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Theoretical contributions from research in Social Psychology in Brazil: society's critical theory

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Abstract

This article aimed at describing the Brazilian production of research in Social Psychology, using as reference the works of thinkers from the so-called Frankfurt School. We have consulted the *Scielo* and the *Periódico Eletrônico em Psicologia* virtual files for the last 10 years. Articles were selected by reading the titles, abstracts and key words. In this production, the topics related to social domination and current weakness of individuals, as well as their resistance against that domination, are the most frequent ones; most of the works are conceptual, but there are also empirical inquiries; this kind of production has increased in the last few years, although being still short in relation to the total. This analysis should be deepened through the reading of full texts, and be extended to books, presentations of surveys in congresses and publications not comprised in this research.

Keywords: Social Psychology; critical theory of society; Frankfurt school.

Resumo

Aportes teóricos das pesquisas em psicologia social no Brasil: a teoria crítica da sociedade. Este artigo teve como objetivo descrever a produção de pesquisas brasileiras em Psicologia Social, que utilizou como referência a obra de pensadores da denominada Escola de Frankfurt. Foram consultados os arquivos virtuais da *Scielo* e do *Periódico Eletrônico em Psicologia*, dos últimos 10 anos. Os artigos foram selecionados por meio da leitura de seus títulos, resumos e palavras-chave. Nessa produção, os temas referentes à dominação social e à fragilidade atual do indivíduo, assim como sua resistência àquela dominação são os mais frequentes; a maior parte dos trabalhos é conceitual, mas há também pesquisas empíricas; esse tipo de produção vem aumentando nos últimos anos, ainda que seja pequena em relação à total. Seria importante aprofundar essa análise com a leitura dos textos completos e a estender aos livros, apresentações de pesquisas em congressos e publicações não localizadas nesta pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia Social, teoria crítica da sociedade, escola de Frankfurt.

The aim of this text is to describe and discuss the production of Brazilian researchers in Social Psychology, a production that has basis in the work of thinkers of the so called Frankfurt School or the Critical Theory of Society, particularly the work of T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, H. Marcuse and W. Benjamin, who are the precursors of this theoretical outlook.

Before discussing the method and presenting results, a few words regarding what these authors thought to be the object of Social Psychology. Among these, Adorno (1991; 2008) is the one who would refer more frequently to this discipline, understanding that it must be an important part of Sociology, differently to what happens in Brazil, where it is deemed to be part of the field of Psychology.

In a text dating to the 1950's, Adorno (1991) indicates that, faced by the violent movement of the latter decades,

what was proposed was a Psychoanalytically Oriented Social Psychology that, alongside with the Theory of Society, would make it possible to comprehend this phenomenon. The object of this Psychoanalytically Oriented Social Psychology is the 'I' or ego, as delimited by Psychoanalysis and which dialectically constituted would express either the impulses of the id, of social limits. In the postscript of this text, what is proposed is that the freudian considerations that allege that all Psychology is also Social Psychology (Freud, 1993) have to be considered in the light of the new mass phenomena that gave way to conflicts and similar behavioral standards among all men, and for which Psychology, that studies the isolated individual, would not suffice. One of the aims of Social Psychology would be to verify up to which point the 'I' or ego, in the days that go by, is resilient to or becomes part of the demands of a society permeated by technical and administrative rationality.

The study on the authoritarian personality is the well known empirical research among all those carried out by Adorno; this specific research was published in 1950, in collaboration with other researchers from Berkeley University (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1965). Despite the fact the focus of this study is the personality, the authors indicate that the social phenomenon they are investigating – fascism – cannot be boiled down to the individual alone, it's origin is social, with repercussions on institutions and social groups; and although they stand by such an emphasis, until then, this had been studied very rarely, in terms of the phenomenon itself.

Horkheimer was the coordinator of a series of researches carried out on fascism, among which the one performed on the authoritarian personality, which explains the same position adopted by Adorno regarding authoritarianism, a social phenomenon that has a social origin, counting upon the support of the individual to sustain it.

