Review of *Ethnic Validity, Ecology, and Psychotherapy:
A Psychosocial Competence Model*
by Tyler, Brome, and Williams

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Although cultural variables are often overlooked in behavior-analytic research, it will come as no surprise to behavior analysts that the collection of cultural variables subsumed under the rubrics of race and ethnicity are important determinants of behavior. For this reason, any resource that elucidates the relation of race and ethnicity to behavior should be of interest to behavior analysts. Such a resource is likely to be particularly interesting to clinical behavior analysts who commonly work with individuals from ethnic or racial backgrounds different from their own. Although certainly not written from a behavior-analytic perspective, Tyler, Brome, and Williams's *Ethnic Validity, Ecology, and Psychotherapy: A Psychosocial Competence Model* attempts to inform therapists about the ways in which culture plays a role in determining the perspectives and levels of understanding of both client and therapist and to present a model of therapy that incorporates clients' and therapists' ethnic and racial heritages. The major premise of the book is that therapists need to incorporate a pluralistic perspective. The book presents (a) an overview of how traditional psychological theory and models of psychotherapy fail to incorporate ethnic and racial issues; (b) Tyler's psychosocial competence model, on which the ethnic validity model (EVM) is based; (c) the ethnic validity model itself, along with extensive applications to psychotherapy; and (d) training, supervision, and research issues. The rationale underlying the proposed ethnic validity model is that (a) American psy-

chology should reflect the growing heterogeneity of its population (especially in its clinical applications), (b) culture and ethnicity influence an individual's psychological functioning and view of the world, (c) therapists should understand their own racial and sociocultural background and how it contributes to the therapeutic process, and (d) psychologists must develop more flexible, culturally sensitive assessment and intervention techniques. The authors emphasize that ethnicity, race, and culture shape our ecology, which they define as the animate and inanimate objects in the environment that form an interrelated and balanced system.

The authors begin by delineating how the ethnic validity model contrasts with previous treatments of racial and ethnic issues in psychology generally and psychotherapy specifically. Historically, sociocultural factors have not been considered relevant to the practice of psychotherapy because psychological theories are supposed to be generic and apply universally. The authors emphasize that the prototypic white, Anglo-Saxon, middle class male has been accepted as the standard for effective psychological functioning (see Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970). The authors hold that the power, privilege, and status associated with the white culture-defining group (CDG) is so integrated into white therapists' perspective that the impact of this privileged position is generally not considered germane to the therapeutic process. They contend that even some minority practitioners, limited by the traditional models in which they were trained, do not consider the potential for their own relatively privileged position to influence the therapeutic process. In contrast, they argue that

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clients' cultural differences have generally been treated as deficits when compared to white norms rather than as legitimate and "valid" behavioral adaptations to the demands of their sociocultural environment (see Sue, Ito, & Bradshaw, 1982, for a more elaborate treatment of cross-cultural comparisons in research).

The authors call for a new model of psychotherapy to understand and assess more adequately the behavior and experience of racial and ethnic minorities and other non-culture-defining groups (NCDG). They argue that for psychotherapy to be effective, a therapist must understand the influence of clients' ecosystems (i.e., small self-sustaining subsystems of the environment that determine what behaviors are ultimately adaptive). Further, they posit that the effectiveness of behavior ultimately can be judged only within the context of that ecosystem; therefore, therapists must be willing and able to conceptualize clients' behavior in that context.

The origins of the EVM lie in Tyler's psychosocial competence model. This model views one's self-efficacy, one's perceived relationship with the world, and one's ability to cope with the demands of the environment as shaped by an individual's ecology. According to this model, human behavior is motivated by a desire for competence and striving for mastery over the environment. This model is contrasted with other views of motivation that the authors dismiss as little more than the striving for tension reduction. Tyler's research supporting this position is discussed.

Unfortunately, Tyler and his colleagues fail to mention an extensive and more general body of cross-cultural research that is quite similar in its theoretical underpinnings. Interestingly, this work should appeal to behavior analysts because of its environmental focus. For example, Berry's (1986) ecocultural framework for cross-cultural research postulates that the physical ecology and sociopolitical context constrain, nurture, and drive cultural and biological adaptations and, eventually, shape adaptive

behavior. Berry's framework is currently used to illustrate how to conduct and interpret the results of cross-cultural research in basic experimental psychology (i.e., cognition, perception, social, etc.) without falling prey to ethnocentric biases (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1990).

The EVM proposes that, because the NCDG has adapted to and become competent in environments that are drastically different from that of the CDG, differences in standards for effective functioning are to be expected. The EVM purports to transcend racial and ethnic differences by conceptualizing the therapeutic dyad as an ecosystem to which *both* therapist and client bring remnants of their ecosystems outside the therapeutic relationship. The EVM describes psychotherapy as consisting exclusively of the process of reaching convergence, divergence, or conflict about what constitutes competent problem-solving skills, effective world views, and norms for effective functioning. Convergent ethnic validity consists of both therapist and client espousing similar and highly compatible criteria of competent coping styles and world views. Divergence occurs when their criteria are different yet compatible. Conflict results when their criteria are not only different but incompatible.

