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Cultural-Identity Development and Family Assessment: An Interaction Model

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This article proposes an extension of Janet Helms's Black and White interaction model to be used as a starting point for organizing and understanding cultural-identity data in making an initial family assessment. A number of efforts to describe how culture affects family counseling have focused on between-group differences. The interaction model presented here endeavors to expand that discussion by systematically including (a) within-group cultural differences in families, (b) changes in cultural-identity attitudes over time, (c) attention to the counselor's stage of cultural identity (in addition to those of the family's various subsystems), and (d) consideration of cultural differences in the work of counselors and families from the same culture or in the work of nondominant culture counselors working with dominant-culture families. The article reviews the Helms model and other pertinent constructs from the literature, extends the theory to multicultural family counseling, and concludes with some illustrative cases suggesting how the interaction paradigm might be applied.

It has become axiomatic to speak of the impact of culture on family structure and consequently on the process of family counseling. Cultural expectations and family patterns of interaction appear to be inextricably bound together. Although some of the early work in the field of family counseling highlighted the crucial importance of culture and socioeconomic status (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967), in recent years especially, the literature has again undertaken a serious exploration of the implications of culture for family functioning. One significant development that has resulted from this renewed interest in culture has been the delineation of critical between-group ethnic differences in family patterns of interaction (Ho, 1987; McGoldrick, Pearce, & Giordano, 1982; Sue & Sue, 1990). However, to achieve a coherent vision of how culture

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affects the family counseling process, a comprehensive conceptual model must also suggest how these important between-group insights might be moderated by within-group cultural variations. Such a model would both guide the counselor in the process of assessment and enable him or her to anticipate particular challenges that may arise in work with a specific family.

This article will suggest that the methodological foundations of Janet Helms's (1984, 1990b, 1990f) Black and White interaction model may offer a starting point for a tenable organizing paradigm for cultural identity data as one part of making an initial family assessment. The following paragraphs will also argue that the Helms model might enrich the current way of viewing families and culture by systematically introducing four considerations into the discussion. First, the model directs attention to within-group differences as well as to between-group differences. Second, the interaction perspective envisions the possibility of change in the worldviews of the participants over time. Third, the interaction model includes the cultural identity of the counselor as well as that of the family in making an assessment. Fourth, the model insists that although many "cultural difference" studies seem to have presupposed dominant culture counselors working with families from nondominant cultural groups, questions of cultural identity are equally important when considering counselors who are not from the dominant group working with dominant culture families, or even when considering counselors and families of the same cultural or ethnic group. The terms *dominant* and *nondominant* are used below in preference to *majority* and *minority* because the stimulus for the psychological response being explored here is a given group's degree of "social power," not its numerical majority or minority *per se*.

CULTURE, ETHNICITY, AND FAMILIES

With the notable exception of the work of Salvador Minuchin and his associates mentioned earlier, much of the seminal work in family counseling was conspicuously silent on the questions of culture and cultural difference. As it sought to establish a family systems perspective over and against the traditional individual orientation and to delineate the kinds of family dynamics that would be its focus, the field of family counseling tended to assume a monocultural (White Northern European) context for family assessment and intervention. Over the past decade, this has begun to change with the growing attention to cultural and ethnic variables and their role in determining family structure. Hopeful signs have appeared both in (a) the field of multicultural counseling and (b) the field of family counseling itself.

One example of the former is the inclusion of a chapter on "Cross-Cultural Family Counseling" in the most recent addition of *Counseling the Culturally Different* (Sue & Sue, 1990), a text previous editions of which have been cited as "classics" in the field of multicultural counseling (Ponterotto & Sabnani, 1989). The authors offer both a contextual and a conceptual model for multicultural family counseling. Their model approaches the issue of cultural difference by examining the "value orientations" of both the counselor and the family. The authors discuss how differences in values along each of the five dimensions proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) might affect the process of family counseling. Although their focus is primarily on the differences that may arise *between* cultural groups, they warn against the stereotyping that may result should a counselor fail to take into account the "large variations [that] exist within the groups themselves." They call for the elaboration of a framework that will help the counselor "more specifically pinpoint cultural differences that exist within a particular family."

As for the discipline of family counseling, one of the most significant contributions in the effort to provide an explicit multicultural frame of reference has been the work of McGoldrick et al. (1982). Their work, *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, has served as a compendium for the culturally related patterns of family interaction for 19 different ethnic groups. These authors also choose as their focus the issue of between-group differences. Their concern is to sensitize counselors to cultural "paradigms"—that is, varying ways in which "typical" families operate from one culture to the next. For instance, although certain patterns might be labeled *pathological* by a counselor operating from the dominant culture's point of view, they may in fact be normative within the context of a given family's beliefs and values. Certain moments in the family life cycle will represent greater crises for one culture than for another. The mainstream culture of the United States will present differing challenges to families of different cultures in the process of adaptation. These authors, and others in the field who have written about particular cultural or ethnic groups, effectively expose the false assumptions of universality beneath the monocultural perspective in family counseling. Counselors can hope to understand a family only in the context of the family's culture.

Yet for the counselor, a critical question remains: To what extent is the typical cultural family pattern for a given group represented in the family sitting in front of me? What are the specific consequences of culturally related family dynamics for the assessment and treatment of *this* family? That question represents a different level of analysis. Although it is essential that a counselor be sensitive to between-group or "emic" cultural differences such as those mentioned earlier, it is also crucial that she or he attend to within-

group differences as well. In what ways does this client or family resemble or differ from the patterns of behavior associated with his or her cultural group? Not to attend to intragroup differences is to avoid the pitfall of "false universals" at the cost of stereotyping. It is unlikely that any treatment based on such a distorted assessment could be effective in symptom relief or in facilitating a family system change that the family experiences as beneficial.

