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# Transcultural Ethnic Validity Model and Intracultural Competence

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# Transcultural Ethnic Validity Model and Intracultural Competence

## Abstract

To be a psychosocially competent person, each of us has to have both an internal and an external perspective on our self and our culture, a transcultural ethnic validity perspective. This conclusion is supported by a logical and empirical examination of how we know who we are and use our own judgmental capabilities to guide and change our lives and our situations. Particular emphasis is placed on the nature of psychological science as a human enterprise influenced by the personal and cultural backgrounds of its scientists and those they study.

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## Introduction

My early background as an infantry soldier in World War II and post-war occupation duty in Germany involved me with others in cross-national interactions, including participation in forming mutually beneficial cross-cultural communities and relationships. In 1952, I began my professional career by taking a university position in the United States as a PhD clinical psychologist with a community orientation. My earlier army and personal experiences led me to focus on how to facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between marginalized (lower class white and Negro/African Americans) and mainstream (white upper and middle class) segments of racially segregated U.S. communities. To do this work, I began to build a conceptually and empirically based approach. An outgrowth of the success of my work was that I was asked to address similar community issues between mainstream groups and Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. Consequently, I became engaged in constructing, testing, and using an increasingly complex conceptual and empirical framework for understanding cross-cultural communities and becoming competent in them.

The post-World War II era was producing rapid changes in international travel, communication, and interpersonal interactions. In governmental, non-governmental, civic, and professional organizations, efforts designed to establish both competing and collaborative relationships were also rapidly being formed. Psychologists were becoming more interested in cross-cultural psychology and related programs. I took part in the development of the field of cross-cultural psychology and in understanding the nature of and relationships between psychological and cultural factors. My colleagues and I began learning how to influence these factors and how to apply that new knowledge to objectives that ranged from personal to professional to political and national goals. We worked to create, evaluate, and use a conceptually and empirically integrated framework. The purpose of this framework was to become more intra-culturally and inter-culturally competent.

The results of my years of professional work, research, and personal experience, led me to believe that acceptance of and reliance on our unexamined personal perspectives makes it impossible to become *intra-culturally* competent at either the individual or cultural level. At the individual level, we all interact with close associates whose unique perspectives differ from ours even though we may be of the same culture. Consequently, we can see that each person is somewhat culturally different from ourselves and all others. Therefore, we can assume that all of our interactions can be enhanced if we as participants frame them in our shared cultural context (Tyler, 2007) rather than each person using his/her individualistic perspective (frame). Further, in our increasingly diverse and technological world it is almost impossible to not be exposed to at least some other cultures. In addition to the need to be able to adjust to each new culture, we must also keep in mind that the world's cultures continue changing at an increasingly rapid rate. This consideration alone suggests that we need to examine the adaptability of the frameworks that we use in all aspects of psychology.

There is a growing body of evidence (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Tyler, 2001, 2007) documenting the accumulating and ongoing impact of these cultural changes on psychology, its scientists, and other participants. These changes make it imperative that we assess the challenges they present for our existing paradigms and for how they need to be modified. Without such an effort, we will continuously reduce the quality and accuracy of our science and the value of our contributions to the wellbeing of all cultures and ourselves.

As I said in 1952, we need an empirically and conceptually integrated approach for accomplishing our goals. That need continues to grow stronger as our world changes around us. The conceptual and empirical framework that I have developed and use in my work, including the organization of this article, I have named *Transcultural Ethnic Validity Model* (TEVM). This model provides a basis for becoming intra-culturally competent in any context ranging from a stable isolated one to one in rapid flux.

This article provides (1) a logical and empirical examination of how we know who we are and (2) how we use our judgmental capabilities to guide and change our situations and our lives. It places a particular emphasis on (3) the nature of psychological science as a human enterprise subject to the influence of the personal and cultural backgrounds of ourselves as scientists and those we study and seek to influence. It (4) explicitly rejects and documents why science cannot be considered an enterprise that is totally objective, immune to subjective and empirical biasing effects (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Tyler 2001, 2007).

