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Araujo Trindade, Zeidi; Martins Guerra, Valeschka; Bonomo, Mariana; Moreira Silva, Renata Danielle
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Research in Social Psychology: methodological strategies of the Brazilian production

Zeidi Araujo Trindade

Valeschka Martins Guerra

Mariana Bonomo

Renata Danielle Moreira Silva

Federal University of Espírito Santo

Abstract

The aim of this study was identifying the methodological strategies used in Social Psychology research in Brazil. By resorting to the term *Social Psychology* as an index search factor, a literature review was conducted in papers published in Psychology periodicals indexed at *Scielo* and *Pepsic* between 2007 and 2011; and in dissertations and theses abstracts indexed at the CAPES Database from 1987 to 1991, and from 2007 to 2011. Altogether, 877 works were analyzed through SPSS. Results indicated that the main data collection and data analysis techniques were: interviews, associated with content and discourse analysis; questionnaires, analyzed mainly through content analysis and descriptive statistics; and inventories and scales, analyzed through descriptive and multivariate statistics. The most frequently investigated objects were generational groups and health/disease processes. The study points to the need for methodological triangulation in the production of knowledge, aiming to overcome qualitative and quantitative false dichotomies in research methodology.

Keywords: methodology; research; Social Psychology; Brazil.

Resumo

Pesquisa em psicologia social: as estratégias metodológicas da produção brasileira. O objetivo do estudo foi identificar as estratégias metodológicas utilizadas em pesquisas do campo da Psicologia Social no Brasil. A partir da expressão *psicologia social*, procedeu-se levantamento em artigos publicados em periódicos da área de Psicologia, indexados nas bases *Scielo* e *Pepsic* entre 2007 e 2011, e em resumos de dissertações/teses, cadastrados no Banco da CAPES entre 1987-1991 e 2007-2011. Foram analisados 877 trabalhos, processados por meio do *software* SPSS. Os resultados revelaram que as técnicas de coleta e tratamento dos dados predominantes foram: entrevistas, associadas à análise de conteúdo e análise de discurso; questionários, tratados através da análise de conteúdo e da estatística descritiva; e inventários/escalas, analisados por meio da estatística descritiva e multivariada. Os objetos mais estudados foram os grupos geracionais e processos de saúde/doença. Discute-se a necessidade da utilização da triangulação metodológica na produção do conhecimento, visando à superação de falsas dicotomias entre métodos qualitativos e quantitativos.

Palavras-chave: metodologia; pesquisa; Psicologia Social; Brasil.

Inspired by studies that reveal the estate-of-the-art of an area of knowledge, research object, or theory, this work seeks to discuss the research methods used in Social Psychology studies in Brazil. It adopts a perspective of analysis that presupposes the need to contextualize the phenomenon of study in order to understand the configurative and procedural characteristics of its manifestation. Therefore, it is important to recollect certain historical moments of the field of Psychology in Brazil related to the afore-mentioned topic. More specifically,

Social Psychology is historically situated in order to explore the use of research methods as part of both, *research policies*, and *the politics of doing research*.

In this sense, emphasizing the research object and submitting it to analysis can be justified on three different grounds: firstly, it re-states the interdependence between object and method inherent to any good investigation design; secondly, it provides visibility to trends dictated by theories and problems that are hegemonic at the time; thirdly, it sheds light on the specificities

of psychological knowledge thus providing an outlook on how the object is constructed. Following the steps of Sá (2007), a decision was also made here to blend references with personal experiences.

The history of psychological knowledge in Brazil is filled with antagonisms, which renders the whole question of the research object problematic. In the 1960's, there was a strong tendency to disqualify all research that did not adopt an experimental design, typical of North American Social Psychology. The dichotomy between *basic* (or the so-called pure) *research* versus *applied research* was pervasive and implied, as all dichotomies do, the supposed superiority of the former over the latter, thus playing down the validity of process-oriented interventionist research. Grounded on the belief that non-experimental projects impaired reliability, Psychology would only gain recognition as a science to the extent to which it followed the model of the Natural Sciences. According to Gergen (2008), this attitude towards research on the part of Brazilian researchers was, in fact, a reflection of the prejudice against applied research common in the US. According to the author, this prejudice was "evinced by the emphasis given to basic research on prestigious journals and on the dependence of promotion and maintenance of contributions to basic in opposition to applied research" (p. 481). In other words, this materialization of intolerance, as termed by Menandro (1996) reinforced the opposition between quantitative and qualitative research methods and their mutual disqualification, a dynamics that still stands today. The experimental paradigm was overestimated, in detriment of the need to understand psychological phenomena that could not be investigated by this method and the nature of the research questions they raise, thus relegating to oblivion many of the problems in the professional practice in Psychology. The components of the object-method equation lay inverted implying that the object must be subjected to the research method.