Marcuse (1981; 1982), in his most renown texts: *Eros and Civilization* and *One-dimensional Man*, also chooses Psychoanalysis as the vantage point to analyze individual support for an irrational society or the possibility of overcoming it. Benjamin (1989; 1994a), on the other hand, in texts on the narrator and on the poet Baudelaire, points it out as a new form of subjectivity that take place because of changes produced by modern social conditions, among which is the homogenization and the outsourcing of space and time in cities, which with the onset of XIX Century are transformed, due to the need to circulate merchandise.

Despite the differences among these thinkers, we can say the delimitation of his work made it possible to give to the field of Social Psychology, although some do not do this explicitly, the relationship between the individual and society, historically constituted and which in contemporary times has had the primacy of society over the individual, a primacy which has been expressed in the determination that institutions and social groups have over that individual.

The studies of Social Psychology did not go by unperceived in the theoretical formulations of some of these thinkers, albeit the present text will attempt to focus solely on the presence of their work as a contribution to the research carried out in Brazil, in the sub-area of Social Psychology, and published in national journals in the field of Psychology.

To fulfill the goals of the research mentioned above, we used titles, abstracts and key words of articles and essays published in the last 10 years, also including the production of this year in course. We researched the virtual archives of Scielo and those of *Periódico Eletrônico em Psicologia*. To search for the articles of interest to us, we used the following expressions: 'Adorno', 'Horkheimer', 'Marcuse', 'Benjamin', 'Critical Theory' and 'Frankfurt School'.

Regarding the delimitation or scope of the journals researched, it is fair to say that: 1-there are journals more directly geared to Social Psychology, although as these do not publish only texts which refer to this sub-area and as others, publish other sub-areas of Psychology, there are articles that could be classified as this, we decided therefore to consult all of the Brazilian scientific magazines on Psychology; and 2- there are

articles in Social Psychology written in magazines geared to other areas, such as Sociology and Education; however, to delimit this research, we only used periodicals in the field of Psychology, so as not to broaden our scope excessively.

Doubtlessly, the data we obtained from the titles, abstracts and key-words in the articles or essays researched have less precision than if they had been extracted from the reading of the full texts, which was not possible to do; on the other hand, for most of what we were attempting to identify, perhaps they sufficed, as most of these data have objective records, such as those which refer to journals in which they were published, year of publication, number of authors, type of research reported – conceptual, empirical or experimental. Others, such as the references used and the topics developed, could have had greater precision if the full texts had been read.

Initially, we obtained 71 references of publications. To be able to obtain data on the sub-areas of Psychology, to which the material researched belongs, we classified it according to the predominant trend, using for this the title, key-words and especially the abstract of each article, as mentioned previously. Table 1 presents this data:

Table 1
Frequency and Proportion of Texts Classified in the Diverse Sub-areas of Psychology

Subareas of Psychology	Frequency	Proportion
Social Psychology	45	0.63
Social Psychology and School Psychology	9	0.13
Social Psychology and Clinical Psychology	6	0.08
None	9	0.13
School Psychology	1	0.01
Clinical Psychology	1	0.01
Total	71	0.99

According to the data in Table 1, most of the work selected was classified in the sub-area of Social Psychology; jointly with other sub-areas, the ratio or proportion increases to 0.84. The other 11 articles, as they deal with topics clearly geared to other sub-areas of Psychology or which, based on the information in them, could not clearly fall into the sub-area of Social Psychology were withdrawn from the material analyzed. Our data was limited therefore to the Brazilian production on Social Psychology in Psychology journals during the last 10 years and refers to 60 articles, obtained virtually through *Scielo* and from *Periódico Eletrônico em Psicologia*.

It is interesting to note that, based on the data presented in Table 1, the sub-area of Social Psychology is the one that has, among the diverse sub-areas of Psychology, the greatest amount of articles/essays that use the Critical Theory of Society as an input; perhaps this happens because the Frankfurters were one of the groups chosen preferentially in their studies regarding the relationship between the individual and society. On the other

hand, it should be pointed out that the amount of publication of articles in Social Psychology, with the contribution of the Critical Theory of Society in the last 10 years, located through *SciELO* and the *Periódico Eletrônico em Psicologia*, is not high, which is not surprising, as this reference is not usually communicated in Post-Graduation courses in this sub-area.