McGoldrick (1982) is sensitive to this issue and indicates a number of variables that "influence the way ethnic patterns surface in families." For instance, the reason for a family's migration will affect how tenaciously it holds on to its traditional culture, as will its socioeconomic status and educational level prior to moving. Likewise, the place where it settles (ethnic enclave or WASP neighborhood), and whether or not its members intermarry will affect the family's rate of adaptation to the dominant culture. In addition, race, religion, and political affiliations may have the effect of either binding a family more firmly to traditional ways or isolating them (e.g., through discrimination) from mainstream North American society. Finally, according to McGoldrick (1982), a family's stage in the family life cycle at the time of the move will affect its rate of acculturation and the particular challenges it will face. She notes that precisely because of the moderating influence of many factors, such as the ones just cited, portraits of the characteristics of families from a given ethnic group serve only as "starting points" for an understanding of any given family. As Inclán (1980) and Boyd-Franklin (1989) have observed, there is no such thing as "*the* Puerto Rican family" or "*the* Black family."

Other authors also use the construct of "level of acculturation" to describe within-group differences in families of the same cultural or ethnic group. Accordingly, some families are seen as having absorbed North American patterns of interacting in their family structure, whereas others are seen as more closely reflecting the patterns of their traditional culture. A number of variables that influence a family's process of acculturation have been suggested. For instance, Landau (1982; Landau-Stanton, 1990) includes "availability of support systems" and "degree of harmony" between old and new cultures, and loss (or not) of extended family in her list of factors influencing family acculturation. A number of authors (Aponte, 1976; Fulmer, 1988; Hines, 1988; Minuchin et al., 1967) emphasize the importance of socioeconomic status as a moderating variable influencing family patterns of interaction.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the evidence would seem to point to the fact that not all family members acculturate at the same rate. For instance, Sciarra and Ponterotto (1991) have recently suggested how the linguistic and cultural disparities present within Hispanic bilingual families might be used to facilitate counseling. One line of research indicates that children accultur-

ate more rapidly than do adults (Baptiste, 1987; Landau, 1982; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978). Sluzki (1979) suggests that in addition to intergenerational factors, there may also be a differential rate of acculturation based on one's role in the family system (i.e., "instrumental" or "affective") and varying degrees of contact with the dominant culture that that role affords. Each of these perspectives holds that different systems within the family may be at different levels of acculturation. To put it another way, in such families, the counselor is no longer dealing with one culture but two or more. With so many confounding variables, it would seem impossible, at least for the present, to speak of any kind of uniform "stage model" of family acculturation that would apply to all families in the process of cultural transition. At the same time, there is growing concern for an appreciation of cultural diversity within groups (e.g., Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Ponterotto, 1987; Wilson & Stith, 1991). Where does that leave the multicultural family practitioner? Does the combination of factors cited above make every family within a given cultural group more or less unique, or are there ways in which some families from a particular culture are more alike than others? Is there any kind of organizing scheme that could help counselors speak systematically or within-group cultural differences in families for purposes of accurate assessment and for devising appropriate treatment strategies? Are there certain types of family alignments within cultural groupings? Here, the methodology presented in the racial and cultural identity development models, and elaborated by Janet Helms in her Black and White process model, may offer a helpful theoretical approach to understanding the kinds of predictable interactions that might be expected in multicultural family counseling.

RACIAL- AND CULTURAL- IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODELS

The racial- and cultural-identity development models represented a watershed for the field of individual multicultural counseling in its effort to come to terms with the issue of intragroup difference. These paradigms take an approach to the question of within-group variation different from the models of acculturation discussed earlier. They focus on an individual's psychological response to the experience of membership in an oppressed group (or of belonging to the group that benefits from oppression) and suggest that persons at different stages of racial- or cultural-identity development can be characterized by distinct and measurable attitudes (positive or negative) toward at least two referent groups. One referent group is the person's own racial- or cultural-group (depending on the model). The other

referent is the salient dominant/nondominant group with which the subject's own group is in contact. Some models use additional referents.

Unlike models of acculturation, the racial- and cultural-identity development models propose stages that suggest a desirable process of psychological growth. The word *developmental* is used in a very specific sense by these authors to underscore the (a) hierarchical and (b) sequential nature of the stages depicted. The models are hierarchical insofar as they explicitly link increased psychological integration to the more-advanced stages of racial or cultural identity development (Carter, 1991a; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). In contrast, acculturation models do not suggest that higher levels of acculturation are healthier. The racial- and cultural-identity models are sequential insofar as they endeavor to describe a process of psychological growth in which, for the most part, one stage follows and builds on those that have preceded it. However, it is important to note that development in these models is not age related or even inevitable. In fact, it has been noted that the process can be arrested for some individuals (Helms, 1984; 1990f) or that for some there may be a certain amount of recycling through earlier stages (Parham, 1989).

The current cultural-identity models (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Helms & Carter, 1986, cited in Carter, Fretz, & Mahalik, 1986; Sue & Sue, 1990) grow out of the early work on racial identity (see Helms, 1990e) and particularly the five-stage model of Black racial identity proposed by Cross (1971; Hall, Cross, & Freedle, 1972) and first operationalized and confirmed by Parham and Helms (1981; Helms & Parham, 1990a, 1990b; Ponterotto & Wise, 1987). Although departing from Cross's taxonomy, cultural-identity theorists have preserved his essential thrust, envisioning more or less discrete stages each of which (a) delineates a particular worldview (Helms, 1986; Sue 1978) and (b) can be measured empirically via varying positive or negative attitudes toward designated referent cultural groups (e.g., dominant vs. nondominant groups).

The three models of cultural-identity development mentioned above converge in using language proposed by Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1979) to describe the stages: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and synergetic articulation and awareness. Like Cross's racial-identity model, these models trace an individual's development from an implicit acceptance of the dominant culture and devaluation of one's own (conformity), through a period of ambivalence (dissonance) to an emphatic rejection of the dominant culture, combined with an exclusive interest in and idealization of one's own culture (resistance and immersion). This stage is followed by another period of reevaluation (introspection), which precedes an integrated acceptance of one's own cultural values and a selective appre-

ciation or rejection of those of the dominant group (synergetic articulation and awareness).

It should also be noted that the cultural-identity development models diverge on a number of points. For instance, the minority identity development model (MID) proposed by Atkinson et al. (1979, 1989) includes two parameters for describing each stage (attitude toward self and attitude toward other minorities) not found in Cross's model (1971), although in at least one study the latter has not been confirmed empirically (Fernandez, 1989). Helms and Carter (1986, cited in Carter, Fretz, & Mahalik, 1986) on the other hand, have chosen to define "cultural identity" more narrowly in developing their cultural-identity inventory. Following Cross, they measure only attitudes toward one's own group and toward the dominant group. In addition, they collapse the two transitional stages (dissonance and introspection) into one, suggesting that four factors offer a more parsimonious description of the range of cultural-identity attitudes and result in a more reliable measure of those attitudes. Helms and Carter adapt the MID model terminology in labeling their factors: conformity, dissonance/introspection, resistance, and awareness.

