The Contextual Analysis in Social Representations of the Body Among Ethnic Groups in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil*

El análisis contextual en las representaciones sociales del cuerpo en grupos étnicos de Río de Janeiro, Brasil

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Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo fue probar el método de análisis contextual, para inferir representaciones sociales del cuerpo, entre grupos étnicos. Se esperaba que algunos individuos/grupos tendieran a compartir aquellos modelos de control social que son considerados más genéricos/universales, y otros afirmaran el yo (individual/grupal) como una particularidad radical. Se observaron representaciones del propio cuerpo entre estudiantes auto-definidos como blancos (n=112) y afro-brasileños (n=44), en muestras bien equilibradas entre ambos sexos, y niveles secundario e universitario. Se les pidió que diesen cuenta de cómo era su cuerpo en lugares simulados y escogidos libremente, y en los contextos del hogar, del aula, un lugar de la escuela, y fuera del ámbito escolar y del hogar. Los blancos tendieron a mencionar emoción/sentimiento, confort/satisfacción y normas/desvíos; en tanto que los afrobrasileños, disposición/autocontrol, disfrutando/deseando y reafirmación individual. Los datos fueron discutidos con base en la historia y cultura de cada grupo.

Palabras clave autores
Análisis contextual, Psicología Social, representaciones sociales.
Palabras clave descriptores
Efectos del contexto, psicología social, representaciones sociales, Psicología.

ABSTRACT

This work aimed at testing a method of contextual analysis to infer social representations of the body in ethnic groups. It was expected that some individuals/groups would tend to relinquish to autonomy, differentiation and delimitation of interindividual and intergroup boundaries, and share those social control patterns considered more generic/universal. Meanwhile, the (individual/group) self as a particularity would be asserted by others. Representations of one's own body were observed among students self-defined as Whites (n=112), and Afro-Brazilians (n=44), in samples that were well balanced between both sexes and secondary and university levels. They were required to account for their body in simulated and freely chosen places, and in the contexts of dwelling, class-room, school contexts, as well as out of these contexts. Whites tended to mention emotion/feeling, comfort/satisfaction and norms/deviances, while Blacks readiness/self-control, enjoying/desiring and individual assertiveness. Data were discussed drawing upon each group's history and culture.

Key words authors
Contextual analysis, social psychology, social representations.
Key words plus
Context Effects, Social Psychology, Social Representations, Psychology.

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Introduction

A quite spread academic tradition exists which constructs its theories with the goal of obtaining generic knowledge; they are concerned with finding universals to the detriment, for instance, of the actual importance of individual and social particularities. In the case of social psychology, this search has taken place historically along with trends of psychologization and sociologization of the discipline. The most often used approach to the object to study actions and thoughts, both in psychology and sociology, have been those of subject-object. Further, this has also quite influenced the existing tendencies in social psychology, that serve more or less as guidelines for each discipline to focus, mainly, whether on the individual, whether on the society.

Aiming at going beyond tendencies whether of decontextualizing the psychological and/or reducing the psychological to the social context, Moscovici (1970) proposed the subject-object-subject approach, which he pointed out is more adequate for social psychology. Furthermore, he added a third constituent part to highlight the importance of constant interaction intermediating the relation between subjects (individual/group/society) with objects, which in turn are transformed/produced by other subjects (individuals/groups/societies).

In that sense, we can consider conditions of "social context" both the objects and the subjects involved in situations of real and/or symbolic interaction, given that in a complex society coexist multiple objects, often constructed or marked by some subjects, but not by others, and so on.