In the middle of the 1970s, an antagonistic reaction took place: the overestimation of practice at the expense of theory; an overestimation of the object, with little concern for the method, as if a mere good look at the object would be enough to understand it. The professor Eda Tassara (personal communication, 1987), parodying Descartes' aphorism, summarized the spirit of this period, by saying: "it seems to me that the maxim in force nowadays is 'I feel, therefore it exists'".

During this period, Social Psychology oriented to the individual suffered heavy criticism resulting in a new split in the field and in two models of analysis: the *sociologization* of the psychological phenomenon, and the *psychologization* of the social phenomenon. This was not a new problem, but it gained strength and visibility at the time. According to Doise (1982), this tension in the scope of Social Psychology can be observed since Wundt, and "it comes from the difficulty that they [social psychologists] find in placing themselves between *psychological* and *sociological explanations*" (p. 41 – emphasis added).

Professionals in the area would criticize the masking of social problems by using psychological jargon. Social problems continued to worsen and became more visible while traditional Social Psychology had very little to offer. This historical moment was known as the "crisis of Social Psychology" in Latin America,

paving the way for the strengthening of historical materialism applied to Social Psychology¹ in opposition to the canons of traditional (or North American) Social Psychology, considered individualistic and ethnocentric. Individual accountability for social problems was no longer accepted, clearly calling upon for a paradigm shift.

The emergence of this new paradigm both, in Brazil and Latin American Social Psychology as a whole, coincided with the spread of dictatorships throughout the continent, mostly supported by North American governments. This support strengthened the opposition to foreign paradigms and the defense of a Social Psychology committed to social transformation and political activism. However, the reaction emphasized another radicalization: the prioritization of social forces, especially those associated with relations of production, with little interest in characteristically psychological and psychosocial processes. Macro social analyses were privileged over micro social ones, over everyday life and the social relations and knowledge of common sense that it comprises. Once again, the precision in the delimitation of the object and the importance of selecting and/or designing compatible methods were obscured by ideological motivations, difficult to overcome.

Based on the premise that the present moment reflects the historical context described above and aiming to identify changes under course, the aim of this research is to analyze the methodological strategies used in the last five years of research in the field of Social Psychology in Brazil.

Characterization of the field of study

In view of the proposed objective, a survey was conducted on published papers in peer-reviewed journals and abstracts of dissertations and thesis, following the criteria below:

- 1) Journal articles indexed at *Scielo* (2012) and *Pepsic* (2012) database, published between 2007 and 2011: all papers from the journal *Psicologia & Sociedade* [Psychology & Society] – aimed at publishing papers in Social Psychology- were included. In order to include other journals the established criteria were a) that either the title, research problem, keywords or objectives of the research displayed any theory or concept included in Social Psychology manuals²; or b) the author's definition of the article as belonging to the area of Social Psychology Papers from 16 journals in the area of Psychology were analyzed, rated as A1, A2 or B1 by the *WebQualis Periódico* (CAPES, 2012a);
- 2) Abstracts registered in the Theses Database (CAPES, 2012b) from 1987 to 1991 and from 2007 to 2011: the search was carried out using the term "Social Psychology" as an exact expression, without specifying the area of knowledge, authorship or institution of affiliation. The time period between 1987-1991 refers to the five initial years of abstracts registered in the system, and the period between 2007 and 2011 refers to the last five years of available information, amounting to ten years altogether.

The spreadsheet for data registration contained information regarding: year of publication, object of study, type of study (empirical or theoretical), type of research (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), nature of data source (people or documents), characteristics of the participants and sample size

(for studies that included people), and data collection and data analysis techniques. The data were categorized through the SPSS software in order to verify possible relations among variables.

