

# Beyond the White Male Canon: Teaching Postcolonial History of Psychology

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***Abstract:** Teachers in the history of psychology can now reexamine their own cultural "situatedness" and assist students in recognizing theirs. The contributionist perspective is recovering the lives and contributions of women, persons of color, and gays. From this rich literature come epistemologies of feminist and minority empiricism which reexamine and extend outmoded categories of anecdotal biography and "schools." Informed by moral and economic issues, power relations, diverse cultural assumptions, and a fluid definition of race, a new postcolonial epistemology is under construction. Thus the history and systems course can lead students and teachers to appreciate how the knowledge and institutions of psychology arose from gendered personal lives and global cultures.*

***Zusammenfassung:** Lehrende im Bereich der Psychologiegeschichte können jetzt ihre eigene kulturelle „Eingebundenheit“ untersuchen und Studierende beim Erkennen deren eigener Eingebundenheit helfen. Die Perspektive der „Kontributionisten“ besteht darin, das Leben von Frauen, Farbigen und Homosexuellen zu entdecken. Aus dieser reichen Literatur entstammen Epistemologien von Feministen/-innen und Minoritäten-Empirismus, wodurch die überholten Kategorien anekdotischer Biographien und „Schulen“ neu gesehen und erweitert werden. Durch moralische und ökonomische Fakten und Machtbeziehungen, durch verschiedene kulturelle Grundannahmen und durch eine beweglichere Definition der Rasse ist eine neue post-koloniale Epistemologie im Entstehen. Auf diese Weise kann die Ausbildung in Geschichte und Systemen Studierende und Lehrende dazu führen, daß sie besser bewerten können, wie das Wissen und die Institutionen der Psychologie aus einzelnen Lebensläufen und globalen Kulturen entstand.*

## A Question to the Teacher: Are Different Cultures Represented?

Traditional North American histories of psychology do not reflect the diversity that is or was. Rarely do they mention African-American, Hispanic-American, Native American, or foreign psychologists. Women and persons of other gender orientations are barely treated in history textbooks. Why is this the case? Evidently, groups historically underrepresented in other professions have also been historically underrepresented in psychology. After all, minorities have not occupied status positions at research universities, and thus have not published

proportionately in mainstream journals. Underemployment, underpublication, and marginalization of persons of color resemble the problems faced by women scientists (Braddock & McPartland, 1987). However, scholars in the history of psychology—if not textbook writers—have begun to raise disquieting questions (e.g., Gilgen & Gilgen, 1987; Morawski, 1988; Landrine, Klonoff, & Brown-Collins, 1992; Sexton & Hogan, 1992). They urge two steps: (a) a compensatory history to recover neglected past contributions, and (b) a rethinking of the questions asked of the past. This platform opens the postcolonial agenda (Kvale, 1992; Allen & Barber, 1992).

Social constructionist critiques of social psychology reveal dynamics of change: (1) "the breaking down of what had been discrete, established categories," (2) "the quickening tempo of change in images, texts, categories," and (3) "the experience of change becomes an end in itself" (Michael, 1991, pp. 205-206). For historians of psychology, the problematization of the subject has entered the literature on history of experiment (Morawski, 1988), the history of method (Hollway, 1989; Danziger, 1990), the study of development (Valsiner, 1991), and psychological practice (Widdicombe, 1992).

One can begin with a brief inventory of how history of psychology teachers have taught students (Ware & Benjamin, 1991). Traditional textbooks cover well the standard view of psychology in North America, its classic findings and theories, its "great men" and "schools." But their categories of knowledge remain male Euro-American schools of the 1920's, set forth in purest canonical form by Edna Heidbreder (1933): pre-scientific and scientific psychology, structuralism, functionalism, behaviorism, dynamic psychology, Gestalt psychology, and psychoanalysis. Can this framework bear the load of psychology's immense conceptual and institutional growth since World War II?

The postcolonial perspective might suggest that one begin by situating the "schools" themselves in their own historical contexts. Market forces (Danziger, 1990) and ideological realities (Ash & Woodward, 1987) underpinned psychology's investigative practices then, as they do today. If postmodern epistemologists (Harding, 1986, 1991; Flax, 1990) are right, psychologists have understood modern "progress" as the quest for "laws of behavior and mind." This project could give way--on the postcolonial account--to the realization that even the criteria of science reflect cultural assumptions such as the hegemony of the West. In place of this onward and upward mentality, postcolonial teachers might call attention, e.g., to Third World women and environmental realities (Nicolson, 1990; Howe, 1991). If values, egalitarian and otherwise, guide post-Enlightenment rationality, teachers may want to reexamine their own cultural "situatedness" and assist students to recognize theirs.