In parallel to this, social sciences have also benefited from the work of discourse analysts who looked at the links between self-knowledge, action and the organization of social reality in order to comprehend in fine-detail processes of cultural and representational reproduction or change. Their works have stressed that discourse is linked to both representations and actions: different descriptions/representations of salient categories convey our understanding of the world and do create/shape both the world and our self-understandings. In other words, these qualitative studies have enhanced current social scientists' awareness that it is necessary to look not only at human generalities, but also to group and individual specificities/variability in order to grasp the flow of changing discourses and processes of being and becoming at the societal, group and individual levels. In this study we are also interested to look at how different representations of identities will lead to different interests and ways of proposing them (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). We believe that in processes of identity construction nothing is previously settled and that social representations are used to achieve particular interests and goals. While competing with other groups' representations particular versions of the world can change/challenge or maintain/legitimate specific power relations between majority and minority groups; but in this process social representations can also be transformed, disappear or survive without much alteration. In sum, our stand is that bearing in mind the historicity of context influenced particular groups' descriptions of the world (and specifically particular uses of descriptions of the body in different more/less public/private contexts) permits us to avoid the risk of naturalizing identity and to comprehend more accurately each groups' specificities, their current discourses and their implicit strategies.

In the case of phenomenon of social representations can be noted that this approach was initially theoretically and empirically formulated to undertake the appropriation of an "object" originated in the academic realm - the psychoanalysis - by non-experts, in a moment in which technicians' and social scientists' power was increasing; and instrumentalization in relation to the individual and private life became part of the social transformation process.

Then we could consider the arrival of psychoanalysis to some urban milieus a sort of modernization in the private life's sphere which has been stirred up through the public sphere by specialists. The means of appropriation adopted by non-experts, according to the above-mentioned author, responded mainly to group's normative criteria, among other aspects. Therefore, the social context

that they studied was the society and the sociological groups; and the individuals were considered as members of different collectivities, according to the most relevant demographical parameters of the time.

Subsequently, a large part of researches on social representations followed this methodology and sampling pattern to study topics and objects. But the academic and professional knowledge, as well as some practices and worldviews related whether to ethnic, religious or political origin, which belong to folk traditions, exerted more influence in the public and academic spaces; and ultimately thwarted the individual elaboration of such contents by some particular groups.

In order to overcome such shortcomings it would be necessary to discuss the way the social context's issue has been tackled in the field of social psychology, specifically in studies of social representations and similar constructs in societies with social hierarchies which are buttressed by public policies of social influence over the private and individual space. All this has got implications in terms of sample collection and factual description.

We start from the premise that, in spite of increasing liberty in the private sphere, the public social contexts do still constrain many individuals/groups, even those interactions lived in situations of academic research. This affects worst individuals/groups in terms of expression/communication of contents/processes which are potentially in conflict with those considered more legitimate and advocated by dominant individuals/groups in some societies and areas of the world. Therefore, we can argue that for many individuals/groups practically there is nothing that could be suitably defined as the so-called "private life", in the sense of a psychosocial space that is separate from the immediate or near social world, lived with a sense of autonomy and differentiation, given that the body itself is the target of intense and extensive social control.

Our first general hypothesis was that, in spite of all these social constraints, some active minority individuals/groups have at their disposal and are able to keep models of action/thought which are different/away from dominant patterns. That is, in terms of potential for autonomous actions, differentiation, and demarcation of interindividual and intergroup boundaries (Moscovici, 1979), contents that can be expressed and conveyed/uttered, e.g., situations/contexts that, like the urban, might allow for more freedom from social control.

Such contents imply social conflict and modify the situation of data collection, in the sense that they encourage/inhibit, and can determine degrees of accessibility for the psychology professional/researcher (D´Unrug, 1974; Osgood, 1959). In the last years an important cultural transformation has taken place boosted by the media, in which cinema, television and publicity have drawn upon languages that, to a certain degree, have promoted an availability for exercises of simulated liberation of imagination and mental cognitive experiences which until then were only lived by most individuals/groups in the very intimate spheres of private life.

Such events have expanded the imagined spaces of liberty, but seldom provoked a transformation of the public space. In general these changes have not brought benefits for the individuals and groups whose actions/worldviews do not enjoy social legitimacy, in spite of some social acceptance, e.g., in the academic/political realms.

If this is the case, among individuals and groups who follow social norms advocated by the social system should be more noticeable the tendency of subjects maintaining along different social contexts the same psychosocial contents, regarding their action and thoughts in relation to the same objects.

A possibility to deflect from their tendency towards normative social pressure can be provided to the researched if we present them especial contextual conditions in which the *normative choice* prevails, and this can be conveniently capitalized/used by the researcher/analyst within his working instruments. Yet, we expect some issues will be granted more social value and become objects of higher degrees of attention and social control, mainly in relation to their external aspects, in terms of corresponding *object* and social *action*.