The database of the journals survey was made up of 563 papers, 227 (40.31%) of which belong to the journal *Psicologia & Sociedade*. Among the other 15 journals analyzed, the ones that presented the largest numbers of publications in Social Psychology during the investigated period were: *Psicologia em Estudo* (Maringá) [*Psychology in Study*] (38), *Estudos de Psicologia* (PUCCAMP) [*Studies of Psychology*] (33), *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* [*Psychology: Reflection and Critique*] (32), *Revista Psicologia: Teoria e Prática* [*Psychology: Theory and Practice*] (30), *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa*

[*Psychology: Theory and Research*] (28) and *Paidéia* (28).

Regarding the Dissertations and Theses, a total of 544 abstracts were selected, with 31 abstracts from the period between 1987 and 1991 (26 Dissertations and 5 Theses), and 513 from 2007 to 2011 (357 Dissertations and 156 Theses). The comparative analysis between both time periods only makes sense when taking into consideration at least one of the aspects of the context, namely, the post-graduation research production related to Psychology. Therefore, by using the term ‘psychology’ as an indexing search factor and by comparing the data found to the frequency with which the term ‘Social Psychology’ was detected, the following results were observed (Table 1):

Considering the current diversity of approaches in Social

Table 1

Distribution of Dissertations/Theses Related to Social Psychology, According to the Area/Subarea – Psychology/Social Psychology.

	Time period 1 [1987-1991]			Time period 2 [2007-2011]			≠ Time1 / Time2
	Psychology	Social Psychology	≠ Area / subarea	Psychology	Social Psychology	≠ Area / subarea	
Masters	384	26	6.8%	4170	357	8.6%	1.8%
PhD	79	05	6.3%	1392	156	11.2%	4.9%

Psychology and the expansion of post-graduation programs in the area³, the difference between time periods is not impressive (1.8% in Master’s Dissertations and 4.9% in PhD Theses). As a preliminary finding, the survey data analysis points to the importance of the interface among areas of knowledge. From all productions in the initial time period, 45.16% (12 Master’s Dissertations and 2 PhD Theses) were developed in post-graduation programs from different areas of knowledge⁴. This number has remained stable in the second time period (42.1%), when taking into consideration the proportion of studies conducted (2007-2011: 160 Master’s Dissertations and 56 PhD Theses, produced in post-graduation programs from different areas of knowledge, from 70 different institutions of higher education).

It is interesting to note that in both levels of production (Masters and PhD) and in both time periods analyzed, the field of Human Sciences does not appear significantly (9.56%), which might suggest a lack of interest by the researchers, or a lack of knowledge regarding all the possible contributions that Social Psychology has to offer. Works associated with the Health Sciences present 35.65% of the analyzed production and, coming in second, Education studies include 18.69% of the total number of interface studies, accounting for 66.15% of the Human Sciences production.

Taking the area of Psychology as a reference, the Master’s Programs with the majority of works detected were as predicted⁵: the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (27); the University of Rio de Janeiro State (23); and the University of São Paulo (19). As for the PhD Theses, the findings were somewhat unexpected thus deserving comment: among the four programs with the largest number of works produced was the Program of Cognitive Psychology at the Federal University of

Pernambuco, whose focus is not Social Psychology program. Of 13 institutions included, those with the largest number of PhD theses were: the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo/Social Psychology(28); the University of Rio de Janeiro State/Social Psychology (25); the Federal University of Pernambuco (17); and the University of São Paulo/Social Psychology (16).

Results

Altogether, 877 works were analyzed, 563 of which were articles from scientific peer-reviewed journals and 314 Dissertations and Theses abstracts, produced in programs within the area of Psychology, with 17 dating from 1987 to 1991. As for the last five years focused upon [2007-2011], 563 articles were found (409 empirical works and 154 theoretical works) and 297 Theses/Dissertations (268 empirical works, 27 theoretical works, and 2 that did not specify the type of study in the abstract).

