Unit 5:

Personality and Social Psychology

5.0 Introduction

As a human being, you are a member of a social world, you are a person in a world of over seven billion people. This unit will seek to help you make sense of the social world we live in. Let us start by examining the terms "personality" and "social psychology". Personality represents an aspect of humanity and is that which explains why people behave in a certain way or do certain things. The term "personality" stems from the word "*persona*" which refers to a mask that used to be worn by actors in a stage play. It may even refer to the mask we wear when we face the outside world. Personality refers to everything about you that makes you who you are – a unique individual who is different from everybody else. As with most conceptions of psychology, personality was defined from a Western perspective. The next section will outline the different theories that help to define personality. Although the theorists provide diverse views of the nature of personality, they are all white, European, or American, and most of them are men, while the expectation was that their understanding of the concept would be universal and valid for all people, regardless of gender, race and ethnic origin. Akbar (2004) argues that the nature, structure and functioning of personality are important for understanding how people view the world and themselves. This has implications for how we view morality, social intelligence, and motivational life. Akbar (2004) also states that an understanding of personality is crucial for determining normal and abnormal behaviour. This means that the definition of "personality" is culture- and context-specific.

Social Psychology is the scientific study of how people's behaviour and decision making are largely influenced by society (McLeod, 2022). The study of Social Psychology is important, as it will help you understand yourself and those around you.

5.1. Understanding the Major Theories of Personality and Social Psychology that are Applicable to the South African Context

"Personality" is a simple word, yet it is a difficult concept to comprehend. This section explores some of the ways in which we can understand and define personality. We will make a distinction between Western and African ways of understanding "personality".

When defining personality, we need to understand an individual's worldviews or cosmologies. These refer to the ways in which we view and make sense of our world, in relation to cultural philosophies. It encompasses our epistemology and ontology. Baldwin (1992) emphasises the importance of understanding that the basic components of human nature lie in the social context, meaning that people live and exist in a world that is social, or governed by relationships that are significant to them as individuals. Thus, each of us experiences our reality within a certain social context.

In the previous units, we explained how Western psychology has dominated our understanding of human behaviour, due to colonial invasions. The study of personality was also based on Western ideas and culture. Western worldviews were imposed on

people and used to explain unique individual characteristics and behaviours (Semenya & Mokwena, 2012).

In this unit, we wish to emphasise that defining and understanding personality cannot be based on a single worldview: it requires an understanding of a person's ontological reality. The ontological and epistemological understandings of the current personality theories are relevant and appropriate for people of European origins, hence their application to Africans would be problematic, and could be classified as a violation of African ontological understanding. It would therefore be unethical of us to continue working with the current Western conceptions of personality.

5.1.1 The African Cosmology and Philosophy of Being

African cosmology, according to Kanu (2013), refers to the ways in which Africans perceive, conceive of, and understand, their universe (i.e., their worldview). It is the lens through which they view and comprehend their reality. It affects their value system and their attitudinal orientations. It encompasses the African's search for the meaning of life. Cosmology holds the link between a person's thoughts and African value systems, philosophy of life, behaviour, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings, and theologies (Kanu, 2013). It can also be understood as a system of thought that emerges from a people's history and culture, which focuses on their reality and the processes taking place within their universe (Semenya & Mokwena, 2012). It is also important to note that different indigenous African people have different cosmologies, depending on their geographical histories, yet the fundamental principles are the same.

Our understanding of African cosmology has been confined, restricted, and misrepresented by the larger body of colonial scholarship, and by colonial forms of indoctrination. Colonial ideologies have not only placed African ways of being at the bottom of every cosmology or belief in the world, but have also demonised African people (Mbiti, 1971). Related actions include reducing African cosmology to ancestral worship, libation, magic, dynamism, totemism, fetishism, superstition, Satanism, the hellish, and/or

naturism. The complexity of African spirituality indicates that an outsider cannot fully comprehend it – it is something one experiences and feels on a spiritual level.

