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Research topics in Social Psychology in Brazil

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Abstract

How is the portrait of the Brazilian scientific production in Social Psychology of the past few years? This study aims to address specifically this question, by visiting the articles published by Brazilian scholars since 1980, all of whom have been recognized and sponsored by the Brazilian National Council on Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). Production from 80 Brazilian researchers was analysed, based on phenomena traditionally studied by Social Psychologists (e.g., Social Influence), which served as *a priori* categories. Articles that reflect studies developed in 5 geopolitical regions of the country, but data showed regions South and Southeast with the highest concentration in terms of academic production. Such finding is discussed in terms of the influence of an individualist culture on Brazilian research. Observing the main Social Psychology topics studied by Brazilians, it was noticed a centrality of the “Psychological” approach to Social Psychology, mainly originated in English-speaking countries.

Keywords: Brazilian scientific production; Social Psychology research; cultural influences on social psychological studies.

Resumo

Temas de pesquisa em Psicologia Social no Brasil. Qual é o retrato da produção científica brasileira em Psicologia Social nos últimos anos? O objetivo deste estudo é focar essa questão, analisando artigos publicados por pesquisadores brasileiros desde 1980, especificamente os autores reconhecidos e patrocinados pelo Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq). Foi analisada a produção de 80 pesquisadores brasileiros, baseado em fenômenos tradicionalmente estudados por psicólogos sociais (ex., Influência Social), que serviram como categorias *a priori*. Esses artigos refletem estudos desenvolvidos nas 5 regiões geopolíticas do país, mas os dados mostraram que as regiões Sul e Sudeste concentraram a maior parte da produção acadêmica. Esse resultado é discutido em termos da influência de uma cultura individualista nas pesquisas brasileiras. Observando os principais tópicos em Psicologia Social estudados pelos brasileiros, nota-se a centralidade da abordagem “psicológica” da Psicologia Social, originada principalmente nos países anglofalantes.

Palavras-chave: produção científica brasileira; pesquisa em Psicologia Social; influências culturais nos estudos em psicologia social.

This paper aims to provide a general overview on the diversity of studies that characterize the Brazilian Social Psychology from different theoretical standings, without disregarding the classic topics of Social Psychology. Firstly, it presents a statistical survey on Social Psychology scholar researchers¹ at the *Plataforma Lattes* of the National Council on Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), additionally to the respective articles published in this field since the 1980's. Then, it is discussed the implications of such production to the Brazilian Social Psychology.

The survey pointed out the existence of 113 CNPq Social Psychology scholars. However, after different procedures to filter and depurate the existing data, the analysis resulted in a more accurate figure of 80 national researchers, distributed as

follows in the five geopolitical regions of Brazil: North Region: 1 researcher; Northeast Region: 12 researchers; Mid-West Region: 5 researcher; Southeast Region: 44 researchers; and, South Region: 18 researchers. As regards the scientific production of the researchers, 2,329 articles have been published since 1980, pointing out a considerable production in the area.

However, two aspects of the survey are worth mentioning. Firstly, not all articles necessarily survey or deal with variables considered as “traditional” to Social Psychology. Many of the works could be more properly classified in the sub-area of Work and Organizational Psychology, for example, to mention just one. Secondly, one cannot assume that all Social Psychology researchers are represented by this group. Although it is clearly a prominent group of researchers which, for this reason, had

their research projects recognized by the CNPq, it is widely known the tough competition and cut of resources for research in Brazil, both in Human Sciences and in the field of Psychology in general, and particularly in the sub-area of Social Psychology. However, this sampling could be considered to be representative of the scientific production in Social Psychology in Brazil, and the discussion of this work is based on that production.