## How Can History Reconcile Personal and Professional Identities?

Take the contributionist perspective first. Past psychologists are first of all flesh and blood persons who can serve students as role models. Students naturally want to know how psychologists managed to balance career and family values, since they are themselves setting out on personal identity formation and a career (Bargad & Hyde, 1991). I use such questions to teach women psychologists' autobiographies (O'Connell & Russo, 1982, 1988). Students come alive when asked how scientific careers change in relation to marriage, divorce, or child rearing (Abir-Am & Outram, 1987).

Social concern can also be readily tapped in undergraduates. Many students find sex bias (Gannon et al, 1992) and racial bias (Graham, 1992) disturbing. Having learned about "experimenter bias" in other courses, many marvel at "social biases" that have kept women and persons of color from obtaining credentials. If challenged to see that "racial bias" is rooted in ignorance, they frequently want to learn more. Literature on black psychology (Burlew, Banks, McAdoo, & Azibo, 1992), Native American ethnogenesis (Roosens, 1989), and family therapy for minorities (Ho, 1987) can fuel discussion about psychological services of inner cities and on reservations, challenging students to rethink personal values and professional objectives.

History of psychology can thus go beyond reporting "theory" or even investigative practice to placing both in socio-political contexts. "Feminist empiricism" means recovering lives and contributions of women. "Minority empiricism" would then mean recovering the lives and contributions of minorities. But such compensation history is not enough. One also wants to understand alternative "standpoints," such as structural obstacles to employment, social class, cultural site, and professional roles. Through such "deconstruction," postcolonial historians situate knowledge and its invisible power relations (Bordo, 1990).

History can be teased out of psychological literatures on African-American children (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1985), families (McAdoo, 1988), women (Rodgers-Rose, 1980), and men (Gary, 1981). Beyond including persons of color as individuals, historians can study them within gendered social institutions. A film "Ethnic Notions" exposes cultural stereotypes of "Sambo" and "Mama" that have served to amuse audiences while relegating African-Americans to a secondary social place.

Teachers may assist students in recognizing hegemonic contexts that designate those labeled black to a different class position. Thus persons of color frequently constitute identities in response to exclusion from white society. This dynamic situating of ethnicity results in "bounded identity constructs," such as Haitians

in America who send money home to Haiti: out of low status in the States comes high status in Haiti (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992).

Caucasian psychology and ethnic minority psychologies may well engage in similar dynamic "bounded identity constructs." Only a handful of Ph.D.s are awarded to African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans each year (Comas-Diaz, 1991), and these few tend to teach outside the mainstream. It is no surprise that blacks founded their own psychological organization in 1968, the Association of Black Psychologists (DiAngelis, 1992).

Ethnicity, class, and gender bear more than academic interest; they can inspire social concerns. Historically, access to the psychological profession has been limited to persons of white, male privilege, and if the fault lines have followed such non-scientific criteria, it is only honest to acknowledge them. As women have become actors and knowledge producers, the "woman question in science" became "the science question in feminism," or how gender changes science (Harding, 1986). By extension, as persons of color become actors and knowledge producers, the "race question in science" shifts to "the science question in 'racial' economies" or how "racial" economies affect science (Harding, 1993). This involves a Gestalt switch from seeking predecessors and role models to constructing science differently.

## **Postcolonial History of Psychology**

The criticism is sure to follow: these are not "scientific questions." Postcolonial history of psychology cautions us not to limit science to a narrow web of relations. Evaluative questions about power and dominance hierarchies invite questions of who is producing what knowledge for whom? Have feminists in psychology been representing black feminists too? Have scientific psychologists been accountable to society in producing socially beneficent knowledge? Historians can weigh accountability between employers and employees, genders, and races.

No single group is privileged in a postcolonial perspective. One must examine knowledge claims in personal, institutional, and national contexts. Postcolonial history of psychology replaces genderless, timeless, cultureless definitions of "man" with "bounded identities" of its constructed objects. Postcolonial history alerts us to identify distorted reflexivity, such as the above-mentioned gender and racial bias in research (Gannon et al, 1992; Graham, 1992) and textbooks (Peterson & Kroner, 1992).

