

Helm's White Racial Identity Development Model

Two Phases: Abandonment of Racism & Defining a Non-Racist** Identity

1. **Contact** – people are:

- Oblivious to racism
- Lack an understanding of racism
- Have minimal experiences with Black people and people of color.
- May profess to be "color-blind"

Societal influence in perpetuating stereotypes and the superior/inferior dichotomy associated between white people and Black people, indigenous people, and people of color are not noticed but accepted unconsciously or consciously without critical thought or analysis, especially among members of the "dominant" group. Racial and cultural differences are considered unimportant and these individuals seldom perceive themselves as "dominant" group members or as having biases or prejudices.

2. **Disintegration** – the person becomes conflicted over un-resolvable racial or moral dilemmas frequently perceived as polar opposites.

- Believing one is non-racist, yet **not** wanting one's child to marry a member of a racial group different from theirs.
- Believing that "all people are created equal", yet treating Black people, indigenous people, people of color, people of a different "caste", darker-skinned individuals, as second-class citizens.
- Not acknowledging that oppression exists while witnessing it (e.g., the murder of George Floyd)

The person becomes increasingly conscious of their whiteness (or their proximity to whiteness, their own internalized racism) and may experience dissonance and conflict in choosing between own-group loyalty and humanism.

3. **Reintegration**

Because of the tremendous influence that the dominant societal ideology exerts, initial resolution of dissonance often moves in the direction of the dominant ideology associated with race and one's own socio-racial group identity. This stage may be characterized as a regression, for the tendency is to idealize one's socio-racial group and to be intolerant of other racial groups. There is a firmer and more conscious belief in white racial superiority, and racial/ethnic "minorities" are blamed for their own problems.

4. **Pseudo-independence**

A person is likely to move into this phase due to a painful or insightful encounter or event, which jars the person from **reintegration** status. The person begins to attempt an understanding of racial, cultural, and sexual orientation differences (etc.) and may reach out to interact with individuals of a different racial group. The choice of which individuals, however, is based on how "similar" they are to that person, and the **primary mechanism used to understand racial issues is intellectual and conceptual**. An attempt to understand has not reached the experiential and



affective domains. In other words, understanding Euro–American white privilege, the sociopolitical aspects of race, and issues of bias, prejudice, and discrimination tend to be more of an intellectual exercise.

5. Immersion/Emersion

If the person is reinforced to continue a personal exploration of themselves as a racial being, questions become focused on what it means to be white. Helms states that the person searches for an understanding of the personal meaning of racism and the ways by which one benefits from white privilege or dominant group privilege. There is an increasing willingness to truly confront one's own biases, to redefine whiteness, and to become more activist in directly combating racism and oppression. This stage is marked with increasing experiential and affective understanding that were lacking in the previous status.

6. Autonomy

Increasing awareness of one's own whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, 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 no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. The development of a non-racist white identity becomes increasingly strong.

*****Please note that this handout discusses the racial development journey as moving from racist into "non-racist".***

Seven Stones' distinction between Non-Racist and Anti-Racist:

We see the distinction between non-racist and anti-racist as the following: We believe that as we progress in our racial development journey, we move from unaware and ignorant (i.e. racist or unaware of our racial biases and therefore expressing, whether knowingly or unknowingly, racist ideologies and biases), to non-racist. To move from non-racist to anti-racist is to become active. Non-racist means that you are "knowledgeable about racial, ethnic and cultural differences, values diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race" (from the Autonomy section of this handout). **To be anti-racist means that you are not only knowledgeable of, aware of, and comfortable with racial differences, but that you are ACTIVE in your efforts to unpack and undo racism and white supremacy within yourself and with those around you in your day-to-day life.**

Inquiry Questions:

- Where am I in my Racial Identity process?
- What happens in between understanding on an intellectual/conceptual level and moving into an experiential understanding?
- How will I travel from one stage to another?
- What holds me back from shifting to the next stage?

SOURCE: Adapted from Helms (1995) from Sue, et al. (1998). *Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Individual and Organizational Development*. Sage Productions. Thousand Oaks, CA.