The strong parallels that exist between the processes of racial and cultural-identity development have been highlighted recently by Sue and Sue (1990) in their proposed racial/cultural-identity development model (R/CID). The authors emphasize the similarities between the experiences described by Cross and other racial-identity theorists and the stages of the MID model. The critical link underscored by Sue and Sue is the individual's effort to integrate his or her understanding of self with the implications of his or her membership in an oppressed group in this country, whether that oppression is due primarily to one's race, to one's sex, or to one's status as a member of a nondominant cultural group.

Unlike models of acculturation, which endeavor to locate a subject's behavior, attitudes, knowledge and/or values on a continuum between two cultures, the models of racial- and cultural-identity development measure a subject's attitude toward his or her own culture and the dominant culture. Although in the racial- and cultural-identity models what is being measured explicitly is not cultural content per se, but attitudes associated with the various stages (Helms, 1990d), it is also true, as noted earlier, that each stage corresponds to a set of values or a worldview (Helms, 1986). It is possible, therefore, to speak of a cultural shift as an individual moves from the predominance of one set of stage-related attitudes to the next (Carter & Helms, 1987, 1990). In this sense then, although they approach the task in different ways, the constructs of acculturation and racial- and cultural-identity development each try to distinguish distinct cultural perspectives within a particular racial or ethnic group.

HELMS'S BLACK AND WHITE INTERACTION MODEL

In her Black and White interaction model (Helms, 1984) and her subsequent reflections on White racial-identity development (Helms, 1990f), Helms has endeavored to advance the discussion in a number of respects. In introducing her 1984 model, Helms indicated the tendency of the various "minority-focused" models that had been proposed to concentrate on only one participant in the counseling process. Implicitly, for Helms, the focus had been on the "normative White" counselor's dexterity in "handling the problem" of a nondominant group client's stage of racial- (or "minority") identity development. The models seemed to assume that the White person in the dyad was the counselor and that the member of the nondominant group was the client. White persons were not depicted as undergoing any sort of racial-identity development. According to Helms, attention needed to be given to the interaction of stage-related attitudes in mixed-race dyads and even in same-race dyads.

In attempting to respond to some of these conceptual biases, Helms (1984, 1990f) has offered a six-stage model of White racial-identity development that outlines a process through which White persons may arrive at an "acceptance of race as a positive aspect of themselves and others." As with the Black racial-identity development model, each stage is marked by attitudes toward Whites and toward Blacks.

According to her most recent articulation of the model (Helms, 1990f), the first three stages represent a process that she has termed "the abandonment of racism." Whites are brought up in the context of, and to some extent absorb, the explicitly and implicitly racist attitudes of society. Thus White people do not begin their development from some merely neutral position of "lack of awareness" about race, especially their own (Katz & Ivey, 1977). Rather, they inherit a personally and socially debilitating "racist identity" with its concomitant attitudes about Whites and Blacks. After gaining consciousness of race that an initial encounter with Blacks engenders (Contact), Whites may attempt to respond to the dissonance caused by the awareness of the implications of being White in a racist society either by overidentifying with or patronizing Blacks (Disintegration)—strategies that typically lead to angry reactions on the part of Blacks. The next stage may well be a retreat into White culture and avoidance of cross-racial contacts (Reintegration). As the socially dominant race in this country, Whites have the option of discontinuing the process at any stage through a change of job or locale.

For Helms, the next three stages reflect a White person's efforts to develop a nonracist White identity. Thus a White person may emerge from the period of withdrawal just mentioned to an intellectual understanding of racial

difference (Pseudo-Independence). This may be followed by efforts to reappropriate that which is of value in White culture and to learn from other Whites who have developed nonracist identities (Immersion/Emersion). The final stage (Autonomy) is marked by an affective acceptance of racial differences and involvement in opposing institutional and cultural racism in all its forms. The White racial-identity model is still being tested but has already received support in a number of empirical studies (Carter, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c; Carter & Helms, 1990; Helms & Carter, 1990a, 1991; Tokar & Swanson, 1991).

One of Helms's guiding interests in developing a model of White racial identity has been to understand how these different stages of racial-identity development will affect the counseling process. What will the different attitudinal and behavioral predispositions associated with each stage portend for the counseling relationship and for counseling outcome? Helms suggests a number of different configurations of the counselor and client relationship based on racial-identity stages. The correspondence of racial-identity stages can be parallel (counselor and client at equivalent stages), progressive (counselor at least one stage ahead of client), regressive (client at least one stage ahead of counselor), or crossed (client and counselor at affective opposites in their feelings toward Black and White). A counselor "cannot move the client further than the counselor has come" in terms of racial identity (Helms, 1984).

Helms (1984) goes on to predict "common affective issues," "counselor/client strategies," and "counseling outcome" based on the various types of counseling relationships that result from different combinations of racial-identity attitudes in counseling dyads. Knowing what to expect, based on an idioemic portrait of *both* the client and the counselor has enormous consequences for accurate assessment and for developing an effective counseling strategy. Helms has already received some empirical support for her process model (Bradby & Helms, 1990; Carter, 1988, 1990b; Carter & Helms, 1992).

In the most recent extension of her thinking in this area, Helms (1990a) has speculated that racial identity theory may be expanded to facilitate an understanding of other kinds of "dyadic interactions in which the participants differ in social power and/or status due to role expectations (e.g., parent-child; teacher-student; husband-wife)" (p. 177). She argues that these other kinds of social dyads should exhibit the same interaction types (parallel, crossed, progressive, regressive) as seen in the counselor-client dyad. It should be possible to predict something about the affective issues, the strategies, and the dynamics or interpersonal tone that will characterize a relationship based on each partner's stage of racial-identity development. Accordingly, one should be able to anticipate the kinds of issues that are likely

to surface in a mixed or same-race parent-child interaction from an assessment of each party's stage of racial-identity development. For instance, the greater the difference in stages the more antagonistic a tone one might expect to find. In addition, a progressive relationship, in which the parent may be able to play his or her natural role of mentor may well present fewer difficulties than a regressive relationship, in which the child has attained a more advanced stage of racial-identity development than his or her parent. This most recent elaboration of Helms's theory has important consequences for understanding the process of multicultural family counseling.