A preliminary analysis emphasizes the distribution of the production found in each region of Brazil. It discloses that South and Southeast Regions concentrate more researchers in Brazil, where the Southeast Region stands for more than 50% of the sampling, both in number of researchers and in amount of academic production. Hall (1997) highlights that a nation cannot be understood as just a political entity; rather, it should also be construed as a collective that makes sense: a system of cultural representation. According to the author, people are connected to their nations by cultural traits unique to their country, extrapolating the idea that their cohesion merely derives from having been born in the same territory. Therefore, it is a symbolic community, thus justifying its power of building feelings of loyalty and identity. In this context, Brazil stands for a very heterogeneous country in cultural terms. That is so because of its large territory and its settlement process in the 16th century, when several social groups were created in consequence of the European and African immigrations. According to Ribeiro (1997), the Brazilian Southeast region can be represented by a sub-culture named by the author as *caipira*. The history of the region – notably the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais – starts with gold and diamond mining, followed by coffee growing in the 18th century and, later on, becoming the industrial center of South America. Torres and Dessen (2008) suggest that this region, jointly with the South region, present Individualist-Vertical cultural values (Triandis, 1995), where autonomy is postulated, individuals perceive themselves as different one from another, and power inequality can be expected. Although this inequality is accepted, individuals who prefer these cultural values do not consent to social rules that perpetuate inequality. Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk and Gelfand (1995) suggest that competition is an important aspect observed in these cultures, and that these individuals are particularly concerned about comparing themselves to the others. Thus, people have the right of being equals, although the existence of inequality is recognized and accepted. Altogether, the data raise the question: does the debate about the “Psychological” Social Psychology, mainly originated in English-speaking countries (Sampson, 1988) and, therefore, individualist, necessarily reflect this cultural standard in the Brazilian scientific production? Is the area development impaired main by the prejudice of Social Psychologists themselves, rather than by the prejudices they should study? If that is true, such prejudices work as schemata, serving as a kind of “form” that ends up by reducing the wealth found in reality.

Among other issues, this survey finds out that there is slow-paced development of Social Psychology in Brazil, notably when one observes the quality of empirical research carried out in the last 30 years. Perhaps the Brazilian researchers should urgently diversify their research methods, moving away from current

reality and studies mainly based on self-reported questionnaires with small samplings, toward data on behavior observation in large samplings from the several subcultures described by Ribeiro (1997). This would allow for interpreting the similarities and differences between the Brazilian subcultures. In face of the large size of the country and its huge cultural and regional diversity, Brazil bears the ideal vocation for such comparisons.

Social Psychology benefits of theorizations from great psychological systems, but also presents its own developed theorizations based on research carried out by Brazilian researchers. There seems to be a problem caused by an increasing interest in new areas and consequent abandon or lack of systematic accumulation of knowledge in more “traditional” areas. Van der Vijver and Leung (2000) noted, in the last decade, a greater worldwide development of Social Psychology applied to cross-cultural study, notably in research about Individualism/Collectivism. However, it does not seem to be the Brazilian production reality. The field still presents micro-theories, failing in developing pretentious studies globally comparable to explain human behavior in the social context. However, several psychosocial phenomena have been identified and analyzed, emphasizing the factors that influence them. In the last four decades, Social Psychology has been mainly influenced by the social-cognitive Psychology that evaluates social phenomena in the individual light. During one of the so-called “crisis of Social Psychology” in the 1960’s and 1970’s, studies started approaching more phenomena comprising the interaction and relation between individuals. This crisis stood for a criticism and self-criticism of social psychologists regarding the validity of the methods employed in their research works, mainly experimental ones; the social relevance of their findings; and, the ethics involved in some of their experiments.

Until the 1970’s, the US Psychological Social Psychology was the most influent in Brazil, just like happened throughout Latin America. One of the most popular works adopted by the Social Psychology by that time, and which expresses such trend, is the book *Psicologia Social* by Aroldo Rodrigues, published by the first time in 1972. The author was also responsible for the development of a fruitful line of research in Psychological Social Psychology in Brazil, disseminated through a series of articles published in national and international journals in the 1970’s and 1980’s. In the remainder Latin American countries, however, the work *Psicologia Social de las Américas* (Kimble et al., 2002) is published, analyzing Psychological Social Psychology under a different focus: the critical or historical-critical Social Psychology. Additionally to the increased production of articles and Master’s Degree dissertations, the first Doctor’s degree courses on this area were created, and the first theses were defended. Moreover, scientific associations were created to promote systematic scientific debate through meetings with the category in different scientific events.

According to Bomfim (2003), the Brazilian Social Psychology was marked by two opposite tendencies, represented by Aroldo Rodrigues and José Augusto Dela Coleta (empiricist, adopting an experimental-cognitive approach interested in individual processes related to social context) and Silvia Lane (Marxist and social-historical). The theoretical and

methodological disagreements in this field have not only evidenced antagonist stands regarding important topics in Social Psychology; it has also provided visibility to some authors that represented such rivalries.

