

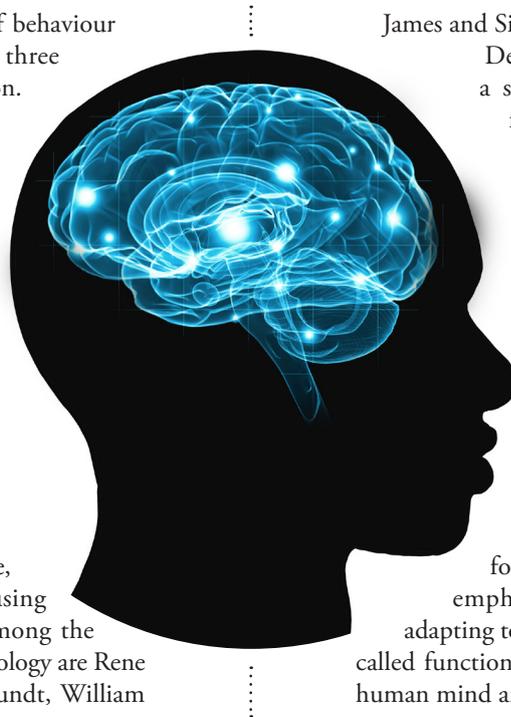
Psychology, Counselling and the Helping Process

By Dr Geoffrey Wango

P psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes. There are three concepts important to the definition. These are: science, behaviour, and mental processes.

Psychologists use scientific methods to observe, describe, predict, and explain behaviours and mental processes. Behaviours are actions that can be directly observed, while mental processes are experiences that cannot be observed directly, such as thoughts, motives, attitudes and feelings.

The history of psychology is rooted in Biology, Physiology and Philosophy. Aristotle argued that the mind and the body are completely separate, and contributed to psychology by focusing attention on the study of the mind. Among the people who have greatly influenced psychology are Rene Descartes, Charles Darwin, Wilhelm Wundt, William



James and Sigmund Freud.

Descartes' contribution was his view of a separate mind and body, and studies focused exclusively on the mind.

Darwin proposed that humans are part of an evolutionary process in the natural selection. This view led researchers to consider the role of the environment and adaptation in psychology. In 1879, Wilhelm Wundt developed the first psychology laboratory in Germany. Wundt's approach emphasized the importance of conscious thought and classification of the mind's structures— called structuralism. While structuralism focused inside the mind, William James emphasized the functions of the mind in adapting to the environment. James's approach was called functionalism. Freud focused on analysis of the human mind and mental processes.

Exploring Psychology: Contemporary Psychologists

Structuralism and functionalism were the first two schools of thought in psychology. However, there have been several other developed and contemporary psychology approaches to the scientific study of behaviours and mental processes.