5.1.2 African Ontology

Central to African cosmology is the concept of ontology. Ontology refers to someone's ways of being. African ontology offers a holistic view of a person's existence in society. According to Semenya and Mokwena (2012) it is a psychological reality which is shared by group members, and includes shared constructs, patterns of belief, feelings, and knowledge that help to guide their behaviour and define their reality. This includes a person's culture, and his/her holistic view of the world. A holistic view is one that considers an African's existence in the world within his/her community, with him/herself, with the spiritual (God and the ancestors) and with the physical world (humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects).

To fully understand African conceptions of "personality", we need to understand African ontology, cosmology, and philosophies. Diop (1991) regards African personality as a collective personality, which includes psychic (national temperament), historical and linguistic factors. Diop (1991) maintains that we need to be aware of the distortions which colonialism enforced on people's understanding of African personalities. This includes studies that were conducted on indigenous people and promoted ideas of inferiority which the colonisers held about African/black people. Our understanding of the development of personality is associated with the social, political, economic and historical conditions governing an individual's life. As such, to understand Africans as people with a collective personality, we must address the impact of the system of colonisation which has silenced, demonized, and marginalised African cultures. Akbar (1996) calls for the development of an African personality that is purposeful, harmonious (especially between nature and African people themselves) with its ecology, and consistent with the laws of life in African communities. The conception of "personality" which Akbar calls for, is discussed in the next section. It draws on the various aspects discussed above, that combine to form an understanding of what African people think are the determinants of individual behaviour.

5.1.3 *Isimilo/Seemo*/ 'Personality'

The concept of *isimilo/semelo* gives uniqueness to *umntu/motho*. It closely describes that which the English language refers to as "personality". *Isimilo/semelo* can be described as someone's personality, his/her characteristics, his/her vibrations that branch out and manifest and materialise to form that person's beingness (*ubuntu bakho*). This can be simplified as manifestations of *isimilo/semelo* through the character expression of a person's essence, as is evident from his/her behaviours. *Isimilo/semelo* communicates an individual's distinctiveness and peculiarity (i.e., uniqueness). It is an expression of what is inside, and this is supported by isiXhosa speakers referring to *indalo yakhe* (a person's natural manner/ways). This further supports the assertion that *isimilo/semelo* is that with which you came into being. *Indalo* (nature) comes from the word *ukudala*, whose root, "*dala*", means old or ancient. *Ukudala*, therefore, is to make an old spirit accessible. A new life is thus not so new, because the spirit is old. *Indalo yakhe* is thus that ancient essence which manifests someone's character. This reconnects the concepts of African ontology and cosmology that are founded on the principle that life is relational (i.e., an interconnection of various forms, both living and spiritual). That means *isimilo/semelo* cannot be explored in fragments. This is also true when you think of "beingness" in the African worldview, which is shaped by a person's interconnectedness with others. Hence the saying, "I am because you are, and since you are, therefore I am". This emphasises that what is regarded as "personality", or *isimilo/semelo*, is a product of interrelations. What you came into being as (your essence) is nurtured within the principles of *isintu* and is functionalised as *ubuntu*. *Isintu* allows those who care for a child, to nurture what that child brings to the world. Those who nurture a child work with the essence that is presenting itself, to ensure s/he makes his/her intended contribution to humanity. If we use the analogy of a tree, *isimilo/semelo* is the root of the plant, while personality is the flavour/texture of the fruit – that person's unique contribution to humanity. Just as siblings have different personalities, so each contributes a different flavour/texture to humanity.

5.1.4 *Mekhoa*/ "Personality Traits"

Isimilo/semelo explains the kind of person someone is, and it is expressed through *mekhoa*, whose closest equivalent in the English language is "traits". *Mekhoa* or "personality traits" give hints of the kind of essence someone brings forth. This finds expression in the use of the same word, *mekhoa*, to refer to spit (in Sesotho). A personality trait is that which you draw from inside and spit out. This confirms a point which we made throughout this section, that *isimilo/semelo* is drawn from within. That is why siblings take on different roles, based on their "personality": some are entrusted with kinship wisdom, some with organisation, others with mediation, etc.