Section 1 examines psychology's current paradigm and then contrasts that paradigm with the Transcultural Ethnic Validity paradigm. Section 2 provides a detailed description of the TEVM components and their impact. My conclusions are then provided in Section 3. They rest on the research findings and examples documented throughout this article.

## Background

Kuhn (1970) eloquently made the point that the basis of any science is its examples or exemplars, as he called them. The exemplars designate that particular science's subject matter. They also identify the scientist's reality and direct his/her efforts. Changing the exemplars changes the subject matter of the science. Further, scientists who start with different exemplars engage in conflicts between their opposing scientific perspectives about what is more basic and more correct. An example of such conflicts is whether only non-verbal behaviors are valid data or whether verbal reports are also valid data. Mannheim (1936) referred to these conflicts as contests to become the *general paradigm*. That is, the goal of each group of scientists is to achieve the position of being able to evaluate and direct other knowledge systems and their adherents, but not be vulnerable to being evaluated, criticized and directed by them. For example, adherents of any paradigm may assume that their *general paradigm* is independent of or more highly evolved than that of any competing paradigm. They then conclude that they can individually and collectively contribute knowledge and explanations to those others, redefine the scientific

paradigms of others, and redirect the scientific activities of those others. Further, they assert that their competitors' *general paradigms* and their adherents have nothing to contribute to them and their paradigm.

### Psychology's Dominant Paradigm

Western psychology's general dominant paradigm is that of a positivist-oriented experimental science. Poortinga (1997) argued that it is the responsibility of the psychologist/investigator to approach research in the same way that the physical scientist does. Exemplars are to be identified and studied without input from subjects who are considered to be only *donors of data*. The scientist's task is to study these exemplars by manipulating them directly or otherwise controlling for their differences. However, as Khilstrom (1995, June) pointed out, respondents (subjects in psychological research) actually have an active role. Their interaction with the experimenter is one in which they are instructed to participate as though they were subjects (passive *knowns*) rather than decision making *knowers*. Thus, respondents are in reality subject/participants who assume the roles of subjects to provide the *known* information sought. They are also acting as participants trying as *knowers* to make sense of the situation and contribute to knowledge.

Khilstrom (1995, June) further argued that these respondent roles can never be completely separated; rather, both the investigator and the respondents must consider the relationship of the experiment, the situation, and their respective participations to the "real life" they are conducting outside of the experimental situation. Even then, neither the scientists nor the respondents can attain the positivist ideal of objectivity that they claim to be their goal.

Berry (1989) used Poortinga's paradigm in his cross-cultural work. In his approach, the generality of exemplars (*imposed etics*) from a reference culture (usually a Western culture) are studied in other cultures in an effort to identify universal human characteristics (*etics*), and culturally specific characteristics (*emics*). Characteristics that demonstrate cross-cultural generality are considered to be *etics*. Those that remain distinctive are then judged to be *emics*.

Berry's approach identifies broad cultural patterns of similarities and differences on the dimensions (ranging from perceptual to social phenomena) chosen for study. However, it has a number of limitations that, in my judgment, more than offset its presumed advantages. Specifically, this approach can and cannot do the following:

- a) It can establish that people from different cultural backgrounds think and act differently from each other, but it cannot bridge their differences;
- b) It can identify only each culture's central tendencies because it masks all subcultural diversity (Murayama, 1997);
- c) It can explore only topics and characteristics relevant in the culture that originates the research. It cannot identify those unique to any comparison cultures.

Further, Berry's approach is subject to the same problem as that which Khilstrom (1995, June) noted about respondents. Namely, the experimenters are trying to behave as disinterested positivist "objective" data collectors, while also acting like judgmental *knowers* self-evaluating whether they are being appropriately "objective". Finally, the practitioners of this approach, their findings, and the inferences they draw are based on and limited by their cultural and personal biases.