Due to the limitations of the records found in relation to the first time period (1987-1991), namely, the impossibility to spot the data in the abstracts, along with the small number of works registered (17 in total, 11 of which classed as empirical works), a decision was made to only briefly present the data obtained, without further analytical endeavour. During this period, 5 studies were carried out (4 qualitative and one quantitative). They investigated a range of research objects, such as professional performance/training, beliefs/values, identity, justice/citizenship, social movements/social minorities, subjectivities among others. The data were collected and treated through interviews, scales/inventories and observation, as well as through categorization and multivariate statistics.

Theoretical works

Between 2007 and 2011, 181 theoretical studies were found. Among these, there were 154 articles (A), 15 Master's Dissertations and 12 PhD Theses. Data related to Dissertations and Theses are presented together (T/D), as no significant difference was observed in the analyzes (χ^2).

The theoretical production was placed into three categories, based on the objectives of the study:

1) *Theory/Method* (A = 57; T/D = 11), when the main focus of the discussion was epistemological, methodological or when it presented any construct (predictive model designed on the basis of scientific procedures – VandeBos, 2010) specific to any psychological theory, such as: the work that aimed at articulating *Social Memory* and *Social Representations Theory*; or those which discussed George Mead's contributions do Social Psychology;

2) *Concept* (A = 22; T/D = 6), when the article discussed an object, class of objects or an abstract idea regarding (or based on) a scientific theory – from psychology or related fields, such as: discussing the concept of *public policies*, *social inclusion*, or *human nature*;

3) *Social Topics* (A = 75; T/D = 10), when the article presented an explanation from a socially relevant phenomenon or object, such as: *generational groups* (e.g., the ideal of youth in current days; aging, and identity construction), *violence* and the *development of public policies*. Of the three Master's Dissertations found between 1987 and 1991, two presented aspects related to theory and method, and one discussed conceptual aspects.

Table 3
Sample size According to the Type of Research.

Sample size	Intervention	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed-method	Total
Scientific articles					
01 to 09	03	55	-	01	59
10 to 29	01	52	09	04	66
30 to 59	01	19	08	07	35
60 to 99	-	14	09	06	29
100 to 199	01	09	25	08	43
200 to 499	-	07	44	18	69
Above 500	-	03	26	02	31
Total	6	159	121	46	332
Dissertations/Theses					
01 to 09	-	43	-	01	44
10 to 29	-	31	03	03	37
30 to 59	-	08	03	02	13
60 to 99	-	02	04	03	09
100 to 199	-	02	07	02	11
200 to 499	-	02	05	-	07
Above 500	-	-	07	05	12
Total	-	88	29	16	133

If we observe the sample size according to the type of research, it is possible to identify that in 67% of the Articles,

Empirical works

Information regarding empirical works (677) will comprise the type of research, population and sample size, as well as techniques for data collection and analysis.

The qualitative approach was the most frequent type of research in the Social Psychology studies, representing 52% of all published articles investigated and 82% of the studies recorded in the system in the last five years. Results from this analyzes can be found in Table 2.

Table 2
Studies in Social Psychology According to the Type of Research.

Type of research	Articles	Dissertations/Theses	Total
Intervention	10	-	10
Qualitative	214	212	424
Quantitative	125	29	154
Mixed-method	60	18	78
Total	409	259	668

In nine abstracts from dissertations/theses, it was not possible to identify the type of research.

Table 3 presents the sample sizes. It is important to note that documental studies add up to 12% of the records (82) and are not included in this Table. It is also worth mentioning that the sample was not identified in a total of 27 abstracts from Post-Graduation works.

qualitative research is conducted with a maximum of 29 participants. In Dissertations and Theses, this value increases

to 84% of the investigated abstracts.

In Articles that used a quantitative approach, the number of participants was over 100 in 78% of the samples; for Dissertations and Theses, the frequency samples of this size is 65%. These samples gather representatives from varied population groups of interest Social Psychology studies. The groups investigated most frequently were professionals (most studied population in general, representing 19% of all Articles' samples and 30% of Dissertations/Theses samples). In Articles, the second and third most frequent samples studied were university students and young adults/adolescents, each representing 11% of all Articles investigated (for Dissertations/Theses, these populations represent only 6%). In Dissertations/Theses, specifically, the second largest frequency was patients/users (11%). When compared to Dissertations/Theses, Articles presented the largest number of studies involving children (5%), elementary and high school students (6%), and family (6%). On the other hand, studies conducted with activists (2%) were observed only in Post-Graduation works.