5.1.5 Political Formations of Personalities

Race and personality have always been used together in Western psychology. Racial profiling in relation to psychological and behavioural qualities has always been used as a tool, as demonstrated in multiple studies conducted on African people's behaviour, cognition, and abilities. The findings of those studies formed the basis for the implementation of the colonial agenda, as well as apartheid. The false notion of indigenous people as irrational, less intellectual, and uncouth, provided justification for their dehumanisation. This not only had implications for how the coloniser perceived them, but how indigenous people perceived themselves. This section will therefore focus on the manifestation of colonisation and oppression in people's personality. It will also draw on some of the personality-related research done on African people and explain how that led to the negative construction of African personalities.

5.1.6 The History of Personality Psychology and Colonisation (Including Apartheid)

As alluded to earlier, personality studies on African and black people had a racist agenda, as those studies were used to classify all Africans as belonging to a single category, and to present them as inferior to whites. Those studies misrepresented and categorised Africans as bad, evil, and sub-human. The basic tenets of personality classification were

to maintain and justify colonial activities done to Africa and African people, on the basis that Africans were not "as human" as people of European origins. It is largely due to such acts, that the personalities of Africans continue to be misunderstood and misrepresented.

The concept of *scientific racism* is discussed in the PYC1511 module. It emphasised that, during the colonial administration, the production and dissemination of knowledge containing racist ideas was encouraged. We also mentioned that some well-known philosophers and psychologists, such as David Hume, Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, Herbert Spencer and Stanley Hall, initiated and promoted these ideas. They gave reasons to justify such oppression, and those reasons had implications for the perceived personality of black and African people (Bulhan, 1985). For instance, Hume emphasised the notion of an inferiority complex, which he ascribed to black and African people. Such ascriptions not only informed the agenda of oppression, but also had an impact on how the oppressed see themselves. Of note here, is how ideas about the oppressed, in addition to the conditions of oppression, combined (and still combine) to construct personalities.

Research studies and psychological assessments played an important role in the construction of black people's personalities. Such studies centered on cognition, intelligence, biology and education, to explain how personality is perceived in Western psychology. This means, ontologically and epistemologically, they represented the Western worldview, which is often drawn from the sensibilities of middle-class white men. What we observed, is how studies on black people yielded results that were negative or opposite to those of white people. Bulhan (1985) calls this the "trait-comparison bias" in Eurocentric psychology. Trait theory is a segment of personality theory in Eurocentric psychology that focuses on individual differences which are stable over time. The danger in using trait theories to describe the personality of black people, is that the analysis of these traits is decontextualised and isolated from socio-historical factors (Bulhan, 1985).

The discipline of Psychology has always struggled with the "nature vs. nurture" debate, which basically questions whether people are born with certain predispositions, such as intelligence, or whether it is a question of exposure to the environment (Bulhan, 1985). Nonetheless, this question has never applied or been used in relation to African and black

people. The description of what an African and black person is, has been in the hands of white people from different disciplines. As such, related arguments were highly ambivalent, and displayed veiled racism (Bulhan, 1985). They also did not consider the impact of colonisation on black people, particularly on their psyche and perception of self.

White psychologists have always speculated about the development and conceptualisation of African personality. Their speculation and inability to accept African cultures as legitimate, led to a distortion of how African personalities develop. This distortion affected how Africans are viewed by the world, and how they view themselves. In the section above we addressed the collective of African ontologies – an aspect of Africans which was demonised and brutalised by Eurocentric psychology. Eurocentrism strives for individualism, and analyses others based on their worldview (as maintained above). As such, the development of African personality was also compared to that of whites in terms of aspects of individualism, rather than using African ontology and African ways of knowing.

- **Using *The Development of Personality in African Cultures* by Simon Biesheuvel as an Example**

This case study aims to show how the study of personality was conducted by white psychologists during the colonial and apartheid eras. Simon Biesheuvel undertook a study into the development of African personalities, using questionnaires and research studies developed by white psychologists. His observation focused on the Bapedi, Balobedu, amaZulu and urban African communities (i.e., township residents), to describe their personality development. The purpose of the study was to identify African personalities in a socially changing or different environment. The following is an excerpt from the study by Biesheuvel (1959):

The kind of education that the Pedi boy formerly received produced a tradition-directed personality..., with comparatively few internalised controls, and influenced more strongly by shame than by guilt. The ego of this personality with relatively undifferentiated, with few conscious values and standards. Its relations with other selves were generally governed by conceptions concerning tribal status and assumed the form of prescribed habits of conduct. Bonds of affection, friendship and respect were rare because these are essentially individual relations depending on particular emotions, sentiments and values, which were not fostered by the traditional education process.

