

Preface

Much has been written over the last several decades dealing with race and psychotherapy, but the literature is built on a foundation of implicit and unchallenged assumptions. These assumptions—that race, culture, society, personality, and therapy denote actual entities in the real world—often lead us astray. I would argue that they are more usefully regarded as concepts with varying utilities and liabilities and varying degrees of contact with empirical reality, and that they deserve to be examined and reevaluated. Rethinking assumptions in light of new knowledge can lead therapists both to understand their clients and themselves in new ways and to become more effective in their clinical practice.

Roughly, the first half of this book provides relevant theoretical and empirical background dealing with the concept of race, and with culture and the social sciences in general, although it also contains some implications for therapy. One specific hope I have for these chapters is that they will help to clarify people's thinking about race and thereby reduce the intellectual confusion surrounding this fraught topic. In addition, I hope that they will help to clarify the "What am I?" question for the many individuals who do not fit neatly into one of America's racial categories. (This includes therapists asking about their own identities and/or asking themselves "What are you?" about some of their clients.)

The second half of the book deals more specifically with applications to problem behavior and therapy. These chapters contain theoretical observations, therapeutic applications, and clinical examples, while maintaining the cross-cultural perspective that pervades the entire work. The ideas presented here are particularly relevant to cognitive, behavioral, strategic, systemic, and solution-focused approaches to individual, couple, and family therapy.

In some ways, my background, leading to a career as a professor of clinical and cross-cultural psychology, has set the stage for this book. As to the "race" and "culture" of its title, I am the grandson of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, married to an African-American anthropology professor who studies Brazilian Indians—mainly the Krikati, a tribe located about 350 miles southeast of Belem, the city at the mouth of the Amazon River. My wife and I lived in Brazil for a couple of years, teaching in graduate programs and doing field work with the Krikati. This gave me an opportunity to become fluent in Portuguese, conversant with Brazilian culture

(and its very different concept of race from that in the United States), and practice and supervise therapy with Brazilians.

Brazil's very different world of racial meanings from those I had grown up with encouraged my curiosity. I learned that many people—including immigrants to the United States—find that they have changed their race by merely moving from one culture to another. What changed is not what they look like, or their genes, or their ancestry, but rather the set of cultural categories that determines their racial classification. The concepts that many people—especially immigrant families and children of intermarriage—use to classify themselves and others simply do not correspond to the options they encounter in the United States. Included among such individuals are well-known Americans like Barack Obama and Tiger Woods, as well as innumerable immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, Southwest Asia, and other regions of the world.

Although the concept of race originated in Europe and spread to the rest of the world, its most significant uses and most variegated forms are to be found in the New World—for two primary reasons, both related to the institution of slavery. First, there were the massive admixtures of immigrant European and imported African populations with the indigenous inhabitants, leading to the development of folk terms to categorize individuals. And second, race was used in differing ways in differing colonies as a formal legal classification to determine which individuals and whose children were free or enslaved. For these reasons, the cultures whose concepts of race are described and compared in Chapter 1 come predominantly from North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean, while the discussion in Chapter 2 leads back to the European origins of the race concept.

These first two chapters discuss a number of related questions and often provide unsuspected answers that differ from common assumptions about race and from the way the concept is used in everyday speech. Among these questions are, “Why do people from different parts of the world look different?”; “Does the human species have races in the biological sense, and if not, why is it so easy to distinguish between people from Sweden, Nigeria, and Japan?”; “How and why do different cultures use the race concept?”; “Where does the race concept come from, and how did it spread so widely around the planet?”; and “How is it possible to have racism in a world without races?”

Turning to the “psychotherapy” of the book’s title, my background has been eclectic, but has emphasized brief therapy approaches—behavioral and cognitive therapies, Ericksonian and behavioral hypnotherapy, and strategic, systemic, and solution-focused family therapy. I began graduate school with the intention of becoming a psychoanalyst, did a Rogerian dissertation, a behavior therapy postdoc, and went on to involvement with hypnosis and family therapy. In my clinical books and articles I have viewed therapy as a social influence process and have drawn on social psychology, sociology, and anthropology—in addition to clinical psychology, psychiatry, and social work—as sources for ideas and empirical evidence. Perhaps most importantly, I was involved with two interdisciplinary therapy movements—behavior therapy and family systems—from their early stages. This gave me an opportunity to observe and participate in their evolution—not unlike that

of other intellectual movements—from the early phase of interdisciplinary excitement and creativity, to a brief mature phase of consolidation, to an extended period of professional bureaucratization.

These experiences, of a variety of cultures, people, and therapeutic approaches, have convinced me of the need to question received wisdom, since it often stems from limited experience. The crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the questioning of common assumptions and rethinking of received knowledge that characterizes the first two chapters can also be found in a variety of ways in the others. This includes an integration of principles of psychology with aspects of anthropology, sociology, and the other social sciences, and also involves both conceptualizing problem behavior and applying differing processes of change to it.

My aim is not just to influence clinical practice, but to challenge assumptions and stimulate thinking about race, culture, therapy, and the academic disciplines and institutions concerned with them. My intention is not so much to get readers to agree with my views of its subject matter and implement its clinical implications as to encourage them to question basic assumptions about the field rather than confining their thinking to approved channels.

The Concept of Race and Psychotherapy is a product of my work on these topics over the last 15 years, though I have been concerned with them in one way or another for over forty years. During this period of time and especially while working on this book, I have benefited from the assistance of many people. From providing cultural information, to reading over drafts of parts or all of the manuscript and offering thoughtful comments, to assisting with clerical tasks, they have all contributed to improving this book and making it a reality. Responsibility for any shortcomings, of course, remains solely with me.



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