In relation to the data gathering techniques used in Articles, interviews were the most frequent (27%), followed by questionnaires and standardized scales/inventories. Combined, these techniques corresponded to 68% of the Articles' data collections. For Dissertations/Theses, interviews were also

most frequently used (42%), followed by the use of observation and standardized scales/inventories. These three techniques combined corresponded to 65% of this type of production.

The techniques for data collection according to the research type were also identified. For qualitative research, 57% were interviews, 8% groups, and 8% observation, whereas for quantitative research, scales/inventories amounted to 48%, and questionnaires 34%. In Mixed-method research, questionnaires (45%) and scales/inventories (19%) were pervasive.

In relation to data treatment techniques, the most frequent ones in Articles were Content Analysis (CA) (25%), Multivariate Statistics (ME) and Descriptive Statistics (DE), both conducted with the use of Specific Softwares (SS). Alone or combined, these techniques correspond to 80% of all analyses mentioned in the publications referred to. In the Post-Graduation production, CA (30%), ME and Discourse Analysis (DA) corresponded, alone or combined, to 62% of all treatment techniques used.

According to the type of research, qualitative studies used CA (45%) and DA (23%) to analyze the data, whereas quantitative studies resorted to ME (50%) and DE (39%). Finally, mixed-method studies used CA (59%) and SS (20%).

It is possible to observe a few patterns of association between data collection techniques and data analyzes (see Table 4). Interviews were strongly associated with the use of CA (52%)

Table 4

Data Processing Techniques According to the Data Collection Technique

Collection technique	CA	DA	CAT*	DE	ME	SS	Other	Total
Free association	03	-	-	-	01	13	02	19
Visual data	03	-	-	-	-	01	02	06
Interview	79	30	09	05	05	08	16	152
Scale/ inventories	07	-	01	23	49	04	-	84
Groups	09	09	-	-	-	-	05	23
Oral history	03	02	-	-	-	-	03	08
Observation	04	02	-	01	01	-	04	12
Questionnaire	28	02	-	33	19	09	01	92
Others	04	02	04	02	04	05	08	29
Total	140	47	14	64	79	40	41	425

* CAT - categorization

and DA (20%). The use of standardized scales/inventories, on the other hand, is strongly associated to the use of DE (27%) and ME (58%). Questionnaires were mainly analyzed by CA (30%) and DE (36%).

These patterns of association are observed not only in relation to data collection and analyzes, but also in relation to the research object. Aiming at identifying these associations, the frequency of research objects are presented in Table 5, followed by the two techniques of data collection and data analyzes used most frequently for each research object.

Initially, based on the frequency, it is possible to observe that the research object most frequently studied in the Articles belonged to a category labeled *Health/disease processes*, which includes research on STD/AIDS, specific diseases (e.g., diabetes, coronary diseases), as well as 'mental health studies'. The latter presented the highest individual frequency of this category (30), corresponding to 33% of all research regarding this object. The second category, in order of frequency, is labeled *Generational*

groups and includes research related to infancy, adolescence, and old age; *Work and Violence and vulnerability* also presented high frequencies in Post-Graduation productions. However, when compared to Dissertations/Theses, *Public policies* and *Family relations* occurred more frequently in published Articles, whereas *Identity* as a research object was more recurrent in Post-Graduation works.

A few patterns were identified in relation to the association between data collection and data analysis techniques with specific research objects (see Table 5). As mentioned earlier, the interview was the most commonly used technique and was associated with all research objects.

Additionally, other techniques were associated to various objects: scales/inventories were more frequently used in studies on *beliefs/values*, *education*, *health/disease processes*, *socio-cognitive/affective processes*, *family relations* and *work*; questionnaires were resorted to in studies regarding *professional performance/training*, *cultural manifestations* (e.g., aesthetics,

Table 5
Research Objects and Techniques of Data Collection and Processing.