The study of the body in psychosocial terms has been object of some works (Jodelet, 1994), although little attention has been paid to the sociocultural aspects related to ethnic groups in different environments and social conditions of life. In this sense, in spite of intense and wide exchange between ethnic groups in Brazil's history, and abroad, we suppose there is a big and steady differentiation among groups who define themselves as Whites and Blacks, and who maintained sociocultural patterns or transformed them according to intra and extragroup dynamics. In part it was the social segregation they experienced in the Brazilian society what enhanced the social distance between groups who using specific discourses and rhetoric deployed social influence strategies that aimed at the social preservation of their respective groups. In the case of Whites, their strategies seem to be centered in a higher normativization or deviance from norms, given that they feel to be linked to dominant groups characterized by hard social control, even when they are engaged in free private activities.

That is, they take for granted the existence of generally valid norms that should be followed (or not), constituting what we might describe as a dominant monoculturalism (Guillaumin, 1972). Blacks (2), in turn, maintain a multicultural strategy, with higher awareness of their own culture that they identify as a minority (or almost) in face of other groups'. It also allows a rather soft social control that provides more space for individual creativity. Such stance can be associated with a higher assertion of their values and references, even with a breaking with the dominant groups. The urban situation has, in a forced way, brought closer the sociocultural groups, among them ethnic groups which has generated social representation phenomena (Banchs, 2000; Moscovici, 1961/1976).

The necessary contents for the above mentioned individual/group accomplishment tend to be more expected, and considered legitimate, among those Whites who are in a position of leadership in societies that are hierarchically organized in ethnic terms.

Very frequently, this goes together with concern with assertion of norms or diversion from them, in what the White-Christians would be more bind. Whites tend to set up an actual worship of norms. This has got effects on the evaluation of issues such as the body. This happens as much in the sense of idealizing an external pattern that is kept by authorities and/or sociocultural references, as of exclusion of things/people, not fitting the pattern, or being distant from it (Guillaumin, 1972). Nonetheless, we suppose that long term duration historical minority groups, such as ethnic groups, tend to maintain sharper boundaries between the public and the private spheres, both at the individual and at the group levels. A main consequence of this is the weakening of individuals who cannot psychologically live in a free space, which would allow them to accomplish differentiation and autonomy, independently of social class and material situation. The moment of democracy's consolidation in Brazil was accompanied by a higher presence of individuals self-defined as Blacks. There are important similarities between this phenomenon and what happened in the USA in terms of historical trends of change on identity into a self-denomination as African-Americans (Philogène, 1999).

We designed this research in order to observe systematically the use of a method of data collecting which intends to give more opportunity of body-related freedom psychosocial experience for participants belonging to ethnic majority/minority individuals/groups.

Method

Participants

We gathered balanced samples of students from both sexes in secondary school and university schooling levels in the city of Rio de Janeiro. They self-defined as Blacks (n=44) and Whites (n=112), according to a list of ethnic-racial self-definitions, which included Dark-skinned, and the open possibility of free self-definition.

Instrument and procedure of collection

We elaborated an open-ended questionnaire that included questions such as freely describing one's own body in a chosen domestic place, in the chosen school environment, in the classroom or away of the previously mentioned places. Thus, they were required to choose a place in the house where they would like to stay and to describe their own body in that milieu. Later, we repeated the same procedure for a chosen part of the school and for the classroom and out of the school, and the dwelling in a chosen place/environment. In addition, they reported types of adopted body-care, and data such as sex, age, schooling, providing information that was both personal and about their family, among others.

Analysis of data

The answers we obtained were object of a thematic content analysis (Bardin, 1994) and, later, they underwent statistical and chi-square tests. It is necessary to say that the thematic contents we found were frequently used in attitudinally favorable or unfavorable ways, according to opposite poles. However, in this work they were organized in a general way, in order to compare individuals/ groups.

