of racial consciousness. The model has five developmental stages:

1. The *naivete stage* (lack of social consciousness) is characteristic of early childhood. It is associated with innocence of the world, being unaware of racism and the importance of race. The duration of this stage is brief.
2. The *acceptance stage* is marked by a belief that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in society. Those who fail must bear the responsibility. White Euro-Americans become the reference group. Victim blaming is prevalent. This stage can last a lifetime.
3. The *resistance stage* is associated with conflicts over the assumptions of White superiority and denial of racism. Some event may cause questioning of stereotypes of ethnic minorities. Racial realities cannot be

denied and the person begins to become conscious of being White. Negative reactions to the person's own group may develop and people of color may be romanticized.



4. The *redefinition stage* is characterized by intense soul searching and honest confrontation with one's biases and accepting responsibility for one's Whiteness. The extremes of good/bad or positive/negative attachments to "White" and "people of color" begin to become more realistic. The person no longer denies being White and feels increased comfort in relating to people of color.



5. The *internalization stage* is the result of forming a new social and personal identity. The individual accepts responsibility for effecting personal and social change without relying on people of color to lead the way.

The Helms White Racial Identity Model (Helms, 1995).

Janet Helms's White racial identity model is perhaps the most elaborate and sophisticated of those proposed.

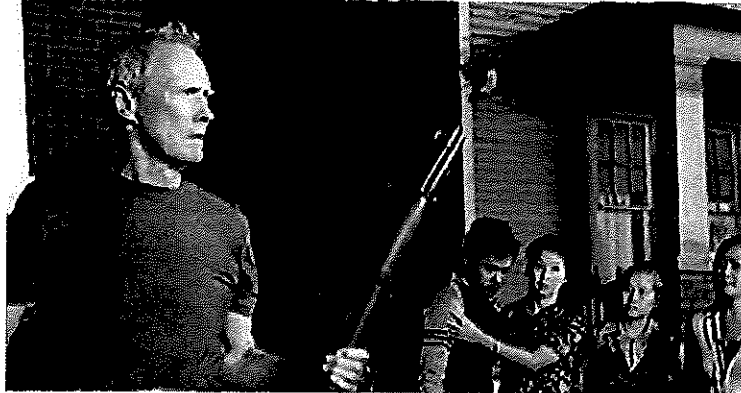
It has generated much research and debate in the psychological literature and is composed of six statuses:

1. *Contact status*. Individuals at this status are oblivious and unaware of racism. They believe that everyone has an equal chance for success, lack an understanding of prejudice and discrimination, and profess to be color-blind. Two contradictory belief systems may coexist—uncritical acceptance of White supremacist notions and the belief that cultural and racial differences are unimportant.



2. *Disintegration status*. The White person becomes conflicted over unresolvable racial moral dilemmas that are perceived as polar opposites: for example, believing that one is nonracist, yet being against interracial marriages for one's own children, or believing that people are equal but gaining awareness of the second-class status of ethnic minorities. Attempts to resolve the conflict may involve avoidance of racial issues.
3. *Reintegration status*. To resolve the conflict, the individual may swing back to the beliefs of White superiority and minority inferiority. The Euro-American cultural standards are idealized and negation and intolerance of ethnic minorities increase. Minorities are blamed for their own problems.
4. *Pseudo-independence status*. An event or events may jar a person from reintegration status. There is awareness of the unfairness of treatment of ethnic minorities and discomfort with a racist White identity. The individual attempts to understand racial, cultural, and sexual orientation differences and attempts to interact with minority group members. However, the individual may unknowingly perpetuate racism by using White standards when working with minorities.

5. *Immersion/emersion status.* Individuals continue the personal exploration of themselves as racial beings and focus on what it means to be White. There is an understanding of White privilege at an intellectual, affective, and experiential level. Successful resolution of this status requires an emotional catharsis involving previously denied or distorted emotions. The ability to achieve this emotional resolution is a necessary condition to the development of a nonracist White identity.



6. *Autonomy status.* Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's role in perpetuating racism, and renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, values diversity, and is comfortable about the experiential reality of race.

The Sue and Sue five-stage process (Sue & Sue, 2005) for White Racial Identity Development incorporates some of the features of the other theories:

1. *Conformity stage.* There is minimal awareness of the self as a racial being and limited knowledge of minority groups. The White culture is thought to be the most developed and all others are inferior. Minority inferiority provides the justification for discriminatory practices.
2. *Dissonance stage.* White individuals are forced to deal with inconsistencies that have been compartmentalized. These may bring individuals face to face with their own prejudices and biases. As a result of the conflicts, individuals may retreat to the previous stage or move on to the next.

3. *Resistance and immersion stage.* Individuals at this stage realize what racism means. There is acknowledgment of the White person's own racism. Again, conflicting feelings may produce a flight back to the earlier stages or movement to the introspective stage.
4. *Introspective stage.* This represents a compromise between the extremes of unconditional acceptance of White identity and the rejection of Whiteness. The individual develops a searching, observing, and questioning attitude.
5. *Integrative awareness stage.* This stage is characterized by (a) understanding of self as a racial/cultural being, (b) awareness of sociopolitical influences with respect to racism, (c) appreciation of racial/cultural diversity, and (d) increased commitment toward eradicating oppression. The formation of a nonracist White Euro-American identity emerges and becomes internalized.

Choose one of these models and the most helpful phases to describe Walt's behaviors, attitudes, and intercultural interactions with the Hmong family.

Worldviews are not only composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts; they may also affect how we think, define events, make decisions, and behave. It has become increasingly clear that many minority persons hold worldviews different from members of the dominant culture. For minorities in America, a strong determinant of worldviews is related to racism and the subordinate position assigned to them in society.

- How did Walt engage in racism and discrimination?
- What kinds of institutional forms of racism, discrimination and bias have I encountered in my respective roles and functions and what kinds of institutional changes would it are required to make changes?

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