AN EXTENSION OF HELMS'S INTERACTION THEORY TO MULTICULTURAL FAMILY COUNSELING

The following paragraphs will suggest that although the constructs employed in the model of family assessment proposed in this article may not be identical to those used by Helms, they are nonetheless sufficiently similar, and the relationships between them are sufficiently analogous, as to allow the interaction paradigm to serve as an organizing scheme for certain important variables in the multicultural family counseling process. Before making that extension of the theory, however, it would seem important to note three adaptations that are being made in the interaction model.

First, the paragraphs below speak of *cultural* identity, not *racial* identity. A nondominant-culture-identity development model is used in place of the Black racial-identity model (see Table 1).

It has been decided to use Helms and Carter's (1986, cited in Carter, Fretz, & Mahalik, 1986) terminology rather than that proposed by Atkinson et al. (1989) because the cultural-identity development model employed here will, like Helms and Carter's, refer only to attitudes toward the dominant group and one's own group. The distinction between racial- and cultural-identity development, although real, should not obscure the fundamental affinity between these two constructs. Both deal with a psychological "coming to terms" with one's membership in a group that is oppressed and devalued by the cultural ideology of the larger society of which an individual's group forms a part.

A second adaptation is use of Helms's White identity development model as the basis for understanding dominant-culture-identity development. This would not seem implausible especially insofar as Whites form the dominant culture and develop in a context of social power within this society. It has been argued that the crucial experience that allows the Black racial-identity model to be extended successfully to other groups is that of development in

TABLE 1: A Nondominant-Culture-Identity Development Model

Conformity:	Naïve acceptance of dominant culture's values. Tendency to denigrate one's own culture and idealize the dominant culture.
Dissonance/ introspection	Beginning to question uncritical assimilation to dominant culture in self and others. Growing interest in one's own cultural heritage.
Resistance	Exclusive interest and pride in one's own culture. Outright rejection of the dominant culture's values. Awareness of and resistance to cultural and political hegemony of the dominant group.
Awareness	A critical interest and pride in one's own culture. A critical acceptance of certain aspects of the dominant culture, combined with continued efforts to resist political marginalization and cultural assimilation to "the mainstream."

SOURCE: Based on Helms and Carter (1986, cited in Carter, Fretz, & Mahalik, 1986).

the context of oppression (Atkinson et al., 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990). What is being suggested here is that there is also a valid analogy between the dynamics that shape White racial identity and those at work in the development of a dominant-group member's attitudes toward nondominant cultural groups and that individual's acceptance of her or his role as a member of the socially powerful group in this country. As noted above, Helms (1990a) has recently proposed the possibility of an extension of the interaction model to other relationships characterized by inequality in social power. Cultural-identity development, then, is used here as a general category that subsumes both dominant-and nondominant-culture-identity development.

The model of dominant-culture identity development presented in Table 2 depicts a person who is initially socialized into a mono-cultural point of view. Thus he or she starts from the position of believing that the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the dominant culture are normative. From this point of view, other ways of being in the world are seen as "odd" or "inferior." With particular respect to the present discussion, the behaviors considered to be normative or deviant might include such things as how affection and anger are expressed in families, how disagreements are handled, what child-rearing practices are acceptable, or the expected degree of psychological closeness or distance between family members. Beginning with his or her initial contact with persons from a nondominant group, a member of the dominant group begins the process of reevaluating both cultures and the social consequences of his or her membership in the dominant culture—an odyssey replete with twists and turns as outlined in Table 2. As with the White racial-identity model, members of the dominant culture are free to terminate the process at any time by ending their contact with individuals from the nondominant group. The final stage is characterized by a multicultural perspective in which

TABLE 2: A Dominant-Culture-Identity Development Model

Contact	Mono-cultural perspective. Assumes universality and validity of dominant group's values, attitudes, etc. Complete unawareness of other cultural points of view.
Disintegration	Initial intercultural contacts spark curiosity as person "discovers" other cultures. Naive enthusiasm for the "exotic" combined with initial consciousness of membership in dominant (oppressive) culture. Possible attempts to reconcile these two perspectives via paternalism or overidentification.
Reintegration	Retreat into and idealization of dominant culture. Denigration of and hostility (overt or covert) toward nondominant cultures.
Pseudo-Independence	Intellectual awareness of the validity of differing cultural perspectives. Intellectual acceptance of membership in dominant group (and the consequences for self and for members of nondominant cultures) as starting point for intercultural contacts.
Immersion/Emersion	Introspective time of cognitive and emotional restructuring. Attempt to work out a nonoppressive dominant-culture identity. Search for dominant-culture role models who have achieved a multicultural perspective.
Autonomy	Multicultural perspective. Beyond acceptance to affective appreciation of difference. Values (rather than tolerates) diversity. Commitment to work for a society that reflects this perspective.

SOURCE: Based on Helms (1984, 1990f).

diversity is valued, rather than tolerated. One's own culture is no longer considered to be normative but rather is perceived as making one important contribution—among many—to understanding and interpreting human experience. Such a perspective would also seem to imply a commitment to social change insofar as the person realizes that his or her own cultural prejudices were (and continue to be, to some extent) inculcated and reinforced by the prevailing cultural ideology and social structures of the society in which she or he has been reared.

The third adaptation involves the extension of Helms's interaction theory from dyads to families. For the purpose of succinctness in this initial exploration, family structure will be simplified to a consideration of *executive* (parental/spousal) and *child/sibling* subsystems. This sort of division has been used in family therapy (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), and would seem especially useful in assessing recently immigrated families given the differing cultural patterns or worldviews reported for parents and children of immigrant families (Baptiste, 1987; Landau, 1982; Sciarra & Ponterotto, 1991; Szapocznik et al, 1978). The model proposed in these paragraphs will use the cultural-identity paradigm in its approach to understanding these intrafamilial cultural differences.