Mental/cognitive

1) Emotion/feeling: swell, happy, feeling well. 2) Enjoy/desire: for something/somebody. 3) Extreme emotion/feeling: terrific, horrible, to adore, to hate. 4) Readiness/self-control: ready, pure adrenaline, intelligent, tired, in need of a change, active, excitement, loosing control. 5) Comfort/ satisfaction: at ease, dissatisfied. 6) Pleasure. 7) To reflect/to be concerned: not to think, to ponder. 8) Concentration: attention, distraction, disconnected from the world, dispersion. 9) Expressive emotion: joy, crying, pleased. 10) Security/protection. 11) Anxiety/distress. 12) Evaluation of pros and counters.

Action

1) Touching/Being touched. 2) Dancing/playing: to sing, to let the body go. 3) Body care/physiology: health, to piss. 4) Lying down/sleeping: nap, to close the eyes. 5) Moving/stopping: head against the wall, to lie down, inert, to shake. 6) Walking/ practicing sports: walking, swimming, bodybuilding, playing soccer. 7) Body alteration: loosing weight, expending energy. 8) Attending a class: absorbing the subject, information. 9) Reading/ studying: to write. 10) Observing/exploring looking at a landscape, people/everything, unknown, hidden, feeling nature, contacts with the sea. 11) Working a posture. 12) Evaluating functionally: its utility. 13) Appropriating/possessing the body: "my body", being grateful to the body, possessing one's own body. 14) Wearing/to make up. 15) Feeding: diet. 16) Watching TV/games.

The body as an object

1) Aesthetic evaluation: cold feet, paunchy, muscular, full of stretch marks, is handsome. 2) Organic function: "him", the lung breathes, it commands my mind. 3) Weight/agility: light, flexible. 4) Rest/ relax: tired, contracted, stressed. 5) Strength. 6) Movement/velocity: motionless, fast. 7) Smell/ cleanliness. 8) Part of the body: eyes, beard, head, breasts. 9) Alteration of physical states: fat, thin. 10) Health/illness: allergic, headache. 11) External/ internal milieu: felt as part of the body, refreshing, noise, getting warm. 12) Motor function: ungainly. 13) Muscles. 14) Eroticism: desirable, sensual.

Psychosocial/ideological implications

1) Norms/social deviance: I am being seen, normal/ strange, rules do not exist, integrated, pattern, social clothes. 2) Sociophysical environment: quiet environment, dynamic class, stuffy atmosphere, hall. 3) Moral/ethical/religious values: the body that God gave me, (we are) a bit of sand. 4) Individual assertiveness: privacy, freedom, I feel I am myself, unique, me, improving myself in general.

5) Interpersonal interaction: meeting new people, loving, treason. 6) Social identity: youth, virile, mixture of father and mother, I am a woman. 7) Socioprofessional milieu: school. 8) Sociocultural environment: Hip-Hop, melodies, computing.

Results

Below we present in tables the main results of the comparative intergroup and intercontextual research, along with levels of significance of chi-square statistical tests. We marked the values with bold-type when the relative intergroup differences were above 20%, and in absolute terms above 4, 9%.

As it can be read above, Whites tended to present, in at least three contexts, themes of *emotion/feeling*, and in practically all the contexts *extreme emotion/feeling*. In addition, they stood out in manifestation of *comfort/satisfaction* and in *reflection/concern with*. Finally, Whites still presented some differentiation in *concentration* in the chosen place of school, and *pleasure* in the dwelling and out of school/dwelling. Blacks indicated *readiness/self-control* and *enjoying/desiring* in three contexts; *emotion/feeling* and *evaluation of pros/counters* standing out in two contexts. Finally, Blacks showed higher frequencies in *concentration* out of school/dwelling, and in *anxiety/distress* in the chosen place of school.