Classic phenomena studied in Social Psychology

Some of the topics considered to be typical to Social Psychology have inspired the proliferation of studies developed in Brazil. Although pursuing different phenomena (e.g., Person's Perception; Social Influence; Prejudice and Discrimination; Causal Attribution), were marked by a common trait: the influence of an individualist culture. This argument should be further developed throughout the session on Cross-Cultural Psychology.

Among the traditional research topics, social psychologists who are interested in the person's perception try to determine how people make judgments on the others – *impression formation* and how they control the others' judgment about them – *impression management*. The *impression formation* was more broadly researched based on the following:

1) *The schemata and prototypes*. People develop schemata, or information networks that are organized and interconnected in the mind, based on previous personal and social experiences, using these to analyze current situations. Research on schemata has shown that people use to pay more attention to evidences that corroborate the pre-existing schemata: they construe information and events consistently with their schemata, and tend to recall better the information consistent to their schemata (Cohen, 1981; Rothbart, Evans, & Fulero, 1979). The prototypes, in turn, represent another kind of mental structure, and refer to models we build about typical qualities of given groups or categories (e.g., leaders, criminals, and elderly).

2) *Heuristic*. In order to facilitate the processing and use of large quantities of information to which people are exposed everyday, they develop "conduct rules", or the heuristic. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) have distinguished two kinds of heuristic, which could distort the impression formation and other social judgments. When the *representative* heuristic is used, judgment is based on the similitude this person bears to a member "typical" to a group (e.g., "she dresses like a lawyer, so she should be a lawyer"). The *availability* heuristic is the tendency toward using the information more easily accessed in memory. For example, participants of the research by Srull and Wyer (1980) tended to construe ambiguous social situations as a "hostile situation" when exposed to words that suggested hostility (e.g., fight, discussion) before analyzing the situation. Although heuristic can help us in our everyday social life, it can also lead to misjudgment, since it makes people disregard important pieces of information. For example, the base rate fallacy is the tendency to ignoring information related to characteristics or events that are frequent among the population (e.g., children in street situation).

3) *Exemplars and abstractions*. The study on impression formation in a cognitive light showed that exemplars and abstractions are important contributors to the impressions we build about the others (Sherman & Klein, 1994). Exemplars are concrete behaviors found in an individual. These are particularly important during the early stages of impression formation. As our

experience as individuals expand, our impressions become more determined by mental abstractions that derive from repeated observations of a person's behavior.

4) *Core traits*. Asch (1946) has developed the main studies on this topic, showing how a core characteristic is acquired in the whole. Thus, a person described as "smart, skilled, determined, practical and careful" tends to be perceived in a more positive way than one described as "smart, skilled, cold, determined, practical and careful." According to Asch, that is so because "cold" is a core trait, more relevant than the other traits, since it is a unique information associated to a large number of characteristics.

5) *Primacy effect*. When a person faces discrepant information about a person, usually his/her impression is more influenced by the information presented first. This phenomenon was named "primacy effect." However, under some circumstances, the "recent effect" can happen. If an irrelevant activity takes place between the presentations of two conflicting pieces of information about a person, or if the individual is warned to avoid making immediate judgment, the latest information on the person should have stronger impact on the impression formation.

6) *Physical attraction*. Physical appearance has strong impact on the impression formation. For example, there is a greater tendency toward forgiving charming wrongdoing, than those who are not so attractive (Dion, 1972). Charming children are also more favored when it comes to IQ and further academic success (Clifford & Walster, 1973).

7) *Stigma*. Stigmatized individuals are those holding characteristics that are not appraised by a social group. Nowadays, stigmata include some physical and mental disorders, additionally to factors such as poverty or obesity. The responses to stigmatized individuals are affected by factors like the stigma visibility and beliefs on the individual's ability of controlling the stigma. For example, the reaction to HIV-infected people tends to be more negative when the virus was acquired due to promiscuous sexual behavior than when the virus is acquired through blood transfusion (Lima & Vala, 2004).