Even in its more intimate relations with its parents, the young child experienced little affection and the associations between age-mates depended more on the fact that they were jointly assigned certain tasks than on voluntary fellowship, more on crude dominance–subordination relations than on mutual interest. Respect for outstanding personal qualities or achievements did not readily develop, because of the overriding importance attaching to status and to seniority, and because of the view that such achievements are predestined and hence independent of personal effort. Despite the emphasis on the virtues of toughness and a Spartan courage, one ventures to suggest that the aggressiveness of the Pedi boy sprang from pronounced anxiety, held in check only by conformity, by the assurance gained from status and by the release of tension which participation in group activities, especially fighting, could provide.

The above excerpt is an illustration of how the distortion of African people's ways of being was enacted. It also demonstrates how stereotypes were engineered for racist ends. It is clear from the excerpt that the research disregarded the culture from which participants emerged and relied solely on the researcher's own understanding of the world, to analyse the participants. Even more important is the fact that Africans did not need this study – it was only conducted for colonial purposes and was therefore unethical.

5.1.1.1 Social Psychology

As seen in the discussion above, attempts to understand individual behaviour from an African perspective need not be divorced from the socio-cultural context from which the behaviour emanates. Also, as illustrated in the above case study which draws from Simon Biesheuvel's (1959) problematic work, it is important to respect the background of the people at whom specific knowledge production endeavours are aimed. Just like the study of personality, Social Psychology has always been largely based on Western notions of what it means to be a human in society. In this module, our aim is to demonstrate that when we approach Psychology from an African perspective, the very foundations of the discipline become irrelevant. It is particularly true for categories such as Social and Personality Psychology, among others. This, because from an African perspective, the social and personal are not thought of in fragments. If we are to continue to use these categories while claiming to be providing an understanding of Psychology that draws from an African perspective, we might end up with an adaptation of Western psychology for the African context. To avoid that, we would like you, as you study this module, to not expect a clear-cut differentiation between the various categories of Psychology. We need to emphasise that the African ontologies (i.e., the ways Africans understand the world) do not fragment the individual from the social. It is through the invasion of African knowledges by colonialism that Africans were forced to view the world through a Westernised lens. It is this Westernised lens that still dominates what is known about being human in society – in other words, Social Psychology. In this section, we draw from the concept of *ubuntu* to illustrate that there are other understandings of being human in the world, that could be applicable to the South African socio-cultural context.

5.1.1.2. Leading Theories in Social Psychology

Before we delve into an in-depth discussion on what the concept of Social Psychology might entail from an African perspective, we felt it was important to clarify the issue of what is often referred to as "leading theories" in different fields of study, including Psychology. The most notable theories of Social Psychology include the following:

- Attribution theory, which refers to how we perceive others when they make decisions
- Self-perception theory, or how we perceive ourselves
- Social identity theory, which refers to how we categorise ourselves and others
- Cognitive dissonance theory, which refers to how our minds have trouble processing conflicting information
- Evolutionary theory, which refers to how and why we see people the way we do (Charles Darwin is the main proponent)
- Other theories, which include social learning, cognitive bias schemas, social comparison, social exchange, the triangular theory of love, and the bystander effect.

From the standpoints of decolonisation and Africanisation – which the University of South Africa (Unisa) has adopted to ensure that what is taught reflects the institution's viewpoint – the concept of "leading theories" is flawed. It is flawed in the sense that it speaks against the African understanding of knowledge production. It considers Euro-American theories and work developed from a Western lens (even by non-Western scholars) as leading discoveries in a particular field. In Social Psychology, it is often theories from Europe and North America, which are based on a Western understanding of the world, that are dominant. This leaves works that are more local and more relevant, on the periphery. Another problematic aspect of the notion of "leading theories" is the very understanding of the concept of a theory. Each society has produced knowledge since time immemorial, but such knowledge has been marginalised, with the status of works being considered valid and thus theoretical, based on how closely they adhere to the Western ethos of knowledge production. In this section, we thus wish to clarify that we decided against giving credence to the notion of "leading theories", as it would have meant pushing the African understanding of Social Psychology to the margins. However, this perspective will be addressed in the section dealing with the Western understanding of Psychology.