My reasons for concluding that this *positivist* ideal is unattainable are documented in the research findings of Munroe and Munroe (1994), and Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994). For example, the life span developmental research of the Munroes demonstrated that early in life the context and active role of individual children in designing their own lives leads them by age three to form "diverse modes of thought and behavior" (Munroe & Munroe, 1994, p. 152) distinct from even their closest associates. Consequently, since all children and therefore, all adults, have organized their lives in this idiosyncratic fashion, the hope for "objectivity" of any scientific (or other) observation and inference is subject to this limitation.

Data uncovered by Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) documented that psychology, particularly in England and the United States, was formulated by white individuals who were explicit Darwinian racists. These beliefs were the basis of the *general* paradigm held at that time by most, if not all, North Euro-Americans. It was the basis for their belief that they were the most highly evolved race. British psychologists Francis Galton, Cyril Burt, and William McDougall (who later immigrated to the United States) formulated their views with these prevalent beliefs and institutionalized their activities accordingly. For example, the British psychologist Burt may even have disgraced himself by fabricating data to support his position about the inferiority of Black Africans (Gould, 1981, pp. 20-21; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, p. 27). It was Galton's focus on measurement that led to hereditarian beliefs about intelligence (Gould, 1981, pp. 74-75; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, p. 27). McDougall argued for the segregation of Blacks, and selective sterilization of them and of mental defectives and other presumed deviants, along with other, related racist practices (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, p. 25).

In the realm of cognitive functioning, these same men with McDougall as an outspoken leader adapted Binet's scale for assessing school aptitude (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, pp. 24-35; Tyler, 2001, 2007). They defined that characteristic as a largely inherited internal quality of intellectual capacity. They then determined that the aptitude "quality" could be measured as an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) as developed by Terman. Despite Binet's protests, Terman established his basic intelligence norms by collecting IQ scores from a presumably representative sample of white and black male and female youth in the United States (Gould, 1981, pp. 155-157). He adjusted the scale items so that white males and females yielded the same score levels. When he found that the black respondents' scores were lower, he accepted those scores as appropriate because he considered blacks to be of an inferior race. He based his judgment on his belief in the hereditarian concept of evolution (Gould, 1981, pp. 74-75).

Even earlier, Spencer had developed an approach called *Social Darwinism* (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994, pp. 5, 22-26). He believed that individuals and groups born inferior should be segregated, prevented from reproducing, and potentially eliminated. He asserted that using resources to help or try to educate such people is a waste of time and resources. His position is one that continues to be widely held in many cultures. The current widespread practice of considering the Euro-American view as the General Paradigm embodies this essentially Darwinian racist view.

In contrast, current data support the position that people's capabilities are largely a function of their psychosocial circumstances and histories. Data clearly show us that heredity plays a role but it is not the sole determinant (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Munroe & Munroe, 1994; Tyler, 2007). An analysis of the psychosocial nature of how we develop explanations of others and ourselves, become who we are, and interact as individuals and societies supports this interactionist view. Consequently, it seems more appropriate to indicate that both intra- and inter-cultural competence are forms of *psychosocial competence*.

In the field of cross-cultural psychology, there are ongoing arguments between representatives of our current cultures about the appropriateness of the available frameworks (Tyler, 1999). My position is that a transcultural perspective, one that encompasses multiple cultures rather than a single culture, is necessarily the *general paradigm*. We can begin to understand ourselves and function well in our own cultures only by understanding that there are other equally valid cultures. We must see ourselves from others' points of view as well as our own if we are to function well within our own cultures, due to intra-cultural individual variations and subcultures.

### **An Alternative: A Transcultural Ethnic Validity Perspective**

In concluding their book, *Cross-cultural Human Development*, the Munroes (1994) emphasized that the search for universals of human development has been fruitful only at the lower stages of psychosocial development. They concluded that

"perhaps, the next ambitious theoretical system [of development] will also provide greater understanding of adult humans' ingeniously diverse modes of thought and behavior". (Munroe & Munroe, 1994, p. 152).