8) *Social context*. Impression formation is also influenced by social context. This influence has been demonstrated by Rosenhan (1973), who used in his research eight "pseudo-patients" who were admitted in mental care institutions, alleging to be hearing voices. After admitted in the hospitals, the pseudo-patients' symptoms immediately ceased, and they started acting normally when interacting with other patients or with the hospital staff. Although more than 1/3 of the real patients stated that the pseudo-patients were healthy, these were diagnosed as schizophrenic, except for one. The results of this study pointed out that behaviors tend to be perceived consistently to social context.

On the other hand, the social psychologists interested in *impression management* (or "self-presentation") have identified several strategies (or behavioral tactics) used by individuals to build an image or identity that is socially accepted. One of the most usual methods of impression management is known as *engratiation* (Snyder, 1987). This method refers to tactics employed by individuals with weaker social power to increase or

improve their image before another person with stronger social power and, thus, reduce their power difference. *Engratiation* includes techniques of “improvement” or “upgrade” of the self and of the others. Compliment and agreement are some examples of this technique. Other methods of impression management are intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification (convince the other that the individual is a nice person), and supplication (convince the others that the individual deserves or needs something).

According to Snyder (1987), people are also differentiated in terms of *self-monitoring* or their ability or need for managing the impression that others build about them. Individuals with high self-monitoring capacity analyze the social situation through their “public self” and, then, endeavor to adjust their public self to the situation. These people are exceptionally good in determining which behaviors, attitudes and other reactions are socially desired or expected in different situations. They are also extremely sensitive to the impression management techniques used by the others and, thus, use the same techniques to their benefit. On the other hand, individuals with low self-monitoring capacity try to change the situation to adjust it to their public self. These people are mainly guided by their own beliefs and values.

Social Influence is one of the most studied topics in Social Psychology, besides social perception. Social influence occurs when attitudes or behaviors of a person directly or indirectly result from social pressure. The most typical responses to social pressure are: conformity, compliance and obedience.

Conformity, for example, happens when an individual changes his/her actions to correspond to the actions of other individuals, as a response to indirect social pressure, either actual or imagined. It could involve public or private acceptance of behaviors, attitudes or beliefs. Sherif (1935) was the first one to research conformity, using the self-kinetic effect – or perception phenomenon – where a stationary light point seems to move in a dark room. Sherif asked the participants to estimate how far the light point had been displaced. When they made the estimates alone, the light point position disclosed high variation. However, when participants were gathered, a “convergence effect” could be observed, i.e., after listening to the estimates by the other group members (in fact, research assistants), participants used to conform to the rule imposed by the group. Asch (1958) carried out a similar research, but replaced the self-kinetic effect for a non-ambiguous task. The participants should find which line in a set of three lines was of the same size as a fourth line. Although there was no right answer, Asch observed that when participants were put together with a group of confederates, most of their responses conformed to the research assistants’ responses, even when these were clearly incorrect.

Compliance, in turn, happens as a response to a direct request of a given group or individual. Research works on “compliance professionals” show that these individuals basically employ six strategies (Cialdini, 1993): reciprocity, consistency, social validation, friendship, authority and delimitation of limits. Cialdini suggests that sellers tend to get more compliance when they emphasize the negative consequences of not buying the product being offered.

Another topic surveyed in the field of social influence refers to *Obedience*. Obedience is the submission of an individual to the

demand of an authority. The experiments carried out by Milgram (1963) became classic in the field of obedience, and continue showing the power of social influence, despite the criticisms due to ethical and methodological issues. In the experiments, participants played a role of “teachers” and the other person (in fact, a research assistant) would be the “student.” The teacher should make the student recall a list of words. However, whenever the student made a mistake, the research would order the teacher to apply an electrical discharge to the student, and each subsequent electrical shock was stronger. Milgram’s research aimed at getting to know if participants would agree in obeying to the authority (the researcher), even if such obedience could result in pain to another person. Despite the variation in the approximation between “student” and “teacher”, Milgram found results that confirm obedience to a figure of authority: the researcher.

In this scene, the investigation on *Prejudice and Discrimination* is also outstanding. Prejudice refers to intolerant, unfair or negative *attitudes* toward an individual, just because he/she belongs to a given group, while discrimination refers to negative, unfair or aggressive *behaviors* in relation to members of a given group. Many concepts explain the phenomenon of prejudice and discrimination.