5.2 Understanding how Individual Behaviour is Influenced by Personality and

   Social Contexts

As you may have noticed, the concept of *ubuntu/botho* is a thread that interconnects all the sections of this module. This is the case because *ubuntu/botho* is the foundation from which life springs, to make sense of human interactions and existence. This makes *ubuntu/botho* particularly compatible with Social Psychology. *Ubuntu* as an overarching ethic explains the psychology of people in social settings. *Ubuntu/botho,* as will be displayed in this unit, not only helps us understand individual behaviour, but also contextualises such behaviour within a social context.

Ubuntu/botho could be defined as an ethic and philosophy that informs and guides the behaviour of the people in a society. It is not only limited to certain behaviours, but is widely applied to ensure a harmonious life within a social setting. *Ubuntu/botho* governs both the personal and communal aspects of life. This is done through cultural principles that are encapsulated in *isintu/setho*, which is defined as the culture that draws from, and is guided by, *ubuntu/botho* (the ethic).

5.3 Understanding the Assumptions of Each Sub-discipline in Terms of Human

   Behaviour

In this section, we aim to explain the interconnection between personality and Social Psychology. We believe that the concept of *ubuntu/botho* facilitates this connection. *Ubuntu* is *isintu* internalised, and manifested outward. It encompasses the values an individual enacts as a demonstration of *umntu/motho* as an ethical being. Being ethical is an overarching quality of being *umntu*. *Ubuntu* means a person's behaviour is guided by the principles of his/her culture. *Umntu/motho* is therefore an entity that conducts *ubuntu* into being, experience, and truth. *Umntu/motho* makes the practise of *ubuntu* possible, through speech and knowledge. *Isimilo/seemo* is centred on the concept of wholeness, which does not deny individuality, but acknowledges other relational elements through which the individual comes to know him/herself. The concept of wholeness assumes that

umntu/motho cannot be described by a single set of physical or psychological characteristics, while excluding other critical aspects such as the spiritual or metaphysical (Ramose, 2005). This, according to Ramose (2005), means that human individuality and the larger environmental whole are mutually established. The larger environmental whole, seen as the encompassing physical and metaphysical universe, together with the human universe (i.e., community), is the ontological and epistemological foundation of human activity (Ramose, 2005).

Africans' communality not only extends to humans, but also acknowledges and encompasses other living and non-living beings, such as plants and animals. They acknowledge that humans do not live life in isolation and need other forms of life to sustain their own lives. Not only do they acknowledge living beside them, but also living with them, and have taken on some of these other forms of being, as that which forms their identity (Mbiti, 1971). This is where the concept of totems finds meaning. In most Bantu cultures, each clan has its own animal/plant which is regarded as an integral member of the family. Usually, the characteristics and/or behaviours of that animal also find expression in the characteristics and behaviours of family members. Thus, the totem is part of that family's identity. For example, if a clan identify themselves as Bakwena (crocodiles), the family displays traits, behaviours or certain aspects of that animal. It could also mean they might have lived in an area where crocodiles reside, thus sharing a deeper connection with those animals. Africans have a mystical relationship with animals, in the sense that they use them in rituals or ceremonies, and the kind of animal used depends on the kind of ceremony that will take place (Semenya & Mokwena, 2012).

5.3.1 Social Psychology and the Colonial Context

It is difficult to apply any concept of Western Social Psychology in an African context, because doing so requires careful consideration of the socio-political context which emanates from the colonial disruption of African life. Dominant themes in Social Psychology, such as notions of stereotypes, crowd behaviour, aggression and violence,

are usually decontextualised and lack a nuanced approach. In this module, we wish to emphasise the importance of being cognisant of the contexts from which those aspects of social behaviour occur. Psychology in South Africa in particular, and Africa in general, accounts for the variations in the societal ills we see today. Stereotypes about group behaviour were engineered through psychological research, such as that studied in the preceding section. The various forms of societal violence can be directly linked to colonial violence, which rid people of their ways of shaping human behaviour. Thus, drawing from concepts such as *ubuntu/botho* is a way of bringing hidden African epistemologies to the centre of learning. It seeks to return the power to define and make sense of the world, to the people who were denied this power during the colonial era.