Research objects	A	D/T	Data collection	Data processing
Professional performance/training	10	17	Interview and Questionnaire	Content analysis and Discourse analysis
Beliefs/Values	13	13	Scale/Inventory and Interview	Content analysis and Multivariate statistics
Education	14	10	Interview and Scale/Inventory	Content analysis and Descriptive statistics
Gender	18	11	Interview and Groups	Discourse analysis and Content analysis
Generational groups	46	23	Interview and Observation	Content analysis and Descriptive statistics
Identity	08	25	Interview and Oral history	Content analysis
Justice and citizenship	08	07	Interview	Content analysis and Discourse analysis
Cultural manifestations	17	15	Interview and Questionnaire	Content analysis and Multivariate statistics
Social movements/minorities	15	16	Interview and Free association	Content analysis and Discourse analysis
Public policies	26	06	Interview and Groups	Content analysis
Health/disease processes	66	25	Interview and Scale/Inventory	Content analysis and Multivariate statistics
Socio-cognitive/ affective processes	24	13	Scale/Inventory and Interview	Multivariate statistics and Discourse analysis
Family relations	28	07	Interview and Scale/Inventory	Content analysis and Multivariate statistics
Interpersonal relations	10	04	Interview and Questionnaire	Content analysis and Descriptive statistics
Theory and method	23	15	Scale/Inventory and Interview	Content analysis and Descriptive statistics
Work	19	19	Interview and Scale/Inventory	Content analysis and Multivariate statistics
Violence and vulnerability	31	19	Interview and Questionnaire	Descriptive statistics and Content analysis
Least frequent topics	33	23	Interview and Questionnaire	Content analysis and Discourse analysis
Total	409	268	-	-

A = Articles; D/T = Dissertations and Theses.

characters, specific places and time periods), *interpersonal relations* and *violence and vulnerability*.

Other techniques have been used less frequently, chosen on the basis of specific objects: the use of groups (focal groups, dynamics, conversational and discussion groups) as a data collection technique is mainly observed in studies about *gender* and *public policies*; observation is more frequent in studies on *generational groups*; oral history techniques (such as life stories and narratives) were more frequent in studies on *identity*; and, finally, free association is the second technique most frequently used in studies about *social movements/minorities*.

Concerning data treatment techniques, the same pattern can be observed in relation to the use of CA, which is associated with all research objects, with the exception of *socio-cognitive/ affective processes*. This type of analysis was used in 63% of *identity* studies and in 42% of the *public policies* studies.

Additionally, the following treatment techniques were associated with various research objects: DA was used in studies regarding *professional performance/training*, *gender*, *justice and citizenship*, *social movements/minorities* and *socio-cognitive/*

affective processes; DE was found more frequently in studies on *education*, *generational groups*, *interpersonal relations*, *theory and method*, and *violence and vulnerability*; and ME was observed in research on *beliefs/values*, *cultural manifestations*, *health/disease processes*, *family relations* and *work*.

Aiming at comparing theoretical and empirical studies in relation to research objects, a decision was made to group them in two thematic categories:

1) *Theory/method/concept* (134) which comprises all studies that emphasize academic production regarding a given theory (e.g., Social Representations Theory), concept (e.g., identity) or specific method (e.g., scale validation);

2) *Social topics* (724) which concentrates studies regarding various phenomena (e.g., professional performance/training, education, etc.). Empirical studies (677) present a higher frequency of research on *social topics* (94%), when compared to theoretical studies (47%). In relation to productions of *theory/method/concept*, these studies are significantly more frequent in theoretical works (72%) when compared to empirical studies (6%), $\chi^2(1) = 243.75, p < 0.001$.

Final considerations

Despite of the importance of the data collected and the reflections regarding the levels of analyzes (psychological and sociological) presented in the introduction, the sources used did not provide access to data on which this discussion could be based. Oriented by the task we set out, namely, to investigate the methodological strategies used Social Psychology research conducted in the last five years, it is necessary to consider a few things regarding the type of research and the most frequent techniques used in the afore mentioned time period.