The categories suggested here must be interpreted with some flexibility. For instance, for many families, the executive subsystem will consist of one parent, whereas for others an uncle, a grandmother, or a godparent should also be included. Clearly, not all family systems will admit such neat divisions as those suggested in the preceding paragraph. In some cases, further subunits will be called for. For instance, in some families, it may be necessary to further subdivide children according to groupings representing different cultural-identity stages. In other families the natural cultural-identity fault line may lie not between parents and children, but between different coalitions within the family with each spouse belonging to a faction representing a different worldview. Other families may be still more diffuse, making it impossible to speak of cultural-identity stage subgroups. Helms's (1990c) thinking on how racial identity functions in groups may be applicable to such families. Thus one of the counselor's first tasks in assessment must be to ascertain how stages of cultural identity may be represented in a particular family. For the sake of illustration, however, the following discussion will presume a triad of counselor, spousal subsystem, and sibling subsystem. It will be suggested that Helms's process model will offer a theoretical vantage point from which to predict the nature of the interaction among these three groups during the process of multicultural family counseling.

What then are some of the consequences of an interaction perspective for assessment and counseling? For Minuchin (1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), assessment and the initial phase of therapy are interwoven and are characterized by processes that he refers to as "joining" and "accommodation." In this phase, the counselor attempts to insert herself or himself into the family system, seeking to "accept the family's organization and style, and to blend with them." Having joined the family, the counselor is able to experience and test the ways in which its interactions are structured and form a "map" of the interactions of the subsystems that will serve as both an assessment of how the family is operating and as a guide to where the counselor might want to move a given family.

An approach informed by an interaction point of view would suggest the importance of postulating a cultural map as well. However, unlike the family map mentioned in the preceding paragraph, here the counselor would be represented in addition to each of the family subsystems (as opposed to the "blending in" envisioned above). Thus, in its most simple form, a family cultural map would be tripolar, including the spousal subsystem, the sibling subsystem, and the counselor. To the extent to which the counselor is able to accurately assess the cultural-identity stage operative at each of the poles in this triangle, he or she will be able to predict something of the nature of the interactions between each of the dyads in the system: parent(s)-children,

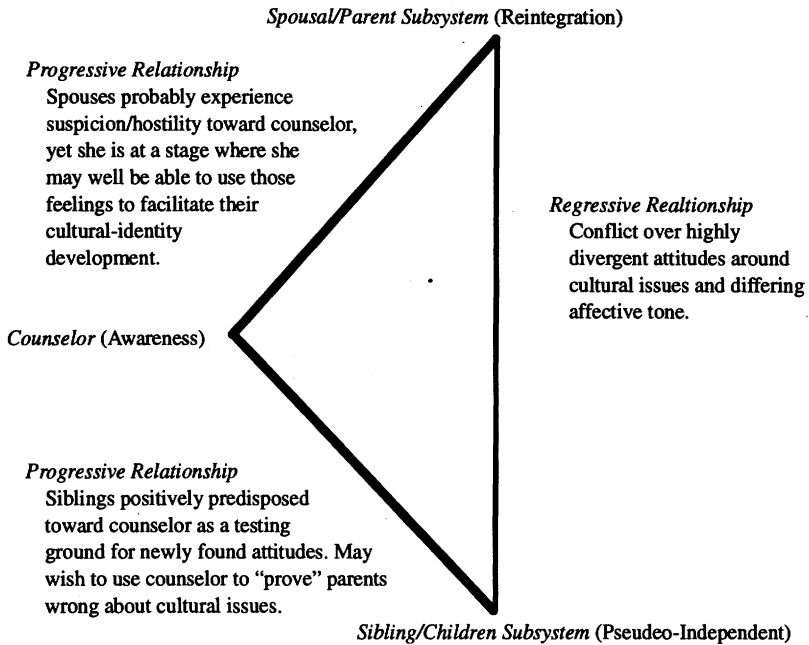


Figure 1 Nondominant-culture counselor/dominant-culture family.

counselor-spouses, and counselor-siblings. As noted above, families may present more complex alignments than the simple spousal and sibling subsystems suggested here. Cultural maps for such families might include three or four different subsystem poles representing different stages of cultural identity. The exact shape (e.g., triangle vs. rectangle) of the map is not very important. What is important is that the counselor be able to anticipate how cultural-identity stages might affect the relations between the family's subsystems and between the counselor and each of the subsystems. Perhaps a couple of illustrations might help to make the point.

One example might be an Awareness-stage counselor from a nondominant cultural group working with a dominant-culture family composed of a Reintegration-stage spousal subsystem and a Pseudo-Independent-stage sibling subsystem. How might knowledge of cultural identity stages help predict some of the dynamics that may emerge in this particular counseling process? This counseling interaction, depicted in Figure 1, is characterized by two progressive relationships (counselor/spouse; counselor/ siblings) and one regressive relationship (parents/children). One hopeful sign is that because the counselor is in the final stage (Awareness) of her own cultural-identity

development, she will be in the position to facilitate the growth of each of the family subsystems. Parents and children are in a regressive relationship, which means that the counselor might expect differing cultural perspectives to be one source of frustration in parent-child relations. This might be particularly troublesome because the children (perhaps as a result of their growing intercultural contacts at school or work) are at a more advanced stage of development than their parents, who might be expected to be their natural mentors. A counselor viewing this situation from a cultural-identity perspective would have a response very different from one who might see it as a simple manifestation of adolescents working through issues of identity or individuation.

Although both spouses and siblings are in a progressive relationship with respect to the counselor, the nature of each of these progressive relationships is very different. Because the children are closer to the counselor's own stage of identity development, there will tend to be a greater degree of affinity between their worldviews. The siblings, who are just emerging from a mono-cultural identity and beginning to intellectually explore the possibility of a multicultural perspective, will tend to see the counselor as their ally and, in fact, she may be a help to them in facilitating that process. They may have high expectations that the counselor will "prove them right." However, the spouses are several stages removed from the counselor and, in a number of key respects, represent a worldview that is almost diametrically opposed to hers. One may expect this relationship to be characterized by considerable friction around cultural-identity issues. In addition, the counselor will note the differing ways in which affect plays a role in the cultural tension between subsystems. Whereas the parents' reaction to the nondominant culture is almost visceral, the children are espousing intellectualized arguments for the opposite point of view. How to mediate this affective gap is one of the decisions the counselor will have to make.