To understand these "ingeniously diverse" aspects of complex human behavior requires beginning with exemplars that include the judgment and decision-making capabilities that emerge at later stages of human development.

Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) pointed out that it is not necessary to be a racist to perpetuate racism. As noted above, they provided extensive documentation of the racist, cultural bias of Western psychology's founding fathers. Specifically, most of the men who established the discipline were white, male racists. Today, their biases persist because they were built into the very structure of the discipline and its exemplars, in

treating participants not as knowers and in imposing dominant cultural perspectives on others.

Together, the critiques of Howitt and Owusu-Bempo along with those of the Munroes lead to two important conclusions. Culturally based experiences begin to influence and permeate our psychological natures at a very early age; that is, we become psychosocial individuals very early in life. Also, our psychosocial natures are inevitably shaped by unexamined, culturally embedded biases.

Building a framework that can take account of people's "diverse modes of thought and behavior" (Munroe & Munroe, 1994), their culturally distinct experiences, and their active roles in defining their lives requires including appropriate exemplars. For example, people interpret the meaning of tragedies differently in ways that enable some to prevail over them while others succumb to them. To understand these interpretive and problem-solving capabilities and differences requires incorporating the ideas that (a) people function as *knowers* in addition to also functioning as *known* in a deterministic fashion, and (b) our *knower* and *known* capabilities are a combination of our individual experiences and our social context (Khilstrom, 1995).

We contribute not only to the construction of our own natures, but also our relationships, communities, societies, and knowledge systems. We continue to create organization in our lives progressively in relation to our time-embedded, ongoing course. We are necessarily involved in influencing and being influenced by our own and others' activities. We bear some responsibility for our own wellbeing and destruction since we have the potential to construct psychosocially benign and supportive patterns of living as well as destructive ones. When people interact, they are limited by their idiosyncratic nature and also actively involved in constructing a sense of the other participants. Further, theories and facts of human psychology formulated by any individual or community of scholars from a particular, common cultural background cannot escape the distinctive features of that background (Tyler, 2001, 2007). The theories and approaches we psychologists construct for interacting with others must be embedded in a broader context than our own in order to transcend our culturally embedded personal limitations. For that broader context to adequately represent everyone involved it must be constructed by the shared efforts of the theorists and other participants from that broader domain (whether it is a local community or range of cultures). It is this reasoning that requires and enables us to construct what I call a *Transcultural Ethnic Validity Model* (TEVM) (Tyler, 2001). The following paragraphs show how a TEVM can be used to provide an integrated understanding of individuals, their communities, ethnicities, and cultures.

### **Individual Psychosocial Competence**

As individuals we use our self-directing skills to guide our lives as best we can. How well we manage to do so is a product of our respective levels of what I call *individual psychosocial competence*. It is made up of a number of factors, including



- a) a sense of self-efficacy;
- b) a sense of a *self-world relationship* involving optimism and trust or their opposites;
- c) some level of *active planfulness*; and elements in our lives such as physical and psychological
- d) supports, and
- e) threats.

All of these factors are psychosocial and interrelated in that they are influenced by social and cultural factors as well as individual experiences. Each of us becomes both a product of and contributor to our culture and its relationships to other cultures. The studies in the following paragraphs illustrate some of these interrelationships.

Rotter (1966) conceptualized and measured self-efficacy as *locus of control*, an individual's expectancy about whether s/he can control the outcomes of activities (internal vs. external control). That concept has generated thousands of studies in many cultures and contexts, and proven to be an important predictive variable. It has also led to the identification of culturally distinctive conceptions of the meaning, nature, and preferences for different kinds of control. For example, in the United States, primary control is manipulative mastery of the environment (i.e., internal control); in Japan, it is adaptation to the environment; in Hinduism and Buddhism, primary control is denial of desire (Tyler, 1999).