It is possible to observe a clear preference for qualitative methodology (63.66%) in research conducted in Brazilian Social Psychology, especially in Dissertations and Theses (81.85%). In Articles, the ratio is more balanced (52%) thus deserving to be underscored along with more detailed investigations that allow for more accurate analyses and explanations. As mentioned before, 40.32% of the Articles were published in the journal *Psychologia & Sociedade* edited by the Brazilian Association of Social Psychology (ABRAPSO). Taking into consideration the overall principles that this association advocates for in the Brazilian Social Psychology scenario, it may be relevant to draw attention to the possible predominance of certain theoretical perspectives and / or methodological distribution of articles in the journal itself.

Furthermore, the data also showed that there is a possible way to overcome the opposition between quantitative and qualitative methods, evidenced in the frequency with which qualitative and quantitative methodologies are employed in Empirical Articles. In addition to the results found in the publications analyzed, it is important to point out that the use of methodological triangulation in the Brazilian social psychological research is possibly more frequent than the observed, since the editorial boards of the journals analyzed in this study restrict the maximum size of the article to approximately 24 pages⁶ possibly resulting in the need on the part of researchers to write two or more articles so as to present all the results yielded by a certain research project. In other words, the fragmentation of the national scientific production into separate articles stemming from the same research project might be down to such editorial guidelines for the preparation of manuscripts, thus disseminating the impression of an exclusive qualitative or quantitative approach in the works analyzed. Therefore, a possible way to investigate the effective use of methodological triangulation in research in Social Psychology in Brazil would be to consider the integral production of the researchers and not just isolated publications.

Although only a small number of Dissertations/Theses combined qualitative and quantitative methods (6% in this study), based on the results of the Empirical Articles (15% of publications combined qualitative and qualitative methods in data collection and data analyzes procedures), we can conclude that this trend might be configured as a *new paradigmatic orientation*. From this perspective, traditional methods live with methodological alternatives, expanding possibilities, overcoming false dichotomies and easing intolerance (Menandro, 1998). Currently, this new perspective of knowledge production is strongly based on the defense of methodological and theoretical

triangulation (Apostolidis, 2006).

Regarding the association between techniques of data analysis and a mixed methods orientation, a specific type of data analysis seems to be characteristically associated to a specific type of research: Discourse Analysis is associated on a massive scale to a qualitative approach (constituting 98% of all investigated research that use DA). Although CA is mainly observed in exclusively qualitative research (73%), it is also found in mixed-method research (26%). It is necessary to emphasize that the popularization of this type of data analysis technique (33% of all records), what was called Content Analysis does not always meet the methodological requirements necessary to be classified as such. In some reports, it is clear that the categorization, which is one of the stages of Content Analysis and / or simple clipping pieces of the participants' reports were called CA.

Another noteworthy aspect of the study is that 49% of the empirical Articles presented some type of quantitative analysis, which was, either exclusive or combined with qualitative techniques. Historically, the research activity in the Brazilian Social Psychology was marked in the 1980/1990 by the rejection of all quantitative techniques of data collection and analysis (e.g., questionnaires, scales and inventories), taken as positivist (Menandro, 1996, 1998). This movement might be considered responsible for the high number of qualitative investigations observed in this study. Despite these results, the last five years have also revealed a scenario in which quantitative research is still frequently used. In addition to that, the use of specific software for the analysis of textual data, such as ALCESTE, EVOC and Tri-deux-mots, is also noticeable. In such cases, they were used in 21% of the empirical Articles, either combined with other data analysis techniques, or alone.

Technological development and the popularization of the access to computers in recent years caused the software to become an important tool, both for data collection and for data processing. Besides, research using electronic questionnaires facilitated data collection with a large number of participants, which is a fundamental condition for the feasibility of more complex statistical treatments, including research with extensive textual data. It ought to be borne in mind, however, that such resources consist of tools that assist the researcher in developing their research and they are not substitution mechanisms of their work of interpretation and analysis. In fact, as Bauer, Gaskell and Allun (2002, p. 24) suggest, "data do not speak for themselves, even when carefully processed with sophisticated statistical models". Data processing via software is, therefore, only one of the stages of data analysis that does not relieve the researcher's interpretative task. Arruda (2005) refers to this condition as the "research nerve" (p. 230), a principle to be adopted in qualitative, quantitative or mixed research, i.e., the empirical findings should be integrated into the theoretical foundations that support research, which is an elementary interface of scientific knowledge production.