This type of alignment suggests a number of dimensions to be borne in mind in formulating a treatment plan. For instance, the counselor will be cognizant that in this situation there will be a strong pull for each of the subsystems to interact primarily with her due to the respectively positive and negative affect that may be generated by cultural-identity stage interactions. She will have to work very hard to keep them interacting with each other. One strategy suggested by this cultural map will be for the counselor to consciously resist the temptation to form the easy alliance with the more-attractive sibling subsystem and focus her attention on engaging the family system via the spousal subsystem in which there is certain to be greater resistance to her presence. What might be indicated in this situation is to concentrate attention on the spouses in an attempt both to keep them in the

counseling process and to facilitate their attainment of the next cultural-identity stage. Such a development would have the effect of returning the system to a greater degree of equilibrium, at least in terms of cultural-identity issues. Perhaps, adapting Szapocznik et al. (1986), cultural issues might even be made the explicit content of family counseling sessions.

Another illustration might be the case of a Disintegration-stage dominant-culture counselor interacting with a nondominant-culture family composed of a Conformity-stage parental subsystem and a Resistance-stage sibling subsystem. In this case, there are one parallel (counselor/spousal) and two regressive (counselor/siblings; parent/children) relationships (see Figure 2). This situation might arise in the case of a first-generation immigrant family living in an ethnic neighborhood in which the parents have been somewhat insulated from day-to-day interaction with the dominant culture, but in which their English-proficient children have had to respond to the effects of prejudice through broader exposure to the dominant culture. A Disintegration-stage counselor would probably welcome the chance to work with a family from a nondominant culture owing to his naive enthusiasm and curiosity regarding cultural differences. At the same time, he may experience some vague discomfort because he is not yet willing to challenge the consequences that membership in the dominant or nondominant groups has in this society. He looks forward to working with this family but hopes on some level they will conform to his stereotype of a "nice minority." For a Disintegration-stage person who opts for continued multicultural contact, Helms (1984, 1990f) has suggested overidentification and paternalism as two strategies that might be employed to reduce the dissonance experienced at this stage.

Clearly, the prognosis for a successful treatment outcome for subsystems with this particular cultural map is not good. In the first place, there are two regressive relationships in this triad. The siblings are apt to perceive their parents as naive and the counselor as part of the problem. If they can be convinced to enter the process, they will most likely do so with a great deal of suspicion and vigilance lest they too be co-opted by the dominant culture. Because counselor and spousal subsystems are at parallel stages, they are likely to collude in resisting any real acceptance of the threatening worldview espoused by the siblings. The tendency in this situation would be for the counselor to form an inappropriately strong alliance with the spousal subsystem and to deal with the siblings by denying any cultural content to their behavior, preferring to see it as a misguided effort at peer identification. At this point, the counseling triad will have been reduced once again to a conflictual dyad, and any chance at therapeutic restructuring from outside the system has been lost. This outcome will be hard to avoid, because the counselor is simply incapable of promoting cultural-identity growth beyond

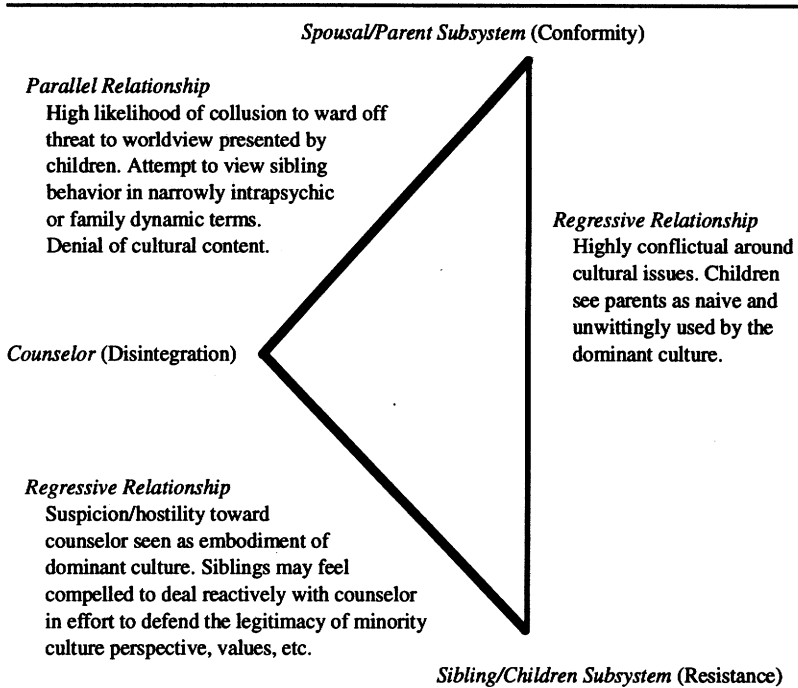


Figure 2 Dominant-culture counselor/non-dominant-culture family.

the level that he himself has attained (although this experience may push him toward the Reintegration stage). Although the interactions that characterize this counseling process may not be as openly conflictual as they might be in the case of a truly crossed relationship, they are likely to be frustrating for all concerned.

As was noted at the outset, this brief initial exploration has not attempted to list categorically all possible permutations of families, counselors, and culture. Rather, it has endeavored to give the reader a sense of the kinds of questions that this paradigm would ask of the family counseling process and that might guide a counselor in working with a particular family. It should also be noted that although the structural approach to family counseling suggested by Minuchin was used in the illustrations provided here, the interaction model might well be used—*mutatis mutandis*—by counselors working from other theoretical points of view. For instance, a Bowenian family counselor might want to include cultural-identity relationships into his or her family genogram. How have cultural-identity relationships tended to play out in this family across generations? In addition, he or she might

suspect that cultural-identity attitudes will influence the task that Kerr and Bowen (1988; see Anonymous, 1972; Kerr, 1988) have referred to as "defining a self" (Anonymous, 1972; Kerr, 1988). It would seem likely, for example, that attitudes related to lower levels of cultural-identity development might be predictive of lesser degrees of differentiation and, consequently, a high family valance for triangulation, especially around cultural issues.

OBSERVATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The preceding discussion has suggested that an extension of Helms's Black and White interaction model might enrich both the theory and the practice of multicultural family counseling. Although intuitively appealing, such an extension is still in need of both further theoretical elaboration and empirical confirmation such as is currently being undertaken with the Black and White interaction model itself. The purpose of these paragraphs has been to outline how an interaction paradigm might contribute to a more theoretically adequate foundation for understanding the complexity of multicultural family counseling interactions and consequently for predicting outcomes and devising counselor strategies. It would seem that the interaction model might expand current thinking on families and culture along at least four dimensions.

First, the interaction paradigm addresses some of the concerns regarding within-group differences expressed in the opening paragraphs. In providing a level of analysis between (a) that which applies to all families of a given culture and (b) that which applies only to the unique combination of history and other factors that define a particular family, a multicultural interaction model of family assessment provides a way of speaking systematically about within-group differences. The paradigm provides categories of practical value to the practitioner that enable her or him to ask questions about "what kind" of Greek or Dominican family is sitting in the consulting room. Are the subsystems in this family crossed? Are they parallel? Can this family be considered progressive or regressive in its cultural identity attitudes? The interaction paradigm permits a more nuanced approach to assessing the culturally related dynamics present in a given family. These same categories also allow for greater subtlety in designing family interventions. For instance, instead of merely speaking of approaches to families of one given culture or another, counselors can begin to focus on concerns and strategies that may be germane to work with progressive families versus others that may be more effective with regressive families of a particular culture.

Second, the interaction model anticipates cultural change or shifts in worldviews among the participants. Although its primary value in family assessment is to provide insight into the cultural-identity alignments of the various subsystems at the beginning of counseling, it does not presume that these relationships will remain static. The counselor is not free to stop attending to cultural issues after she or he has made a correct initial assessment. Rather, especially in an ongoing counseling relationship, the counselor may well witness a change in the cultural alignments of the subsystems, possibly as a result of the intercultural interaction in which he or she is a participant. Thus the interaction model encourages counselors to continue to be attentive to change in the cultural-identity patterns throughout the course of the family counseling relationship. Furthermore, to the extent that the cultural-identity models are developmental in nature, they may serve to help the counselor predict in which directions those changes may occur and how they are likely to affect the counseling process.

The third dimension along which a multicultural interaction paradigm makes a contribution to the discussion is in its explicit focus on the cultural-identity development of the *counselor* and how his or her cultural-identity attitudes affect the counseling process. In the honest attempt to help counselors become aware of both intergroup and intragroup cultural differences in family dynamics, the counselor's own cultural contribution to the interaction has sometimes been obscured. At times, almost unwittingly, such an exclusive focus on the cultural norms of a given family's traditional culture has tended to turn the family into a sort of exotic *rara avis* that the skilled, culturally sensitive counselor must be equipped to handle. An interaction perspective does not permit such comforting flights of fancy. Rather, the interaction model keeps the counselor within its frame of reference. There is not one culturally neutral party and two or more culturally different participants in a family counseling session. The issues that will be significant for predicting the course of a particular multicultural family counseling interaction will depend on the stages of cultural-identity development of each of the subsystems in the room, including that of the counselor. The model discussed above has the advantage of providing a framework that incorporates the counselor's role in its attempt to understand the family counseling process.

A fourth way in which an interaction perspective would serve to enhance the present discussion of multicultural family counseling is in countering the assumption, not infrequently found in the literature, that the client family will be the nondominant group participants in a counseling session and the counselor will be of the culturally dominant group. Descriptions of traits that characterize families of various nondominant cultures will be of little help to

the ethnic group practitioner confronted with a family of the dominant culture. The interaction paradigm provides a model that works in either direction. Perhaps even more important, it anticipates cultural differences between counselors and client families of the same culture. Aside from the important variable of socioeconomic status (Muñoz, 1979; Sue & Sue, 1990), there is little in the literature that is of help in conceptualizing schematically the cultural difficulties that may arise between a family and a counselor of the same culture. At times, there almost seems to be an assumption that working with a counselor of the same culture obviates issues of cultural difference. The interaction model is particularly helpful insofar as it focuses on the cultural-identity stage of each of the participants involved in the interaction. These within-group differences are as important to understanding the multicultural family counseling process as the more frequently stressed between-group differences. Again, the interaction paradigm would seem to provide a conceptual tool adequate for interpreting these nuances and useful in representing a truly "inclusive" multicultural perspective (Carter, 1991b).

Before concluding, two important potential moderating variables not explored in the preceding discussion—race, and degree of social power—should be briefly noted. Regarding race, some persons from nondominant cultures are members of "visible racial/ethnic groups" (Cook & Helms, 1988) and some are not. For persons of color, the patterns of the cultural-identity development model should apply, although they may well be intensified as the individual is exposed to the combination of racial and cultural prejudice. For White persons of a nondominant cultural group, the experience of prejudice may be mitigated somewhat because they belong to the socially powerful race. However, it seems likely that they will continue to be treated as members of a nondominant group as long as they continue to "stand out." Nor would it seem unlikely that such a person would attempt to emphasize his or her "Whiteness" as a means of gaining leverage in a racist-dominant culture. The exact pattern of such an interaction between the nondominant group cultural-identity development and the White racial-identity development models is unclear. It may be that for a first-generation family, issues of cultural identity are salient. Over time (perhaps generations), as the family acculturates to the point where it is truly bicultural in its values, attitudes, and behaviors (or completely assimilated by the dominant culture), the White and Black racial identity development models will probably come to be better descriptors of the family's experience.

As has been frequently noted above, it is certainly the case that the constructs of racial identity and cultural identity are not orthogonal. It has recently been suggested (R. T. Carter, personal communication, October 15, 1991) that they may be so integrally related as to be considered one construct

for all intents and purposes. Should the empirical research in this area confirm that hypothesis, it may be more accurate to speak of racial-cultural (vs. racial and/or cultural) identity development. In that case, the dynamics represented in the model presented here will be essentially the same, but the racial implications of each stage will need to be made more explicit. This very important issue falls outside the scope of this article. However, the crucial point for the present discussion is that counselors dealing with families who are members of nondominant cultural groups simply cannot afford to be oblivious to issues of race.