As public servants, psychologists can become more aware of the social relations within which they create their knowledge. They have the tools to do so. They also have the social roles, as counselors and testers, as teachers and

researchers, to undertake the task of social engineering. The opportunities are immense. But the need for values, and caution in their exercise, is clear. Values cannot be taught from the mono-disciplinary standpoint of psychology alone. The undergraduate student needs knowledge of neighboring disciplines. Interdisciplinary women's studies (Bargad & Hyde, 1991), and the feminization of the discipline, invite reconceptualization of scientific issues (Riger, 1992). As one example, legal justice issues bear on psychological aspects of rape, abortion, pornography, and sex equality (MacKinnon, 1989). Psychologists have long worked for social change (Katz, 1991). "Psychology in the public interest" is now a Directorate of APA. "Postcolonial epistemologies" acknowledge that what and how "others" know belongs to the project of scientific knowledge, for knowledge and power are structurally related (Rouse, 1987).

### **Sexism: Historical Treatment of Women and Homosexuals**

Deficient historical treatment of women's experience of "sexism" and "sex discrimination" in a male-dominated society bears comparison with the neglected history of racism. A sense of power imbalance is familiar to most women. Power relations surround gay lives as well. If homosexuality and other sexual orientations represent an estimated ten percent of the population, then they belong in the history of psychology; history teachers could address the homophobic social practices and prejudices that persons of different sexual orientations face (McCord & Herzog, 1991). Special issues treat homosexuality in pre-Nazi Germany (Oosterhuis, 1991), gay emancipation history in the Netherlands (Pheterson & Jansen, 1986), and homosexual educators in the United States (Harbeck, 1991). Other concerns in the news are gays in the military and in public institutions. My students read portions of a book by Suzanne Pharr (1988), an organizer of lesbian friendship and political action groups. They also read an article dispelling myths about gays (Peplau, 1981). Then students view "Coming Out in the Suburbs" about lesbians and "Silent Pioneers" about older gay couples. While not strictly historical, this material at the end of a unit on moral development offers students an opportunity to experience and reflect on their own feelings about homosexuality and homophobia.

History of psychology could open its pages to research on homosexuality, among other areas of social concern. Gender issues have a history of gradual recognition in APA's Division 35 on women (Hogan & Sexton, 1991; Mednick & Urbanski, 1991); similar institutional scholarship is needed on Division 44 on gays and lesbians and Division 45 the ethnic and minority issues.

## **Power Relations in African-American Psychology**

What can the white historian of psychology say about African-American psychology? More than one thinks. Simply by posing the question, one acknowledges difference. One can confront the fact that African-Americans lack a prominent place in the history of the discipline, either as psychologists or as subjects of study (Burlew et al, 1992; Graham, 1992).

Yet African-American numbers are not small; literally thousands of blacks occupy professional positions in psychological professions. What does the discipline look like from their perspective? Despite the paucity of secondary literature on black psychology, the legendary work of Mamie Phipps Clark and Kenneth Clark in the 1940s and 1950s is readily available. Their study of "Negro" children's preference for white dolls revealed segregation's damage to self-esteem. Numerous "psychologists for social action" worked with the legal community to create a brief that led to the *Brown vs. Board of Education* mandate to desegregate in 1954 (Clark, 1953; Keppel, 1995). Clearly power was the economic and legal issue here, as psychologists set out to work within existing legal structures. Receiving the Kurt Lewin award, Kenneth Clark (1965) deemed power one of the most important--and neglected--topics in the field.

## **Race and Culture in the Soviet Republics**

Parallels between race relations in the history of psychology in the United States and in Soviet Union have begun to come to light. Until recently, a rather monolithic and monocultural history prevailed. Now, an Estonian-American developmental psychologist has demonstrated that Pavlov, Vygotsky, and Rubinstein were hardly the only psychologists worth remembering (Valsiner, 1988). One star psychologist, A. R. Luria, actually founded a "culture-historical school" with his early ethnographic research in Siberia during the 1920s. But it was not published until the 1970s because it did not fit the race-neutral ideology of "activity theory" and "conditioning" in Soviet psychology. Here is one daunting example of power. The treatment of women--in contrast to official Socialist pronouncements--is another (Buckley, 1985). One wonders what kind of progress has occurred since the end of the Cold War (Gilgen & Gilgen, 1995).