Among these, the *stereotypy* is exceptional. Stereotypes are “schemata” oriented to whole groups containing simplified, strict and generalized impressions in relation to the members of those groups. Stereotypes have strong effects on how social information is processed: faster, people pay more attention to information consistent to their stereotypes, and deny or refuse information inconsistent to a stereotype. Although stereotype can be considered as a natural process that prevents a cognitive overload by reducing a large amount of information to a manageable number of categories, it could become problematic – i.e., lead to prejudice and discrimination – when the traits assigned to a group are mainly negative ones, when the person who is stereotyping is dogmatic and does not adjust his/her beliefs to new information, or when the stereotype generates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Prejudice and discrimination are also associated to the belief that a group represents a direct threat to an individual’s well-being. This explanation is reinforced by the fact that incidents of racial violence historically increase in times of economic downturn. Sears (1988) developed the idea of *symbolic* or *modern racism* proposing that prejudice and discrimination are weaker and less present than they used to be, since these represent a form of resistance to racial changes. Symbolic racists deny their prejudice and put social and economic problems of minority groups down to internal factors (e.g., short effort or discipline). Recently, the notion of *modern racism* has also been applied to gender. According to Swim, Aiking, Hall and Hunter (1995), modern sexism is characterized by the denial of discrimination against women, and for the resentment at demands for social equality.

Finally, in his book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport (1954) argues that since prejudice has multiple determinants, focusing on only one will not lead to understanding or completely solving the problem. However, Allport advocates that the many causes

of prejudice are internalized by the individual and, thus, the individual is who engages in discriminatory practices and can learn to act in more equalitarian and less discriminatory ways. In terms of interventions, Allport suggests that sometimes “common sense” should not go before the “sense of right”, and that laws forbidding discrimination could be efficient, even if these do not reflect public consensus.

Additionally to prejudice and discrimination, another topic commonly investigated in Social Psychology deals with *Attribution of Cause*. The term attribution refers to the process of determining or inferring the reason why a given behavior or event happens. Heider (1958) started a significant share of the work on attribution, developing a theory suggesting that we naturally develop theories on the causes of the behavior. The research developed by Heider and other academics disclosed that attributions of cause may be described in terms of taxonomy. Therefore, behavior can be apportioned to the individual’s dispositional characteristics (internal ones), as well as to his/her humor, skills or desire or situational factors (external ones) like the characteristics of the task, social status, or physical environment. Human reactions can also esteem from factors perceived as stable or constant, or instable or temporary factors. Moreover, individuals find that some behaviors bring specific effects (involving a limited number of events, conditions or other phenomena), while others bring global consequences (i.e., affect a wide variety of phenomena). Finally, people understand that some causes of the behavior are under the individual’s control (e.g., effort, attention), while others are incontrollable (e.g., aptitude, luck). According to Heider, these criteria lead to a process of judgment of guilt or grant of rewards to the actor of the behavior.

A consistent finding in surveys about attribution of cause is that observers tend to overestimate the role played by dispositional factors and ignore the role played by situational factors when inferring the cause of an individual’s behavior. For example, an observer tends to attribute an individual’s failure in performing a task more to a result of the individual’s lack of intelligence or skill, than to a result of a characteristic of the task itself (i.e., difficulty). This failure in attribution is known as *Fundamental Attribution Error* and is widely used to explain many phenomena, such as the attributions that advocate for the *belief in a fair world* – people’s tendency toward considering the victim as the cause of its own misfortune (Lerner, 1966).

In the light of Cross-Cultural Psychology, the research about attribution of cause, however, suggests that the tendency to overestimate the role played by dispositional factors is a clear characteristic of individualist cultures (e.g., North European countries, the United States). Research developed with more collectivist cultures (e.g., China, India) found out that members of these cultures tend to make more situational attributions. According to Morris and Peng (1994), these differences are related to implicit theories on social behavior: while individualist cultures adopt an individual-focused theory on social behavior, collectivist cultures tend to adhere to a situation-focused theory.

Cross-cultural Psychology and the studies on individualism/collectivism

All these classic topics in Social Psychology can be discussed in the light of comparisons between individualist and collectivist cultures. Resuming the claim that these and other classic surveys in Social Psychology are gathered by their origin in individualist countries, it is worth discussing the proposal of Cross-Cultural Psychology. The development of these surveys in an individualist context also bears an individualist bias, which comes from researchers themselves and is reflected in the subjects recruited to the research, in the selection of the method used, and even in the phenomenon surveyed itself. If culture can be understood as lenses that distort reality and our understanding of the world, it would be useful arguing to which extent these research and their findings can be applied directly to other groups of different nature, like Brazil – a country mentioned in literature as an example of collectivist culture (Triandis, 1995).