Another moderating factor might be the questions of degree of social power as evidenced, for example, by socioeconomic status or by a given culture's perceived level of social acceptability. Certain cultures have more in common with and are judged as more acceptable by the dominant culture than are others. A White English-speaking immigrant from Northern Europe may well experience different kinds of societal interactions than will a White Spanish-speaking immigrant from Latin America. Similarly, higher socioeconomic statuses would place some immigrants in higher positions of social power. A corporate lawyer from San Juan, Puerto Rico will be treated differently by the dominant culture than will an agricultural worker migrating from Coamo. The nondominant-culture-identity model will probably apply to all of the cases just mentioned, but it may do so in a somewhat different manner for each. As noted above, nondominant group cultural-identity development is achieved in the context of social oppression. A person's relative position of social power (via socioeconomic status or cultural acceptability) may moderate the intensity with which he or she experiences the xenophobia of the dominant society and, consequently, the intensity with which he or she experiences the various attitudes associated with stages of the nondominant-culture-identity development model discussed here.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

It is hoped that the interaction perspective presented in this article will be of service to practitioners and training programs in providing a paradigm that facilitates thinking systematically about how cultural variables may affect the family counseling process and that suggests parameters to be included in the discussion. In some ways, the extension of the construct of cultural identity to family assessment is merely an attempt to represent conceptually the phenomenon of within-family cultural difference that practitioners, and to a lesser extent researchers, have noted for years. Although the model suggested in these paragraphs has the advantage of building on the empirical

work already done in the field of racial- and cultural-identity development, it is now itself in need of substantial empirical investigation before it can be incorporated into a body of constructs that guides the practice of counseling and the training of counselors. A few brief suggestions regarding the research agenda for this model will be offered.

First, the question of measurement. The existence of reliable research measures of (nondominant) cultural-identity attitudes and White racial-identity attitudes should facilitate the work here. One question is the extent to which (if at all) the White racial-identity scales will need to be adapted to measure dominant-culture-identity development. Should the current stimuli be changed to reflect this shift in emphasis? Any adaptations needed would seem minor but would nevertheless necessitate the testing of the altered instrument. Alterations in the scales would not seem necessary should further empirical investigation indicate that racial identity and cultural identity form what is essentially a single construct.

Another area for continued investigation concerns the developmental nature of racial and cultural identity. Helms (1990d) has already reported statistical evidence that supports viewing Black racial-identity development as a stagewise process. Longitudinal studies would offer an important additional means of confirming, or perhaps modifying (e.g., Parham, 1989), the sequential claims of the cultural and racial-identity models.

A core concern of the research agenda regarding the use of the cultural-identity interaction model as a tool for family assessment will need to be the exploration of the extent to which the attitudes associated with the various stages are predictive of other psychological constructs, especially those of concern to family counselors (Draper & Marcos, 1990). One way to approach this would be to explore how these relationships exist in individuals. A number of instruments are designed to assess an individual's attitudes toward family-related variables (Grotevant & Carlson, 1989; Touliatos, Perlmutter, & Strauss, 1989). For instance, are attitudes associated with the various cultural-identity development stages related to or predictive of differing values or attitudes regarding family life (e.g., expected level of compliance in children, expected level of psychological family cohesion, preferred degree of flexibility, or preferred level of emotional expressiveness in the family system)? Are varying cultural-identity attitudes associated with preferences for differing patterns of family organization or "family social environments" (Moos & Moos, 1976)? In sum, are cultural-identity attitudes related to family values and structure?

Another strategy would be to examine *in vivo* family interactions in response to some explicit cultural stimuli for both relationship type and family process variables. This might be done via coded transcripts or obser-

vations of structured tasks. Do intrafamilial relationship types predict differing kinds of family psychological organization? Do crossed families have more rigid subsystem boundaries than parallel families? Is the range of expressed affect greater in progressive families than in regressive families? Do progressive and parallel families score higher on global measures of psychological family functioning (Beavers, 1981; Olsen, Portner, & Levee, 1985; Szapocznik et al., 1991) than regressive or crossed families? Are relationship types predictive of reported levels of family stress or family satisfaction?

Perhaps the most difficult part of empirically investigating the model presented above would be in testing its interactional nature. Do the relationship types suggested here make a difference in counseling process and outcome? Helms's interaction model of racial identity has received support in studies that have operationalized the process variables as "counselor intentions/client reactions" (Carter, 1988, 1990b). Only one study, to the author's knowledge, has operationalized the construct of relationship types such as described in the cultural-identity interaction model presented here (Carter, 1988; Carter & Helms, 1992). That study found that counselor/client relationship types significantly predicted counseling process and outcome variables in simulated-therapy dyads. Although these kinds of studies will be difficult to conduct, they would seem to point the way to how the cultural-identity interaction model might be operationalized with families, even though it would require attempting to measure three or four different relationship types concurrently. Should the model receive some initial support via research measuring attitudes, values, and so on with individuals or through observations of family interactions as suggested above, such process studies would seem imperative.

CONCLUSION

An interaction model such as the one proposed by Helms to describe Black and White dyads would seem to provide an organizing paradigm that is both practically and conceptually useful for understanding the process of multicultural family counseling. It has pragmatic value for the practitioner insofar as it provides a crucial matrix along which to evaluate both the family's subsystems and himself or herself in order to assess the role that culture will play in the counseling process. Identifying each participant's psychological orientation toward the dominant and nondominant cultures, predicting the types of relationships likely to result, and developing one's treatment strategy

accordingly would seem to be indispensable steps toward a successful counseling outcome.

Finally, the interaction paradigm would also seem to offer a conceptual perspective that is both heuristically fertile and systematic in its approach to the process of multicultural family counseling. That is to say, it is a model that encourages the counselor to include the contribution of all the participants in the counseling process (including the counselor) and to be cognizant of the fact that cultural-identity development occurs for persons of both dominant and nondominant groups. In addition, although not denying the importance of intergroup variables, it endeavors to represent intragroup cultural differences. Last, through its depiction of the kinds of relationships possible between persons of differing cultural-identity stages, the model suggests a way of organizing into types or categories the data about the cultural relationships that exist within families. It is a paradigm that gives theorists and practitioners alternatives to either seeing families of a given cultural group as all the same or considering each family to be utterly unique. Such a nuanced understanding of complex relationships involved in the process of multicultural family counseling would seem necessary to allow for more accurate assessment of families with differing patterns of cultural identity and for the development of treatment strategies designed to address their differential needs.

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