In line with the considerations above, it is necessary to look further for the decontextualization of subject and object of research, a rupture that usually occurs when a research report does not discuss or lists the characteristics of the participants

along with the problems it sets out to study.

The Higher Education Census (INEP, 2011) provides empirical evidence that contributes to this discussion, especially when considering the large number of research with university students observed in the results of this study. Currently, there are approximately 6.7 million higher education students in the country, a category that presents very specific characteristics as a social segment and that is substantially different from the general Brazilian population, if one considers that higher education access is still a privilege. Some data deserve mention: just 17.8% of the Brazilian youth with ages ranging from 18 to 24 attend or attended higher education courses. Even though the increase of people from underprivileged economic classes enrolling in universities - especially in private institutions - may indicate that social inequality is decreasing, unequal access still exists. 20% of the Brazilian population with higher income is attending or attended higher education as opposed to 4.2% of the people with low income who have reached this level of education. Discrepancies also exist in relation to the place of residence, gender and ethnicity among the university population and the general population.

The ease of access that university faculty researchers have to university students favors the development of studies with a larger number of participants, enabling the execution of their research. However, it can also produce misleading generalizations and a disconnection in relation to the phenomenon analyzed, since most quantitative studies use non-stratified samples, i.e., samples that do not show correspondence between demographic characteristics of the sample and the general population of the study.

Regarding the necessary caution when generalizing quantitative studies results, two remarks on methodology deserve mention: (a) the use of convenience samples and non-stratified survey studies lead to the loss of external validity, i.e., the possibility of generalizing the results to a broader context (Creswell, 2010); and (b) the very concept of generalization, which, according to Grey (2012), means that the results of a study can be applied to other people, groups or conditions. It is important to note, however, that the fact that a study is not subject to generalization, that does not make it less relevant to the body of scientific knowledge production.

Finally, it was not possible to identify the sample in 40 (9.8%) of the Articles included in this study, the data collection technique in 13 (3.2%) and the data processing technique in 35 (8.6%). For Dissertations/Theses, these numbers increase, respectively (and alarmingly) to 100 (37.3%), 64 (23.9%) e 166 (61.9%). These data should be taken as a warning regarding the quality of the methodological training in Psychology, especially for Post-Graduation programs. The absence of this basic information regarding the adopted procedures in the development of empirical research can reveal not only deficiencies in the

preparation of abstracts, but it can also indicate a severe state of neglect of methodological procedures.

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Footnotes

1. Lane (1981) suggests that the criticisms made towards the North American SP were also strong in Europe, especially in England and in France. Lane's book, entitled "O que é Psicologia Social" ["What is Social Psychology?"] was used as a reference for informing the change in paradigm what would base part of the academic production in the area.
2. References: Camino, Torres, Lima, and Pereira, 2011; Guareschi and Jovchelovitch (2000; 2011); Rodrigues, Assmar, and Jablonski (2009); Vala and Monteiro (2002).
3. It is important to emphasize that in the time period starting in 1987, there were 15 Programs of Post-Graduation in Psychology in Brazil (only 6 with PhD level studies). In 1991, this number increases to 19 (9 with PhD studies). In the second time period, starting in 2007, there were 57 Programs (25 with PhD studies) and, currently, there are 71 Programs registered at CAPES (45 with PhD level studies).
4. In order to classify the Works according to the area of knowledge, we decided to adopt the criteria proposed by CAPES.
5. We found records of Dissertations in 37 different Programs in the area of Psychology.
6. Mean, calculated according to the information provided by the journals with articles analyzed in this study.

Zeidi Araujo Trindade, titular Professor of Psychology, Psychology College and Psychology Post-Graduation Program at the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), and CNPq Research Scholar. E-mail: zeidi.trindade@gmail.com

Valeschka Martins Guerra, Psychology College and Psychology Post-Graduation Program at the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES).

Mariana Bonomo, contributor professor of Psychology Post-Graduation Program at the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES).

Renata Danielle Moreira Silva, PhD student of Psychology Post-Graduation Program at the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES) contributor researcher of Rede de Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia (RedePso/UFES).