Psychosocial context is also relevant to the nature of our senses of *self-efficacy*. Examples include:

- a) Jessor and colleagues (1968) measured internal control and opportunity in a US town with Anglo, Hispanic, and Native American residents. Level of internal control was related to opportunity, with high status Anglos most internal, and low status Native Americans, least.
- b) My colleagues and I (Tyler, Dhawan, & Sinha, 1989) found gender-based commonalities and differences between students from the US and India. Males in both cultures thought external events controlled personal more than task related activities; females thought the opposite. Males were more focused on chance/fate as an external factor controlling events; females focused on powerful others. A gender-based cross-cultural difference was that only US females expected to receive a fair share of opportunities in life.
- c) Jin (1992) compared Chinese and US college students. Tyler (2001) summarized Jin's findings as indicating that the Chinese students had significantly lower self-efficacy scores, were more depressed, less oriented to active planning, less internal, and rated their sociocultural environment as being significantly more negative. However, in the United States, the men were more self-efficacious and perceived the sociocultural environment as being more positive than did the women.

- d) Women in both samples perceived their status as disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. The same was true for all members of *Non Culture-defining Groups* (NCDG), i.e. minorities, in the United States.

Complex differences were also found in *self-world relationships*. Those who lived in a more benign and supportive context (e.g., higher status individuals) tended to be more trusting. For example,

- a) Elderly African American women nominated as competent natural leaders in their communities were less trusting and concerned with social approval than their less competent peers. The reverse was true among Anglo American women (Tyler, Pargament, & Gatz, 1981).
- b) In general, street children were indifferent to threats from mainstream society, but responsive to supports. The exceptions were that trust levels in Bogota street youth were lower on the street with *physical threats*; in contrast, among Latino street youth in Washington, DC, trust levels on the street were higher with *physical supports* (Tyler, Tyler, Echeverry, & Zea, 1991).
- c) Among white high school students in the US, trust level was positively related to observed competence; among their African American peers, it was not (Tyler & Pargament, 1981).

The attribute that showed the most generality across the life span and circumstances in a range of cultures was that of *active planfulness* (Tyler, 2001). In particular, it proved to be the most dominant characteristic of individuals who had a disadvantaged status in a hostile world. Group comparisons revealed differences with women more actively planful in some cultures, men in others, and no difference in others. Overall, there was consistent evidence that approaching life in a more active and constructively organized way served people well, though it was not essential for some high status individuals to have those characteristics (Tyler, 2001).

### **Ethnic Validity**

The way each of us organizes our life has both a personal validity and an ethnic validity based in the context of our psychosocial heritage. An important aspect of our heritages is the hierarchical structure differentiating *Culture-defining* (CD) and *Non culture-defining* (NCD) roles, statuses, and memberships (Tyler, Brome & Williams, 1991).

People who are primarily assigned to or socialized as having a NCD status are usually from lower classes, ethnic minorities, people of color (as they are now designated in the Western world), or are native to so-called, less developed societies. Their possibilities are largely defined by others while their perspectives, and at times, their very humanity are devalued. However, most of us have occasions to shift back and forth between defining roles for ourselves and others and roles defined for us by others. More importantly, people from mainstream *Culture-defining Groups* (CDGs), including

professionals, are often socialized to a sense of *superiority* without regard to *context*. The society's structures, social control measures, and designated leaders and helpers share and support that perspective. It is difficult for CDG individuals to appreciate the self-protective biases in their contexts or themselves or the strengths of people whose lives are formed and lived out in *Non Culture-defining* (NCD) contexts (Tyler et al., 1991; Tyler, Tyler, Tommasello, & Connolly, 1992).

For example, adolescents are temporarily in an NCD status in relation to adults. Parents and professionals think of them as needing CDG adults to define them, empower them, and improve them, yet that approach often increases the difficulty of their struggle to become adults. We asked street youth in Colombia to list their wishes. In contrast to the lay and professional expectations that their wishes would be hostile and antisocial, their wishes were overwhelmingly positive and prosocial. The street children wanted loving homes and families as well as education and jobs, not just the negative realities that had been their lot (Tyler & Tyler, 1996).