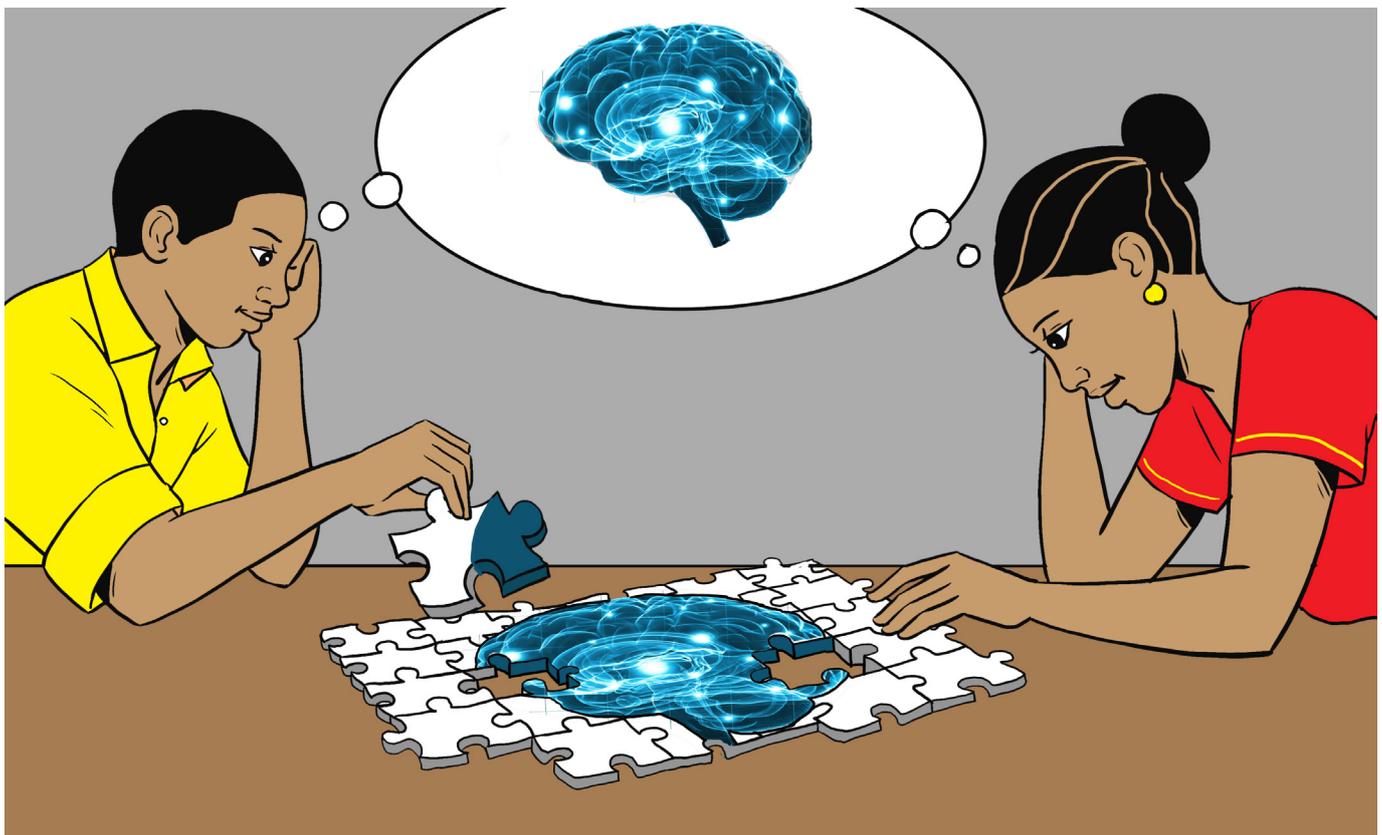
Contemporary psychology perspectives can be classified into several approaches:

1. The Behavioural Approach dominated psychology during the first half of the 20th Century, led by John Watson and B. F. Skinner. The focus was on observable responses and environmental determinants. The Behavioural Neuroscience approach studies the biological basis of behaviour and mental process, specifically focusing on the role of the nervous system.
2. The psychodynamic approach has origins in Sigmund Freud. Freud focused on the role of unconscious influences on how we think and act. In this approach, early life experiences are considered important determinants of adult psychology.
3. Social Cognitive Theory, championed by Albert Bandura, is a more recent development of the behaviourist approach and integrates the role of environmental factors and mental processes in understanding behaviours. The socio-cultural approach recognizes that both social and cultural contexts influence our psychology, including how we act, think, and feel.
4. Humanistic psychology adopts a humanistic approach led by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. They emphasized on human needs and free will of people — and their capacity for understanding and solving their own challenges.
5. The Cognitive approach has a central focus on mental processes with an emphasis on attention, perception, memory, thinking, and solving problems.
6. Evolutionary Psychology approaches include positive psychology. The focus is on the adaptive aspects of our application of psychology. This includes adaptation to the demands of our environment and how this shapes our repertoire of behaviours and mental processes.

Contemporary Approaches to Psychology

Many scholars have argued that psychology is predominantly focused on solving psychological problems, such as mental disorders and social disturbances. Yet all humans, regardless of their status or where in the world they live, experience emotions such as happiness and anger. It is possible that this is the reason why most people associate psychologists with the changing of bad (inappropriate) behaviours and problematic mental processes. However, psychologists study and work with psychologically healthy people. Evolutionary and positive psychology movements that emerged at the beginning of the 21st Century have attempted to promote the study of positive psychological phenomena such as creativity, optimism, and effective social relations.

Two movements have tended to define the current emphasis on a more positive psychology and living. These are: the humanistic approach and positive psychology. The humanistic approach emphasizes on a person's capacity for personal growth, freedom of choice, and the positive qualities of people. Humanistic approaches, such as Carl Rogers', have added to our understanding of what constitutes effective therapy. At the beginning of the 21st century, psychologists Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi proposed a positive movement, one that would place stronger emphasis on positive psychological experiences, such as hope and optimism, creativity, and social responsibility.



Positive Psychology

There are a variety of contemporary perspectives in psychology, including counselling psychology as a helping process. The positive psychology movement has included a positive attitude towards living and an overview of psychology-related careers. Among the major areas of concern for us is counselling psychology and psychotherapy.

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