In the table below are the frequencies and amount of texts regarding the journals they were taken from.

Table 2
Frequency and Proportion of Articles/essays per Journals from Which They were Extracted

Journal	Frequency	Proportion
Psicologia & Sociedade	12	0.20
Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia	7	0.12
Revista Mal Estar e Subjetividade	7	0.12
Psicologia USP	5	0.08
Psicologia: Ciência e Profissão	5	0.08
Estilos da Clínica	3	0.05
Fractal: revista de psicologia	3	0.05
Temas em Psicologia	2	0.03
Psicologia Clínica	2	0.03
Interações	2	0.03
Paidéia	2	0.03
Estudos de Psicologia (Natal)	2	0.03
Estudos de Psicologia (Campinas)	2	0.03
Ide	1	0.02
Psicologia em estudo	1	0.02
Psyche	1	0.02
Psicologia em Revista	1	0.02
Psicologia: Teoria e Prática	1	0.02
Boletim de Psicologia	1	0.02
Total	60	1.00

As can be observed in the table above, the publications in the sub-area of Social Psychology with reference to the Critical Theory are present in approximately one third of the journals, which are more directly associated to this sub-area, such as *Psicologia & Sociedade*, *Mal Estar e Subjetividade* and *Interações*; in almost half of the publications researched it is included in journals geared to Psychology in general, and a little more than 0.10 of the total production is in the journals of Clinical Psychology (*Estilos da Clínica*, *Psychology Clínica*, *Ide* and *Psyche*). On the one hand, this could mean that the number of journals geared more directly to Social Psychology is not sufficient to encompass this type of production; on the other hand, it could indicate a greater connection between the sub-areas. Now, the fact that part of the production of articles in the sub-area of Social Psychology is published in journals that are more geared to Clinical Psychology may be related to the focus and emphasis that the theoretical Frankfurters had on Psychoanalytical work, especially that developed by Freud. It is interesting to observe that the articles published in a journal such as *Psicologia & Sociedade* have Adorno as their main reference, with greater frequency than that of the others from the Frankfurt School; Benjamin is the main author of the work published in Clinical Psychology journals.

If a large part of the production was published in journals for the sub-area of Social Psychology, as was expected, it should be noted that none of the texts analyzed were published in journals for the sub-area of Educational/School Psychology and neither in journals specializing in the sub-area of Labor/Organizational Psychology, still fully compliant with the data in Table 1; nine of the 60 papers also referred to School Psychology. Perhaps that focus on school, according to this theoretical approach, tends to consider that institution more from the outlook of psychosocial implications and not those more pertaining to School Psychology per se.

By means of the abstracts we classified the texts based on which other areas, besides Psychology, they predominantly referred to; the results of such a classification are in Table 3.

Table 3
Frequency and Proportion of Areas the Texts Refer to

Areas	Frequency	Proportion
Psychology	31 (29	0.35
Sociology	18 (6	(0.33) 0.20
Marxism)		(0.07)
Education	11	0.12
Arts (Literature, Music, Poetry, Theater)	9	0.10
Philosophy	8	0.09
Urbanism	3	0.03
No area	9	0.10
Total	89*	0.99

* Some articles were classified in more than one area

According to Table 3, the texts analyzed, besides referring to Social Psychology were also associated primarily to Psychoanalysis and to Sociology; in a lower proportion, they also have a connection with the fields of Education, Philosophy and Arts. It is also not surprising that one-third of texts are associated to Psychoanalysis, as the preference of the authors of the Critical Theory for that form of understanding of subjectivity is clearly stated, as pointed out previously. In *Sociology and Psychology*, Adorno (1991) claims that Psychoanalysis is the science that studies more in-depth what sustains subjective support for objective irrationality; and Marcuse (1981), in *Eros and Civilization*, sets forth a philosophical interpretation of Freud's work. That the associations with Sociology that have Marxism as a reference have a proportion of 0.07 compared to the total is also not a surprise, as the sociological perspective of the Frankfurters does not only take Marx as a reference of Sociology, but frequently also makes use of the work of Weber and that of Durkheim. It is worthwhile pointing out that nevertheless, from reading the abstracts, what can be observed is that the sociologic issues appear in a more generic fashion than those referring to Psychoanalysis, whose main concepts, the unconscious, impulses, desires, ego, id and superego are more clearly delimited. Which means to say that those concepts referring to Sociology are not presented with the same specificity as those in Psychoanalysis, and because of this, analysis such as those of the sociologists mentioned do not seem to have been used or incorporated with the same depth. This could also indicate a broader nature of the analysis of the objects researched; in general, the relationship