These findings support the conclusion that people choose a style of living that seems to provide them with a *personally* and *ethnically* valid competence in their life contexts. It may be actively prosocial and trusting, combative and distrustful, or passive and disorganized depending largely on people's circumstances and experiences. If our scientific, psychological perspectives, knowledge, and skills are to be valid they must incorporate an understanding of how people use their diverse experiences from their contexts to understand themselves, others, and those contexts. Further, if we are to understand our own situations and be competent within them, we as psychologists must acquire a transcultural perspective about ourselves and our situations.

## **Psychosocial Competence and Change**

### *Interactions as Interventions*

All of us are guided in part by our psychosocial competence conceptions as we interact with our internal and external realities. Those of us who are psychologists contribute to those ongoing processes through research and professional activities. Inevitably, we provide to others and ourselves ways of building on each other's capabilities or of diminishing them. In the process we are all engaged in *resource exchange, resource enhancement, and resource diminution*. As individuals or professionals we are necessarily involved in an *exchange* with people; taking as well as giving, but we are not taking over other peoples' lives, and they are not taking over ours. Rather, we are *resource collaborators* if we are working together or *resource antagonists* if we are seeking the same resources (Tyler, Pargament & Gatz, 1983).

### *Dynamics of Change Interventions*

My colleagues and I (Tyler, Brome, & Williams, 1991) examined how to become effective change agents. We learned that psychosocial competence approaches and the use of contextual factors shape all of our interactions, including those within and among

ourselves as well as with others including clients. We become professionals/participants. That is, we've begun to use a different paradigm. This approach requires that we build collaborative patterns. We must also develop and use competence approaches that focus on identifying and building on the *commonalities* we all have, such as people's concerns for the welfare of their children. In addition, we must also learn to respect and accept that there are *different* ways of living and being human. Finally, we have to learn prosocial ways to contain *conflict*.

With a psychosocial competence perspective, we can build on tried and accepted approaches like the rule basic to most religions that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. We also need to continue to develop new approaches to accommodate differences that emphasize non-violent methods of change. Finally, we must not only understand these distinctions, we must model them and teach them to others. Those who need to use them range from policy makers to gang members, that is, everyone (Tyler et al., 1991).

We also found that the patterns of destructive interactions between individuals, communities, and societies are the same as those of constructive interactions. For example, participants in destructive interactions often devalue each other, define the nature of their differences as threatening, and try to subjugate or destroy their "enemies" (Tyler et al., 1991). Destructive interactions emphasize that survival rests in preemptive steps to destroy one's enemies and can lead to a cycle of escalating violence. Violent actions threaten their targets as persons. They, in turn, respond to protect themselves, and so the cycle builds. The presence of these kinds of cycles has been documented in the functioning of extremist groups, in patterns of personal, ethnic and racial violence, and in wars (Tyler, 2001).

However, most interaction patterns are probably neither totally constructive nor destructive. Rather, they are probably mixed, and at times they stem from a lack of sensitivity to differences in ethnic and culturally based perspectives. For example, CDG psychologists may, at times, try to interact with NCDG clients as resource collaborators and enhancers without considering the ethnic/racial relationships between them and their clients (Tyler et al., 1991). Ridley (1984) wrote of adaptive paranoia among African American therapy clients interacting with CDG therapists in the United States. The relationship change needed was not for NCDG clients to become more trusting when they consider it unwarranted, but for CDG therapists to demonstrate their trustworthiness (Ridley, 1984). Other societal agents working with delinquent youth often viewed them as deficient, immature, immoral, and resistant to discipline. Treating youth that way is likely to make them less trusting and to escalate conflict rather than establish a basis for constructive collaboration (Tyler et al., 1991).

Contextual factors also have an impact on the ways change occurs and can be influenced. Barker and Schoggen (1973) studied the influence of public places on the behaviors that occur in them in the United States and Great Britain. They called places such as schools, parks, or communities *behavior settings* and identified how different settings create different demands (habitat claims) for certain role behaviors that shape social and individual choices.