Only half a century after the 1918 revolution, the Kharkov school in the Ukraine extended the culture-historical research of Luria's protégé, Lev Vygotsky, in the direction of cognitive development. Similarly in Estonia, cross-cultural research took off in the 1970s under Peeter Tulviste at Tartu University. Certainly "culture" played a prominent role in these unofficial Soviet psycho-

logies. Yet "race" seems curiously absent. I suspect that if the surface were scratched with historical scholarship, "race" and "gender" would raise problematic issues (Woodward & Clark, 1995).

### **Colonial Psychology**

Power relations are most transparent in cases of colonial psychology. Since the "postcolonial" initiatives of the 1980s, historians have continued to expose ideology in institutional psychologies in different national contexts. Theories of race proliferated after Darwin's "Descent of Man" in 1871. In France, a laboratory and an anthropological society provided evidence that brain size is larger in the "superior races." Criminal anthropology and crowd psychology actively endorsed race studies and race theories in the 1890s (Van Ginneken, 1992). Colonial attitudes coincided with the period of expansion of the French Empire into North Africa and the British Empire into India (Hartnack, 1987). Interest shifted gradually from race to nations, but the point is clear: scientific thinking that unconsciously justified "colonial anthropology" belonged to mainstream psychology in France and Great Britain for decades.

A small body of research by South African psychologists on apartheid has found that "white supremacy" often becomes the focus; it is difficult to keep attention on the oppressed (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991; Louw, 1992). A typical way in which the oppressors receive study is nineteenth-century apartheid policies (Giliomee & Schlemmer, 1989). Mental tests have been misused to demonstrate that South African blacks were culturally inferior. Psychologists have now demonstrated that racial attitudes and prejudice underlay the dilemma (Duckitt, 1992). Ironically, both the demonstration of great racial differences in test scores and the study of prejudice may have helped to legitimate the status quo (Foster, 1991).

Students and teachers can contrast such historical examples with the interface between professional and public interest in the United States today. The "Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues" is a Division of the American Psychological Association that lobbies and assists Congressional staff in preparing legislation beneficial to ethnic minorities. Historical retrospect in the classroom can culminate in the 1990s by pointing out considerable progress in sophistication about race and ethnicity in APA.

### **Psychology under Totalitarianism**

Analogous in some ways to colonial psychology, and different in others, was the abuse of psychology toward racial ends under totalitarianism. German psychology

became a profession in the 1940s when the selection of officers for the *Wehrmacht* provided a need for "psychotechnics," or personnel testing (Geuter, 1992). With this wartime rationale, institutes of psychology quickly sprang to life. Germany was not alone. Mental testing, more than any other enterprise, had already put psychology on the map in the United States during World War I. Psychometrics was used and abused in sorting out persons on racial lines, throughout education and government. Scholarship has uncovered evidence of institutional racism in the creation and application of these test results (Samelson, 1987). Testing related to eugenics in ways that were ethnocentric, and sometimes xenophobic, if not totalitarian. This dark chapter belongs to a postmodern exposé of oppressive use of power in national psychologies. But it is also possible to err in the opposite direction by associating collective psychologies, such as Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, with Nazi ideology (Brock, 1992).

### **Progress so far in Social Epistemology and Sociology of Science**

Considerations of racial bias in intelligence testing suggest that it is also time to consider the embeddedness of the psychological experiment in political economies. "Social epistemology" replaces a philosophy of science that sought to "rationally construct" science in logical and geometric models. The arrangement of equipment, the use of time and staff, the inscriptions and publication practices—all this and more have come under scrutiny. From participant observer reports of the practices of laboratories has come a new social category, "local knowledge," referring to the historical and temporal situatedness of knowledge production (Ophir & Shapin, 1991). Power relations begin here in the relation of the experimenter to nature, and to the experimental and clinical subject. The undergraduate student can now receive the benefit of these exciting new intellectual tools. Whether as general education or as pre-professional knowledge, an understanding of psychology in its culturally-constructed practices comes closer to overcoming sexism and racism than ever before.

As seen above, pat answers about inclusion of "different" genders and races do not suffice. Beyond pointing to unjust treatment of populations through "containment" and "exclusion," the historian of psychology has a responsibility to rethink the epistemological question of feminist and minority empiricism. The nature of objectivity may change and history may have to be rewritten. If history must be constantly rewritten, historians of psychology have shown how, posing profounder questions than in the days of warring schools (Morawski & Steele, 1991).

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