However, the debate on cultural manifestations in academic research demands clarifying the concept of culture, which has been deeply discussed in a different – and even supplementary – way by many authors (Hofstede, 1993; Smith & Bond, 1999; Triandis, 1994). The *Aurélio Buarque de Holanda* Portuguese Language Dictionary bears a quite general definition that, somehow, summarizes the several definitions found in scientific literature (Holanda, 2001). There, culture is presented as the complex of behavior standards, beliefs, institutions and other spiritual and material values transmitted in a collective way, and characteristic to a society. This notion seems to be supplementary to that presented by Kluckhohn (1962), according to which the variable culture could be divided into objective elements (expressed in artifacts produced by social groups) and subjective elements (values, beliefs and rules of such groups). Following Kluckhohn’s proposal, it seems quite clear that Social Psychology is mainly interested on the subjective elements of culture. However, there are many of such subjective elements, making this a very wide concept to be used in scientific works. This point has been discussed by many authors (Smith, Bond, & Kagitçibasi, 2006) who advocate for the “unpacking” of the concept of culture, i.e., the need for identifying, clarifying and isolating those subjective elements to allow for their use as variables of research.

In an effort to “unpack” (Smith & Bond, 1999) culture, besides identifying value structures that could enable the differentiation of cultures, Geert Hofstede has gathered data in more than 50 countries, investigating the work experience, stability, teams building, and other variables related to the organizational context. One of the main findings of his work is that culture can be used as a causal and predicting variable. His research evidenced that people bear different intentions, assign different attributions to the same situation, and even behave in different ways due to the cultural group to which they belong. According to Triandis (1994), Hofstede’s research provides a set of benchmarks through which other studies could be organized at conceptual level. Smith, Bond and Kagitçibasi (2006) also

emphasize that Hofstede's work conceptualizes national culture in terms of its meaning, thus enabling the study of cultures by surveying values in representative samplings of members of each of those cultures.

In his work, Hofstede (1980; 1983; 1984; 1991; 1993) has identified the variation of four cultural dimensions: Masculinity – Femininity; Uncertainty Avoidance; Power Distance; and, Individualism – Collectivism. Smith and Bond (1999), Smith, Bond and Kagitçibasi (2006), Torres (2009), among others, have developed extensive discussions and reviews on these dimensions. This work is limited to briefly describing such dimensions, linking them to the objectives of this paper.

Masculinity is found in societies with huge sexual differentiation, while *femininity* is a trait of cultures where sexual differentiation is minimal. Hofstede (1980) also found that female countries assign more emphasis to life quality than to investment on career or work, while the opposite is true to male cultures. *Uncertainty Avoidance*, in turn, is reflected on an emphasis to ritual behaviors, rules and job stability. Hofstede observed that countries with high levels of uncertainty avoidance tend to be more ideological and less pragmatic (Hofstede, 1991) regarding decision-making than countries with low uncertainty avoidance.

The *power distance* – the third dimension – refers to which extent the members of a given culture accept power inequality, and to which extent they are aware about the distance between those with lots of power (e.g., bosses) and those with few power (e.g., subordinates). Power distance reflects the grounds to the leader's power on the subordinate (Smith & Bond, 1999). In cultures with long power distance, rules and social rules are built by superiors and determined by leaders. In cultures with short power distance, rules tend to be consensual and, thus, subordinates are more directly involved in its elaboration. Therefore, the longer power distance, more conformity around a social rule (Smith, Dugan, Peterson, & Leung, 1998).

Finally, individualism-collectivism reflects the extent to which groups emphasize personal or group goals. Hofstede (1983) has observed that members of individualist cultures tend to focus “on their own work”, while members of collectivist cultures prefer group goals. According to Singelis et al. (1995), social behavior in collectivist cultures is better predicted by social rules and obligations, while in individualist cultures social behavior is better predicted by attitudes and other internal processes. Smith and Schwartz (1997) found empirical evidences to this statement. Some authors (Triandis, 1995) suggest that the individualism/collectivism cultural dimension is crucial to analyze a culture, and several research works (Egri & Herman, 2000; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) have shown the influence of this dimension on the behavior of members of a cultural group.