It has been widely documented that benign and supportive settings are conducive to positive psychosocial development. However, contexts are not always benign and supportive and may produce destructive forms of development instead. For example, to sustain inner city drug cultures, behavior settings require special roles. Included are attractive gang roles for youth who are usually from NCDGs and have little access to long term, prosocial careers. Yet it is mostly CDG adults who buy the drugs, and adults from all groups who employ and exploit the youth, trapping them in violent life styles and replacing them as they are destroyed. Even so, there is substantial support for the belief that youths join gangs to fulfill a sense of belonging, not because they want to be violent or involved with drugs (Tyler, et al., 1992). Likewise, Sereny's (1985) studies of youthful prostitutes in the United States and Europe strongly support the conclusion that the continuance of these exploitive settings is based in part on the reluctance of authorities to hold CDG adult clients responsible, preferring instead to blame the youth.

### *Configurations as Integral to Functioning and Change*

The ways we build prosocial or antisocial communities and contexts and encourage or reduce prosocial behavior or unwanted violence and other destructive activities go together. The work of Olweus (1992) shows why successful antiviolence youth programs require a collaborative approach to define the issues, identify resources, and combine individual and social change approaches. He studied bullying in Norwegian schools and found that the bullies were not insecure nor did they have low self-esteem. They felt good about themselves and, unless stopped, continued their patterns into adulthood.

Olweus (1992) reported that bullying could be changed when the teachers, parents, and students in that *behavior setting* changed to redefine it and support the development of prosocial configurations of behavior. They did so by organizing a joint community and school program that created school, community, and home environments in which all adults were taught (a) to establish warm caring relationships with the children in order to create benign and supportive environments that could be trusted, and (b) to use consistent, firm, non-hostile, non-physical controls against unacceptable behavior.

Such patterns of change have been found in numerous cultures as basic to the control of other patterns of violence as well. For example, the extensive multicultural work of Huesmann and Eron (1986) on the relationship between television viewing and violence found similar patterns with some cultural variations. The relationships found between watching violent programs on television and violent behaviors were a product of individual differences plus parental, environmental, and cultural norms and the inhibiting or facilitating nature of the violence seen on television.

## **Conclusions**

The pattern and level of psychosocial competence each of us attains and how well it serves us rests on the possibilities and restrictions that our life contexts provide and on the perspectives we have acquired, particularly our knowledge and skills at decision making

and problem solving. If we have been exposed to only one culture, we are limited to its implicit and explicit possibilities. Only when we become aware of our possibilities and the limitations of our current perspective plus the presence and nature of our limitations, can we begin to transcend our boundaries.

A centuries old phenomenon that brings everyone face to face with the need to redefine his/her understanding of self and worlds is an encounter with strangers and strange situations. We are thereby required as individuals and groups to see how we and our situations could be different. This phenomenon requires us as individuals and groups to explore and transcend our self-centered perspectives. That is, once we decenter ourselves, we can undertake the task of learning how to communicate and interact across psychosocial differences.

Adopting this process of shifting perspectives can be particularly important for psychologist-investigators who usually try to understand other cultures by defining them as poor imitations of their own. A shift in perspective challenges and defeats our efforts to impose our own culture-bound views of science, ethics, and values – all of which are culturally limited – on other cultures. A transcultural perspective provides a more adequate foundation for psychologist-investigators to use in their work. That is, their basis for understanding different individual and collective psychological issues, both intra and inter culturally, is conceptually and methodologically designed for that task. Transcultural interactions necessarily require:

