



Summary of Unit 1 - very great and thorough

Introduction to Psychology (University of South Africa)



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after studying this unit, you should:

- Identify the origin of psychology in Africa.
- Recognize different areas in the development of psychology in Africa.
- Understand the various theoretical perspectives influencing psychology's development on the continent.
- Recognize psychology's role in colonization and racial segregation.

1.1 Introduction

The history of psychology in Africa is marked by complex and nonlinear developments. Rather than a straightforward progression, the evolution of psychology reflects various historical contexts and power dynamics that have shaped how psychology is conceptualized and practiced in Africa, particularly in South Africa. This unit explores psychology as the study of human behaviour and the impact of its geographic origins on African societies. It highlights the deficiencies within the discipline when viewed through an African lens and discusses the origins of psychology, the geographical influences on its evolution, and its links with colonization and racism.

1.2 The Origin of Psychology in Africa

Psychology has deep historical roots, yet the establishment of psychology as a formal academic discipline is relatively recent in Africa. Although psychological ideas have existed within African societies, the professional discipline emerged largely from Euro-American influences introduced during the colonial era. This introduction was facilitated by Western missionaries, returning African scholars, and foreign psychologists. According to Nsamenang (2007), psychology was integrated into theology training by missionaries, thereby emphasizing its scientific aspects and granting it authority over human experiences. The definition of psychology evolved to encompass the systematic study of human mental life within both pre- and post-colonial contexts, giving importance to local worldviews (Nwoye, 2015a). However, the challenge remained of insufficient local expertise to fill the gaps left in African psychology departments post-colonization. The influence of Western psychology has overshadowed local psychological understandings, leading to a dissatisfaction among African professionals forced to operate under Eurocentric frameworks.

1.2.1 Psychology and Location

The term 'psychology' is rooted in the Greek words for soul (psychē) and study (logos), presenting a cultural perspective that impacts how psychology is understood globally. One critical consideration is epistemic location; people's geographical contexts influence their worldviews and, consequently, their understanding of human behaviour. This suggests that psychology is not a neutral science; rather, it reflects cultural biases that may distort non-Western perspectives. It raises essential questions about who determines the boundaries of psychological study and highlights the potential repercussions of a narrow focus that neglects diverse cultural experiences.

1.2.2 Psychology in Egypt

In 19th-century Egypt, several pivotal developments contributed to the emergence of psychology as a discipline. The opening of the Al-Abssia Mental Health Hospital in 1880

marked the first mental health facility in Africa. The proliferation of newspapers and magazines played a critical role in public education about psychological concepts, with early publications laying the groundwork for formal psychology training in educational institutions.

1.2.3 Psychology in South Africa

The discipline of psychology in South Africa has a complex and often troubling history. Initially rooted in noble intentions, psychology became a tool to reinforce apartheid ideologies by promoting racial segregation and perceived superiority of white culture. Prominent figures in government and academia supported a framework that justified such discrimination through alleged scientific principles. Psychological education aligned closely with colonial and apartheid agendas, often propagating racist ideologies through psychometric testing and biased research.

1.2.4 Psychology in Zambia

In Zambia, psychology emerged primarily in response to colonial anthropological research which served British interests. The establishment of institutions for psychological research was closely linked to colonial governance, with a strong emphasis on categorizing and assessing African populations through Western psychological frameworks. This history, while advancing the discipline, raised questions regarding the cultural relevance of Western psychological practices in the Zambian context.

1.3 Neglected Perspectives in Psychology

The evolution of psychology in Africa has often excluded indigenous perspectives, leading to misdiagnosis and marginalization of local practices and beliefs (Oppong, 2022). There is a chronic tendency for African psychology to mirror Western models, which perpetuates the legacy of colonization and undermines the cultural significance of local knowledge systems. Recognition of diverse African realities in psychological practices is essential for developing a truly relevant discipline.

1.4 The Role of Psychology in Colonization and Racial Segregation

Psychology's entanglement in colonial and oppressive frameworks raises critical insights about its historical origins. The discipline's development was influenced by the need to manage and categorize people behaviorally and politically, particularly in colonial contexts where distinction and control over indigenous populations were justified through scientific claims. The role of prominent psychologists and psychological associations during South Africa's apartheid era exemplifies this troubling history, with advocacy for racial superiority being intertwined with psychological research and practice (Need to Review Summary).

1.5 Conclusion

This unit traces the multifaceted origins and trajectories of psychology within Africa, addressing the complex interplay between Western influences and local contexts. It calls for an acknowledgment of the historical injustices linked to the discipline, highlighting the necessity for psychology to evolve by integrating indigenous knowledge and remaining cognizant of its role in perpetuating racial segregation and colonial ideologies. The

development of a more inclusive, culturally attuned psychology in Africa is imperative for future progress and relevance within the global discipline.