Before discussing clinical applications of the EVM, the authors examine the impact of race relations on psychotherapy. They contend that acceptance of slavery for over 200 years has affected black/white power dynamics profoundly and ubiquitously in the United States. This "slave/master" relationship continues to be reflected in the privileged status of white society, even for those who are not conscious of their status or are not personally prejudiced. According to the EVM, this relationship further results in disparate views between white CDG and blacks or other NCDGs regarding their ecosystems' potential for psychosocial and physical support versus conflict or threat. At issue is whether one should adopt an optimistically trusting or warily distrusting world view, and whether one should expect to influence the environ-

ment. Generally, members of the CDG evaluate their environment in terms of its potential to support or threaten their accustomed psychosocial power and privilege. In contrast, NCDG members evaluate their environment in terms of a basic sense of physical safety and whether to approach a situation with trust or distrust. Numerous examples of how these different approaches result in fundamentally different views of effective problem solving and coping are presented in several chapters of case material. In so doing, the book highlights several significant limitations of psychotherapy when it is practiced without appropriate regard to culture, ethnicity, or race.

Unfortunately, the ethnic validity model has conspicuous theoretical and pragmatic weaknesses. First, the authors propose that therapists applying the EVM need not have extensive knowledge of the client's ecosystem, assuming that attempts to fully understand the client will suffice. Thus, it is up to the client to educate the therapist about the complexities of his or her culture of origin. But if culture is so very central to the EVM, why should this responsibility fall to the client? Actually, this endorsement of cultural naivete contradicts recently developed guidelines for providers of psychological services to diverse populations that urge psychologists to "seek out educational and training experiences to enhance their understanding" of "cultural, social, psychological, political, economic, and historical material specific to the particular ethnic group being served" (American Psychological Association, 1990, p. 2).

Another salient problem is the attempt to equate racial status with all other forms of minority status. Although the authors argue that "Race cannot be interchanged for ethnicity, nor ethnicity for race" (p. 7), they extend the EVM and its assumptions about black/white racial relations to other groups disenfranchised on the basis of ethnicity, social class, or gender. Although slavery is one awful example of an oppressor/oppressed power relationship, it is neither exclusive nor prototypic. For example, Mexican Amer-

icans dominated the southwestern United States until they lost their land and status to Anglo colonization and treaties. American Indians have been all but exterminated physically and culturally. In contrast, Asian Americans are seen as superintelligent model minorities (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Thus, the claim that the EVM's "master/slave" view of power dynamics applies to all NCDGs denies the unique history and consequences of varied interactions with the CDG for other racial, ethnic, and gender-based groups.

Another shortcoming of the EVM as a complete model of psychotherapy is that it lacks generalizability to white therapist/white client dyads. A comprehensive model of psychotherapy should extend to all possible racial combinations of therapeutic dyads. Yet, the authors themselves acknowledge that white therapists and clients will most likely not touch on racial issues except where therapeutic concerns specifically include interracial relations. They fail to emphasize that the power dynamics of white dyads may be less influenced by race than by class or gender distinctions, which have also been discussed as potential sources of bias in psychotherapy (Murray & Abramson, 1983).

One problem related to this attempt to overgeneralize from the black experience to all other ethnic minority groups is that important concepts like variation in level of acculturation are not considered in the book. Acculturation refers to the changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that occur when one cultural group (e.g., the NCDG) comes into continuous close contact with another (e.g., the CDG). There is no discussion of the client's level of acculturation within the model or the book, although it has been shown to relate to mental health status (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991). A bicultural person can behave in accord with the norms of the ecosystems of both the NCDGs and the CDGs depending on the demands of the situation. An ill-informed therapist could possibly find such switching confusing, and even the client might find it difficult to explain the intricacies of living between ecosystems.

Perhaps this problem is another result of the model being primarily applicable to blacks, for whom the concept of acculturation has not been clearly defined.

The EVM does not appear to fulfill the requirements most theorists expect of a well-developed model for psychotherapy. It does not offer a more general account of the development of abnormal behavior. It is not founded on a comprehensive body of research, nor are its major tenets readily testable. A matrix of research parameters and variables, set out late in the text, does suggest how the variables discussed somewhat amorphously can perhaps be categorized for research purposes. However, in so doing, the authors introduce concepts not previously described, such as "form of knowing," and jargon to which it would be difficult to assign a precise definition, such as "destiny" as part of a "world view" parameter.

The almost total emphasis of the EVM on the process of reconciling or disagreeing about effective problem solving seems incomplete as a therapeutic intervention. For example, in the series of examples drawn from the authors' clinical experiences, all of the successful and failed attempts to resolve conflict are attributed to the congruence or discrepancy between the therapist's and client's experiences. This exclusive focus on process reminds the reader of humanistic therapeutic approaches. Yet, humanists acknowledge and indeed predict conditions under which psychological dysfunction occurs, whereas the EVM fails to define what constitutes problematic behavior. What is specifically not addressed are situations in which therapists must deal with clients whose behavior is clearly dysfunctional and maladaptive in virtually any ecosystem.

What results, then, is less a comprehensive model of psychotherapy or a more general model of cross-cultural research than an approach to coping with

racial, ethnic, and other culturally based differences between therapists and clients. Although such an emphasis has certainly been long overdue, the EVM is not a comprehensive theory on which to base psychotherapeutic interventions. It is, however, a worthwhile framework that joins the ranks of others that attempt to integrate diversity in the practice of psychotherapy (e.g., Helms, 1989; Ramirez, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1990).

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