- a) Including ourselves as participants in all phases of our interactions, even when we are behaving as psychologists or other experts who contribute special expertise.
- b) Including ourselves as part of our communities and cultures whether we are ordinary citizens, community and cultural leaders, or those considered society's outcasts. It is essential that all residents be and be considered collaborative participants in the community. We cannot build better lives and better cities unless everyone is involved in listening to everyone else. This is the only way we can learn to hear why people's choices are meaningful to them. Further, we all must also be willing to consider changing ourselves or otherwise, others are not likely to change either.
- c) Defining ourselves as part of the world beyond our own communities, ethnicities, and cultures, and acting on our need to extend our perspectives beyond those traditional boundaries. In other words, it is imperative that we establish a transcultural ethnic validity conception of and for ourselves as well as others in order to live effective and enriching lives, to be psychosocially competent, even within our own culture. A kind of *decentering* (of seeing oneself as other than in the center of the universe) is essential as the basis of all of our activities. Whether we are trying to understand and guide our lives, do research, teach, or create change, our success rests on creating a transcultural perspective in order to move beyond the biases of our cultural and CD or NCD perspectives.

As Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994) emphasized, we must become aware of and responsive to the nature of the context where we are socialized, and we must be working to change it as well. Anything short of this means that we are acting to support the current situation in a *social control* way; that is, we are, at least tacitly, acting to perpetuate the status quo. Actually, we may be working actively against any efforts, even our own, to change ourselves and/or the contexts within which we live. In summary, we become psychosocially competent intra culturally only by reaching out and interacting with people who have other cultural perspectives and sharing how they view ours. When we become inter culturally competent, we simultaneously become intra culturally competent.

At the beginning of Section 1, I cited Kuhn's (1970) description of exemplars and how they define the subject matter of any science. When we examine the current subject matter of psychology, we see that the exemplars are based on the biases, including racism, of psychology's pioneers, by being defined without input from participants. They built these biases into the foundation of our current frameworks. If we are ever to remove racism and these other biases from our work, we must first develop alternative exemplars and frameworks.

In this article, I introduced a psychosocial competence framework as an alternative approach to the development of intra and inter cultural competence. This framework consistently demonstrates that it can provide a new direction for psychological science. When we, as psychologists, take on the tasks involved in becoming psychosocially competent, we necessarily begin to move away from racism and the related biases built into our current frameworks. Instead of continuing to rely on judgmental and falsely objective interpretations of our research findings as universals, we have a new way to look at and interpret them. A psychosocial competence framework requires us to examine our findings within their respective contexts. We must face and consider the rich diversity that exists across and within cultures worldwide. This approach to knowledge gives us all a way to redefine ourselves and develop new understandings of our science as well as our daily interactions. As we develop new exemplars and, thereby, a new body of psychological knowledge, we establish the potential to contribute to our field, our society, and each other in new ways. Perhaps we can even learn how to reduce the violence in our world, especially related to cross-cultural misunderstandings, and develop more prosocial societies and paths to peace.

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### About the Author

Forrest B. Tyler received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Ohio State University in 1952. Throughout his career he has been a university professor, director of clinical/community psychology graduate programs and of a preschool, and a government program administrator. His teaching, research, and program development activities have included involvement with people across their life spans and in a number of cultural contexts. The focus of his work has been on people's development of psychological strengths with particular attention to the role of people's self-directing capabilities and the effects of societal contexts, particularly the limiting of possibilities from restrictive and disadvantageous circumstances. He is currently an emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA, who continues to be active in his career. E-Mail: [ft Tyler@psyc.umd.edu](mailto:ft Tyler@psyc.umd.edu)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Primary control is defined differently in different cultures. What are the three ways cited? Give examples of each and discuss their advantages and disadvantages.
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using an etic/emic approach to cross-cultural research?
3. What is meant by a behavioral setting? a habitat claim? Consider some examples of each and discuss how they have influenced your life.

4. What differences in how you respond would it make to be treated like a knower as a participant in a research study? as a known?
5. What kind of difficulties would two people with different self and world views have in communicating with each other? Give some examples and discuss how they can be overcome.
6. Why might it be difficult to change your psychosocial competence orientation if you cannot change your life context?
7. What is meant by a transcultural ethnic validity orientation? What kinds of differences would developing such an orientation have on most of us? Give some examples.