Another effort to unpack culture is found in several studies by Shalom Schwartz and his collaborators (Schwartz, 1994), who identified fifty-six values and built a questionnaire, where respondents should inform to which extent each of those values serve as a guiding principle to their lives. Up to this date, individual responses have been obtained in more than 80 countries, including all regions of the world. When analyzed in terms of national cultures, the findings disclose, with notable

consistency in different cultures, that spatial relations of the items' average can be summarized as belonging to seven realms or dimensions: Egalitarianism, Self-transcendence, Conservatism, Hierarchy, Realm, Affective Autonomy, and Intellectual Autonomy.

Studies like that by Hofstede and Schwartz report that cultures can be understood in terms of meanings and, therefore, should be studied through the evaluation of values of representative samples of each culture's members. However, it is worth reinforcing that although two nations can be distinguished in terms of a given dimension of values, this should not lead to the conclusion that any two members of those cultures would present the same differences. Therefore, the level of cultural analysis cannot be transposed to the level of individual analysis. Moreover, Hofstede's and Schwartz's research evidenced the existence of consistent meanings across cultures. The polarities emerging from Schwartz's study (conservatism vs. autonomy; realm and hierarchy vs. egalitarianism) could be understood as strong remainders of Hofstede's dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance, respectively.

However, no culture could be classified just as individualist or hierarchical. A culture bears high degree of individualism or hierarchy *in relation* to another culture. Therefore, such cultural manifestations are just relational. Brazil, for example, can be considered as collectivist in comparison to the United States, but is undoubtedly individualist when compared to our neighbor Colombia (Hofstede, 1984). According to Schwartz's theory, when Brazil is compared to Western Europe it scores high in Hierarchy and low in Intellectual Autonomy. When compared to the United States, Brazil also scores higher in Intellectual Autonomy, while the USA scores higher in Affective Autonomy. The Realm dimension seems to be higher to the USA, while Brazil scores higher in Harmony. However, when compared to Asia, African countries and to the Middle East, Brazil presents an almost inverse position.

This kind of comparison is the motto of the Cross-cultural Psychology, which is one of the Social Psychology approaches that are becoming more and more recognized by the Brazilian academic community. Typically, cross-cultural psychologists work with tools such as questionnaires, scales and interview/structured observation; the quantitative prevails in their analysis and methodological options that, with empirical orientation, aim at testing differences between samples of nations and/or ethnical groups.

Just like other representatives of Cross-cultural Psychology around the world, the Brazilian researchers (i.e., Álvaro Tamayo, Valdiney Gouveia, Maria Cristina Ferreira, Cláudio Torres, among others) interested on this Social Psychology approach, use to try to establish the variance that is explained by cultural values. These researchers differ from those of Intercultural Psychology as the representatives of the second group are more concerned about the interpersonal relation between members of different cultural groups. The researchers focused on Cultural Psychology, in turn, are more concerned about the processes through which culture is transmitted among the group members.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the fact that most of the Social Psychology has been originally developed mainly in the

United States and United Kingdom. This is reflected in the Social Psychology handbooks used in several introduction courses at great academic centers worldwide. Baron and Byrne Handbook (1994) – maybe one of the most popular textbooks in the United States – bears around 1,700 quotations. However, only few more than 100 of these refer to studies developed out of the United States. The textbook by Hogg and Vaughan (1995) – one of the best known and more popular in Europe – bears more than 500 quotations of studies made out of the United States, of the total 2,000 references made in the work. However, most of these 500 quotations refer to studies developed in the Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand, i.e., all individualist countries, at least if compared to Latin American.

These data evidence the urgent need for exercising translation skills in the pursuit for the Social Psychology knowledge. But not the English translation that, after all, can be considered to be the *lingua franca* of the field, or the Latin of our times. What is necessary is a *Cultural* translation. Not everything one reads and studies can be directly applied to our reality. Not everything produced in about one-fifth of the individualist world can be directly applied to the remainder four-fifths of the world, which is collectivist.

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Footnote

1. The survey was originally developed by Almeida (2012), and is detailed in the author's article in another Edition.

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