

SPECIAL ISSUE

Neal Miller and the Integration of Psychoanalysis and Behavior Therapy

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Neal Miller's pioneering insights into the possibilities of synthesis between psychoanalytic and learning theory formulations of phenomena of anxiety, defense, psychopathology, and personality dynamics provided a key foundation for later efforts to integrate psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral approaches to therapy. This paper highlights Miller's influence and the continuing legacy of his integrative mindset in the contemporary psychotherapy integration movement.

I first became acquainted with Neal Miller's work as an undergraduate at Columbia. I had been a physics major for my first three years as an undergraduate and switched to psychology only in my senior year. In order to graduate as a psychology major, I had to take virtually all psychology courses that year, having taken an exam over the summer to bypass "Intro," the prerequisite for all the others. Columbia in those days was a pretty narrowly Skinnerian department. In fact, it was so dominated by Skinnerian ideas at that time, that I—very literally—thought that the reason that so many of the psychology books were assigned the call numbers BF had to do with those being Skinner's initials! In some ways I enjoyed that immersion in Skinnerian thinking, and it has in fact had some useful influences on my later thinking. But the great breath of fresh air, the one non-Skinnerian work that got through the filter, was Dollard and Miller's *Personality and Psychotherapy* (1950). That book enormously stimulated and energized me. It provided an outlet for my (forbidden) interest in Freud, but from the beginning enabled me to understand psychoanalysis not as an alternative to the psychology of learning or to rigorous psychological research, but as a natural complement in a partnership that enormously increased the value of both.

Personality and Psychotherapy probably remains the single book that most influenced my thinking and the course of my career. There were many other books and papers, of course, that profoundly influenced me, but the influence of *Personality and Psychotherapy* was unique. It was not the only book that examined the relation between

psychoanalysis and learning theory—indeed, it was not even the only book by either Dollard or Miller that explored those themes—but it was an achievement of such towering insight and creativity that almost all the others, good and important as they are, pale in comparison. True, the impact of the book was very limited among those entrenched on either side of the divide they sought to bridge; orthodoxy succumbs to neither logic nor data. But it opened a path for those who could see around the artificial walls that kept ideas "pure," but saddled with the same weaknesses of any species that lacks hybrid vigor.

I was extremely fortunate to have been a graduate student at Yale in the years when both Neal Miller and John Dollard were still actively teaching. Dollard was in fact my very first psychotherapy supervisor, so I "cut my teeth" on the integrative way of thinking that Dollard and Miller's work pointed to. At the time *Personality and Psychotherapy* was published (1950), there was essentially no such field as behavior therapy. Historians can point to precursors, but clearly that was the time of psychoanalytic hegemony. Indeed, when I asked John Dollard for a letter of recommendation for my postdoctoral training at the NYU postdoctoral program in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, he said he would write me a very strong letter but with a "heavy heart." The reason, interestingly, was that he wished I had applied to the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, a bastion of orthodoxy. NYU had appealed to me precisely because, among psychoanalytic training programs, it was at the time the most heterodox, with representatives of all the leading psychoanalytic viewpoints (though none outside of psychoanalysis). Thus, in the context of the times, Dollard viewed the logical next step after being trained in the thinking that evolved from his and Miller's work as standard Freudian training (though I am sure he did not envision me as someone who would remain trapped within its narrow confines). The path of integrating psychoanalysis with behavior therapy still lay in the future. It was a different path from that of integrating it with learning theory, but it clearly took the earlier achievement as its foundation.

Neal Miller did not have the same kind of direct connection with clinical training at Yale as Dollard did, even in a purely intellectual way. But even apart from his work with Dollard, his elegant studies of the nature of conflict were both an inspiring intellectual model for me and a foundation for my later thinking about a wide range of issues. Even today, when those Hullian-inspired studies of animals caught between the desire for food and the fear of shock are no longer viewed as the cutting edge of psychological research, I continue to teach Miller's analysis of approach-avoidance conflict to my graduate students as an essential foundation for their thinking about clinical work.

It was only some years after I left Yale that the full impact of having been immersed there in Dollard and Miller's thinking began to be felt. As I noted earlier, at the time *Personality and Psychotherapy* was written, behavior therapy was still basically "in utero." Even at the time I was in graduate school (1961–1965) it was only a rapidly growing toddler. During my graduate school years, despite the presence of both Dollard and Miller, and although the Yale clinical program, housed in a psychology department of remarkable intellectual breadth, strongly emphasized research both as the central identity of its doctoral graduates and as a foundation for clinical practice, I learned virtually nothing about behavior therapy. When I pursued my postdoctoral psychoanalytic training, the absence of attention to behavior therapy continued, but, as behavior therapy began to be a more influential force in the therapeutic world, as it very rapidly developed, as it were, from the toddler of my Yale days to a strapping youth eager to throw its weight around, the absence of attention in the circles I was moving was no longer a simple lack of interest or awareness. It was an outright disdain and hostility. When, a few years later, I began my own explorations of the possibility of integration of psychoanalytic ideas and methods with those of behavior therapy, I presented some of my thinking to the institute where I had been trained and from which I had recently graduated. One of the first questions that greeted me after my presentation was completed was, "Don't you think what you are exploring here is fascistic?"

I mention this last experience to illustrate how little support or encouragement there was at the time for integrating the competing therapeutic paradigms. It was certainly not a "natural" insight to think they could fruitfully and synergistically be combined. The sources of my move toward an integrative point of view were complex, and I have written about them in two different autobiographical publications (Wachtel, 2000, 2001). But it

is crystal clear to me that without the immersion in the ideas of John Dollard and Neal Miller, no amount of reading about or clinical exposure to behavior therapy would have suggested to me that psychoanalysis and behavior therapy could be brought together in a coherent fashion. To this day, their ideas continue to inspire my thinking and continue to be regularly cited in my writings. Miller's research and theoretical work on anxiety as a learned response, and on the role of extinction in the reduction of anxiety, implicitly underlie much of the contemporary work on exposure that is so central to the cognitive-behavioral approach, and it is foundational for my own thinking about the ways that exposure and interpretation are but two sides of the same clinical coin, an idea that has led me to suggest modifications in the way both aims are approached in the clinical process (Wachtel, 1997, 2008).

Today, the pursuit of integrative thinking in psychotherapy is a growing international trend. There is an international organization devoted specifically to this effort (the Society for the Exploration of Psychotherapy Integration, known also by its acronym, SEPI), and scholars around the world have been making important contributions to the advancement of integrative thinking. But when I began my own integrative efforts, there was little support from either side for the effort to bridge the gaps between theories or to examine how proponents of each attended to a different facet of a larger whole, maintaining their particular parochial vision through a determined intellectual tunnel vision. Had I not had the direct inspiration of studying at Yale at the time both John Dollard and Neal Miller were still central members of the faculty, it seems unlikely to me that I would have seen around the walls any better than anyone else in the psychoanalytic community of which I was a part. Many of my teachers and fellow students in the psychoanalytic world were brilliant men and women. They did not lack for intellectual firepower. But they did lack for the experience of directly encountering John Dollard and Neal Miller.

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