between the individual and society is presented, in the research analyzed, not through the institutions, but through references to the constitution or creation of subjectivity mediated by society, through consumption, standardization etc, as we will better be able to see in the analysis of the topics, based on the data presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Main Topics Developed in the Articles Researched

Topics	Number of articles*	Frequency
Weakening/resistance of the individual	3.8.10.11.12.13. 23.28.36.38.39.40. 43.41. 60	15
Social violence. ideological dominance, domination of the body	2.7. 15. 20.21. 30.32.33.48.49.52. 56.57.58	14
Theoretical contributions to Social Psychology	1. 4.14. 19. 25.26.27.42.46.47. 51.54.55	13
Art, narration, citizenship and playing as forms of resistance, criticism or adaptation	5 .6.9 29.31.34.37.44.59	9
City and subjectivity	16. 22. 24.45.53	5
Education for autonomy, inclusive education and failure at school	17.18 .35.50	4
Total	-	60

*as numbered in Appendix 1

The classification of abstracts according to the topics presented in the table above was not an easy task, as some of these topics are closely related, such as the one called 'weakening or resistance of the individual' and 'social violence, ideological dominance and the domination of the body', that were the most frequent, as, in general, the factors present in the latter topic are deemed to be determinant in the individual's fragility, but in the possible resistance to it as well. It is necessary to mention as well that the fact that this resistance to domination is emphasized in some of these studies shows that the pessimism attributed to the Frankfurt School is not true. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that whether it is a more visible social violence, usually called barbarianism, such as the one that takes place by means of ideology and through the domination of the body is are not directly associated to any social institution, but instead to social set up, such as totality. If society is not, as we stated formerly, presented in its present-day structure in a detailed way, through a clearly delimited sociologic reference, the emphasis of its importance in determination is not minor. The description of the "fragility of the 'I' or ego, on the other hand, is done by Adorno (1991) and by Horkheimer and Adorno (1985), but also by Marcuse (1982): what is stated in these texts is that in a managed, uni-dimensional society permeated by technical rationality, it is not necessary that the 'I', understood in its psychoanalytical meaning, be very developed; in general, scantily developed individuals are created, with difficulties in expressing their

desires and dependant on authorities.

As highlighted before, only rare articles deal with specific groups or institutions. One of these studies a community, but not as an object; it does not deal with community Psychology, but instead with obtaining citizenship; neither are there articles on prisons, schools, families. Even those articles on education do not treat schools as institutions responsible for fostering the autonomy or not of their students, but as an expression of society, by means of their educational trends; in those texts, the tendency is to have an analysis of the attitudes or mindsets that are socially determined and associated to desires/ psychic needs and not an institutional analysis.

The categories – 'Art, narration, citizenship and playing as criticism or adaptation' – and – 'City and subjectivity' – in general use the work of Walter Benjamin as their main reference. The unfinished work 'Passages' (Benjamin, 2006) and his texts on the narrator (Benjamin, 1994a), the work of art and its technical reproducibility (Benjamin, 1994b) and on the poet Baudelaire (Benjamin, 1989) are the most used. The lack of individual differentiation due to a decline in experience, replaced by living together itself also provides, according to the thinker more fragile and superficial individuals. Benjamin's references to Psychoanalysis, in the final account are not predominantly geared to the 'fragility of the ego, but to sensations, perceptions, remembrances and reflex actions; the new individual constitution or make up was possible due to the transformation of the large cities beginning in the XIX Century.

The topic 'Theoretical contributions to Social Psychology', which is the main one in almost one fourth of the texts analyzed, brings an analysis of more delimited objects, such as the Cultural Industry, or criticism about the Frankfurters, or presents the critical theory as one of the references of Social Psychology. The texts classified in this category have as references Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Benjamin, but also Habermas.