5.3.1.1 Intergenerational Trauma as Part of the Colonial Context

As mentioned, the forceful removals and land grabs visited on Africans translated to the removal of their roots, and thus their ways of knowing and existing in the world. It also involved the loss of control and ownership of their knowledge systems, beliefs, and behaviours, and subjected them to overt racism, giving rise to the captive or colonised mind. The trauma of displacement can be described as the experience of loss, humiliation, and social and cultural dislocation, and includes the violence which accompanied such displacement (Alayarian, 2007; Kuusisto-Arponen, 2009; Wade et al., 2005). According to Kuusisto-Arponen (2009, p. 48), the experience of displacement is not easily forgotten. Prager (2003) defines trauma as "a wound that never heals. It succeeds in passing [on] the experience from one generation to the next. The present is lived as if it were the past and the result is that the next generation is deprived of its sense of social location and its capacity to creatively define itself autonomously from the former." This transmission of trauma usually occurs from parent to child in a vertical, downward direction, but can also move in an upward fashion, as it did in South Africa during apartheid. The violence visited on young black South Africans traumatised their parents, who often watched as their children were abused or killed. Subsequently, many of those

children who survived, carry their trauma of being abused or seeing their peers being abused and tortured (Hoosain, 2013).

As Gagné (1998, pp. 355–373) explains, the effects of colonialism are intergenerational, in that the resultant trauma led to dependency, cultural genocide, racism, and alcoholism in communities. This further led to family violence, sexual abuse and accidental deaths within indigenous communities which were previously exposed to colonialism. In line with an understanding of group behaviour, and how individuals connect with the members of the groups to which they belong, some of the responses to historic trauma include elevated suicide rates, self-destructive behaviour, substance abuse, identification with the pain that their ancestors endured, the fixation of trauma, somatic symptoms that have no medical basis, anxiety, guilt and chronic grief (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 54).

In line with the principles of *ubuntu*, the trauma of displacement can be described as social or structural trauma, as it is not only felt by individuals within a family, but also collectively within a community. Hence, it is also called collective trauma. The individual is interlocked within a network of connections that give him/her emotional, social, and material support. It gives a sense of social "embeddedness", belonging and meaning in life. Events that threaten the network of connections and a person's embeddedness in the network, traumatises the individual. This leads us to ask how trauma is transmitted.

Mechanisms of trauma transmission are biological, familial, and societal (Weingarten, 2004). The biological means of trauma transmission focus on the neurobiology of trauma. When the stress response system is activated for prolonged periods of time, the stress hormone cortisol increases, which leads to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]) could be passed on to the unborn foetus. As an example, Holocaust survivors and their children were found to have lower levels of cortisol, resulting in an increased reactivity to stressful situations and a distorted view of the world and the self (Lehrner & Yehuda, 2018).

Another way in which trauma is transmitted, is through family communication mechanisms. These include projective identification, silence, and over-disclosure. Projective identification occurs when an individual projects unacceptable feelings onto

another person, which can happen as part of any ordinary interaction. However, projective identification can be pathological if the projection is rigidly maintained, and the person being projected onto cannot challenge the contents of what is being projected. That is, the person projecting his/her feelings, manipulates the person onto whom the feelings are being projected.

On the other hand, individuals who have suffered trauma may disclose graphic traumatic details to their children as a way of helping them navigate an unsafe, untrustworthy world. Socialisation is a process in which values, beliefs, and behaviours are passed down. The trauma of displacement has been transmitted through the mechanisms of socialisation and social learning (Rosenthal, 1985; Wareham et al., 2009). Thus, when beliefs help people cope with threatening issues of racism or poverty, these will be retained and socialised into succeeding generations. For example, South African racial attitudes have been passed down from generation to generation, and today, even after the demise of apartheid, social interaction among adolescents largely unfolds along racial lines (Keizan & Duncan, 2010). Traumatic events can be confusing and complicated, making it difficult for parents who have experienced political violence, to speak about it. The way they share about their trauma becomes indirect and uncertain, especially because sensitive topics are often avoided. Although we are accustomed to thinking silence is the absence of sound, its function in families is much more complex (Danieli, 1998), given the multiple and embedded meanings it communicates (Weingarten, 2004). Thus, while silence and silencing aim to shield a child from the horrors the parents experienced, in the long run, the danger is that the children may fantasise about the missing information and create more frightening stories. In this way, children come to bear witness to the unresolved trauma of their parents, without necessarily knowing the full details.