To know if the authors of the Critical Theory were the core references or not in the texts used, we proceeded to their classification in accordance to the number of references found in the abstract. Table 5 shows the data of that classification.

In Table 5 it can be observed that most of the abstracts analyzed have more than one reference to an author (approximately three fourths of the total amount). Adorno and Benjamin are the most mentioned and Horkheimer does not appear in any of them alone. Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse and Critical Theory most of the time are associated to more than one author. This can perhaps be explained by the fact these authors had not developed psychological and sociologic theories per se and as such, which necessarily takes them to having interlocutors from Psychoanalysis and Sociology, mainly in the case of Social Psychology; not that they use the production of these interlocutors such as it is presented, but instead permeated with criticism (see the text by Adorno as an example, 1991). This means that the work carried out by the partial sciences are important to the group from Frankfurt, but not less than the indication of their limitations.

As Adorno and Benjamin were the most mentioned authors of the Critical Theory in the work analyzed, in the next two tables we will present the authors that are most presented jointly with

Table 5
Frequency of the Authors of the Critical Theory as an Isolated Reference or Jointly With Other Authors

Author	Single reference	With another reference	With another two references	With at least three more authors	Total
Adorno	8	6	6	7	27
Benjamin	5	5	6	4	20
Horkheimer	0	1	6	2	9
Marcuse	1	2	1	3	7
Critical Theory	4	4	3	1	12
Total	18	18	22	17	75

them. The next table indicates the frequency of authors that are most mentioned.

Table 6
Authors that Are Referred to Most Often Along with Adorno

	Author	Frequency
Critical Theory	Horkheimer	8
	Marcuse	2
	Critical Theory	3
Psychoanalysis	Freud	4
	Psychoanalysis	3

According to the data on Table 6, the authors most referred to along with Adorno belong to the Critical Theory itself; the most frequent is Horkheimer, which is comprehensible due to the extensive joint production, from which stands out the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is a fundamental work from that perspective. Other texts bring references to Psychoanalysis, with Freud being the most mentioned. This is indicative that a large part of the texts produced in the sub-area of Social Psychology and that have Adorno as their reference are not associated to psychoanalysis, although, as mentioned formerly, this is a very important reference for his work at large.

The following table brings the frequency of authors that are most mentioned jointly with Benjamin in the texts analyzed.

Table 7
Authors that Are Referred to More Frequently Along with Benjamin

	Authors	Frequency
Psychoanalysis	Freud	4
	Psychoanalysis	6
	Lacan	2

As can be seen in the table above, the authors that are most mentioned side by side with Benjamin belong to the realm of Psychoanalysis; no work was found that had that author side by side with the others from the Frankfurt School. This could express the isolated work of Benjamin with regards to his colleagues, or perhaps it is a person with a stance, an outlook somewhat different from that of the other authors. When analyzing the topics, it was observed that this author had his work used in work emphasizing aspects and issues that are different to those of the texts that have the inputs of the work of Adorno, Horkheimer and/or Marcuse.

Among the texts analyzed, there are those that may be deemed conceptual or theoretical, others that are based on the description of empirical data (Poetry, Books, Propaganda), that make use of the theory, but without being experimental, and others that are experimental. Below we present data that refers to this classification.

Table 8
Frequency and Proportion per Type of Article

Type	Frequency	Proportion or Amount
Conceptual	43	0.72
Empirical	7	0.12
Experimental	10	0.17
Total	60	1.01

Based on the data in Table 8, what can be verified is that around three fourths of the texts analyzed are conceptual, which can be explained by the value attributed to this perspective with theory as an element of praxis, with the drafting of essays (Adorno, 2003). However, there is also experimental work and those who carry out an analysis of empirical objects. The majority of experimental studies is based on the work of Adorno, whilst a little more than half of the work deemed to be empirical use the work of Walter Benjamin as their reference. Perhaps the knowledge of Adorno's experimental work, basically his participation in the research on the authoritarian personality, made it possible that his concepts be used more broadly experimentally. This data shows that the theory is important for this philosophic and scientific perspective, the empirical and experimental data are as well, as they are substantial for the creation of concepts which refer to the movement of the objects studied that are comprehended historically.