Silence as trauma transmission not only occurs at the family level, but also at a societal level. Two types of silence operate at a societal level, namely the silence produced through state oppression and terror, and that which is produced by social scientists and historians. Silence is therefore one of the key mechanisms of trauma transmission (Weingaten, 2004). Indirect information, or information which is shared through community networks or overheard stories, also serve as silence, and this communicates

that the trauma is indescribable. Collective silence is often accompanied by violence – particularly political violence, which has been experienced in multiple ways in South Africa.

Another form of trauma transmission, at a societal level, is shame. Shame is defined as a negative emotion, a feeling of being lacking as a human being, in some vital way (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Collectively, a society can experience shame which transforms itself into humiliation, where a region or a nation might suffer and transmit its group identity onto the next generation. Shame is not just about failing to get our needs met. Shame is, more importantly, a response to the message that people give themselves about why their needs were not met; it is about the individual's interpretation that the lack is due to a deficiency within him/herself. Furthermore, shame in trauma survivors leaves them with unacknowledged grief, and they are often denied the chance to mourn (Davoine & Gaudilliere, 2004). According to Western culture, mourning is for the immediate family and next of kin. In the context of South Africa, black people were denied an opportunity to grieve the loss of ancestors and members of their extended kin.

As indicated by Adonis (2016), it would be interesting to determine the transgenerational implications that apartheid might have for white South Africans. Arguably, collective shame and guilt are transmitted across generations. The legacy of apartheid and colonialism is difficult to engage with, and has been addressed (albeit superficially), therefore it would be relevant to focus on how this may affect young white South Africans, particularly as regards issues related to guilt and silencing.

The DSM-IV, a diagnostic manual that is predominantly used in Western societies and also in South Africa, is based on Eurocentric values of trauma (Denborough, 2008; Evans-Campbell, 2008). The DSM-IV describes trauma as an event that involves actual or threatened death, or serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of self or others. Traditional ways of defining trauma are focused on the individual and are based on a medical model of PTSD symptoms, rather than the meaning people attach to an event. The traditional definitions of trauma are not appropriate; thus a broader and indigenous definition is required.

Task based on this unit

In a discussion forum on myUnisa with your e-tutor, please complete the following task:

- Take the time to find definitions of trauma and how it influences people, especially in the South African context.
- Discuss the mechanisms of trauma transmission from a victim's and a perpetrator's viewpoint.
- Now that you have some understanding of trauma and its influence on individuals, discuss with your group how this may influence personality.

Social Psychology and Knowledge Production

In closing, we would like to reiterate the point made throughout this module, that knowledge approached from an African perspective dismantles long-standing views of what valid knowledge is, and how that knowledge is produced. In the context of Africa, knowledge production is a collective process, thus knowledge about phenomena cannot be attributed to a single source. This makes the concept of having so-called "leading theories" inapplicable to African knowledge. For example, the concept of *ubuntu*, which is central to African ways of explaining Social Psychology, is not individually produced. Even though some scholars write about it, it would be flawed to call them *ubuntu* theorists, because *ubuntu* is a philosophy that belongs to African humanity. Its application is lived through culture, rather than being prescribed in classrooms.

Summary

In this learning unit we discussed contemporary definitions of personality, distinguishing between personality as viewed from an African and from a Western perspective. We also delved into an ontological view of personality, as traditionally understood from an African context, without using Western lenses. The history of personality psychology and colonisation was discussed, focusing on how Western worldviews of personality were

imposed on Africans via ill means and unscientific methods, to perpetuate the "superiority" of Western ideologies. The unit also discussed the concept of Social Psychology from an African perspective, focusing on the philosophy of *ubuntu*, its meaning and praxis in Africa. The intergenerational traumas emanating from colonial structures were discussed, to demonstrate how colonisation disrupted the social life of African people, and their ways of functioning in an interconnected society.

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