The following table presents data on the number of authors of the texts submitted to analysis.

Table 9
Frequency and Proportion of the Number of Authors of the Articles Analyzed

Number of authors	Frequency	Proportion
One author	44	0.73
Two authors	9	0.15
Three authors	4	0.07
Four or more authors	3	0.05
Total	60	1.00

According to the data in the table above, the majority of the work analyzed had a single author, which is coherent with the data in the prior table: it is more difficult to write a conceptual text in conjunction with colleagues; the reports on research correspond more to the work carried out by teams; in fact, only one of the 10 works classified as experimental had a single author.

In the table below, we present the frequency and proportion of the work per publication period.

Table 10
Frequency and Proportion of Work Published per Period

Period	Frequency	Proportion
2002-2006	13	0.22
2007-2012	47	0.78
Total	60	1.00

According to the data in Table 10, the publication in Social Psychology, with the contribution of the Critical Theory of Society increased substantially from the first to the last period set forth by this table, which could possibly be explained due to the greater dissemination of the work of these authors in graduation courses in Psychology, but above all in the Post-Graduation courses in Social Psychology.

In summary, based on the analysis of data obtained from the bibliographic research carried out, with the aim of describing scientific production in Social Psychology, that has used the Critical Theory of Society as a contribution in the last 10 years, we can conclude that:

- 1- The majority of this production is published in journals linked more directly to Social Psychology, which seems to be associated to the emphasis that Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Marcuse put on the relationship between society and the individual, a topic par excellence of this sub-area in Psychology;
- 2- Psychoanalysis and Sociology are very present areas in these texts, being that the sociologic categories are presented with less clarity or delimitation compared to those of Psychoanalysis. This is fully comprehensible as we are dealing with researchers of Psychology, and may perhaps be that the authors of the texts analyzed did not get over the schism between Sociology and Psychology as the Frankfurt School attempted to do. Overcoming this does not deny the separation of objects and the concepts of these disciplines, but attempts to immanently relate them. If the sociologic categories do not appear concretely as regards the constitution of the individual, this is once again perceived as a psychological monad, that will need to be overcome at the moment in which the awareness of its social determination is established;
- 3- The main issues worked out in these texts refer to the social domination over the individual and the present-day fragility in his/her training, as we all the resistance to such a domination; as we argued previously, they are intrinsically related categories, as, according to the Frankfurters, social domination

is responsible for individual fragility, but also leads to resistance, keeping in mind that society is contradictory;

- 4- The main authors mentioned in the texts analyzed are Adorno and Benjamin; the former tends to appear mainly with his colleagues of the Critical Theory of Society, especially Horkheimer, while Benjamin is a reference of texts jointly with authors of Psychoanalysis;
- 5- The majority of the works can be classified as conceptual or theoretical, although there is an expressive number of works of an empirical or experimental nature. The first affirmation relates to the importance that the Frankfurt School attributes to theory, which in itself is understood as praxis (Adorno, 1995); the latter affirmation shows that theory in itself is not sufficient, that it is in contradiction to the perception that these authors, and those that use this as an input, are dogmatic;
- 6- The large majority of the texts analyzed are written by a single author, which is coherent with what was affirmed in the previous topic, and the texts that were written by several authors are more apt to be used in research reports than in theoretical analysis;
- 7- Observe that the production of texts in the sub-area of Social Psychology with the input of the Critical Theory of Society has been increasing substantially when compared to the period of 2002-2006 and 2007-2012. This may be due to the fact that this theory has become more widespread, above all in the post graduation courses in Social Psychology.

Doubtlessly, what we conclude in this work should be considered under the lens of its limitations: the analysis of titles, abstracts and key-words in publications in the field of Psychology, during the last 10 years, material that has been obtained through the virtual archives of *SciELO* and the *Periódico Eletrônico de Psicologia*. The analysis would need to be confirmed and carried out more in-depth through reading of the full texts and also by extending this to the production of books and the presentation of the results of research results at conferences, and other publications not used or located in this research. Despite this, it seems to indicate a sound trend, although if we consider the total amount of scientific production in Psychology, few articles/essays are published.

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