TABLE 1

Percentages of themes used to represent mental/cognitive aspects related to the body in different contexts, according to groups who self-defined as Whites and Blacks

	Dwelling		Chosen place school		Classroom		Outside	
	W	**B**	**W**	**B**	**W**	**B**	**W**	**B**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Emotion/feeling	**25,0**	17,9	31,7	**37,8**	**21,6**	16,1	**25,8**	18,7
Enjoying/desiring	8,0	**10,4**	0,9	**10,8**	5,6	**6,4**	8,2	6,2
Extreme emotion/feeling	**12,0**	8,9	**14,9**	8,1	**16,8**	0	**12,9**	0
Readiness/self-control	15,0	**26,8**	6,5	**10,8**	20,0	**38,7**	25,8	21,8
Comfort/satisfaction	**20,0**	16,4	**29,9**	10,8	12,8	**19,3**	12,9	9,3
Pleasure	**5,0**	0	0,9	0	4,0	0	**5,8**	0
Reflection/concern	**11,0**	5,9	0	**8,1**	**14,4**	3,2	7,0	3,1
Concentration	0	1,4	**13,0**	2,7	4,8	**9,6**	0	**15,6**
Expressive emotion	1,0	2,9	0,9	2,7	0	3,2	0	3,1
Security/protection	2,0	0	0,9	0	0	0	0	0
Anxiety/distress	1,0	0	0	**5,4**	0	3,2	1,1	3,1
Evaluation pros-counters	0	**8,9**	0	2,7	0	0	0	**18,7**

c^2 W and B in the chosen place of dwelling = 22,477; gl=11; p<0,0209. c^2 W and B in the chosen place of school =35,065; gl=11; p<0,0002. c^2 W and B in the classroom = 22,9; gl=9; p<0,0064. c^2 W and B in the chosen place out of school/dwelling = 40,027; gl=10; p<0,0000.

Source: own work.

TABLE 2
Percentages of themes used to represent actions related to the body in different contexts, according to groups self-defined as Whites and Blacks

	Dwelling		Chosen place school		Classroom		Outside	
	W	B	W	B	W	B	W	B
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Touching/being touched	0	1,6	0	3,1	0	0	1,5	0
Dancing/playing	**6,1**	3,3	9,1	**18,7**	0	4,1	**10,9**	8,3
Body care/physiology	1,2	0	0	0	0	4,1	0	2,7
Going to bed/sleeping	8,6	**11,8**	3,0	3,1	3,1	0	4,6	0
Movement/stopping	20,9	**35,5**	**29,5**	6,2	**46,0**	33,3	21,8	**33,3**
Walking/practicing sports	**8,6**	5,0	20,4	18,7	6,3	4,1	**23,4**	19,4
Body alteration	2,45	**5,0**	0	0	0	0	0	2,7
Attending class	0	0	2,0	0	0	0	0	0
Reading/studying	1,2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Working body posture	0	0	1,0	0	0	0	0	0
Observing/exploring	**18,5**	1,6	6,1	**15,6**	9,5	4,1	0	0
Evaluating functionally	2,4	**10,1**	2,0	0	3,1	0	3,1	**8,3**
Appropriating/possessing	14,8	**18,6**	20,4	18,7	28,5	**50,0**	29,6	19,4
Wearing/make-up	2,4	0	0	0	1,5	0	3,1	2,7
Feeding	4,9	5,0	6,1	**15,6**	1,5	0	1,5	2,7
Watching TV/game	**8,8**	1,8	0	0	0	0	0	0

c^2 W and B in chosen place of dwelling = 23,568; gl=13; p< 0,0353. c^2 W and B in chosen place of school = 17,335; gl=10; p < 0,0673. c^2 W and B in classroom = no significant. c^2 W and B in chosen place out of dwelling/school = no significant.

Source: own work.

In what concerns actions of the body, Whites tended to express themselves in terms of *movement/stopping* in the dwelling or out of dwelling/school, as well as *walking/practicing sports* in the same contexts and in the classroom. In addition, Whites presented a varied range of actions related to leisure in the dwelling, like *dancing/playing*, *watching TV/games*, *observing/exploring*; and *appropriating/possessing* the body in a context out of dwelling and school. In contrast, Blacks in the dwelling and classroom contexts mentioned *appropriating/possessing* one's own body, and *evaluating functionally* in the dwelling and away of dwelling/school.

It is good to underline that contents about the body that considered it an object, were in intergroup terms more similar than the others we found. Mainly if we compare the more public contexts (out of dwelling), the statistical tests did not reveal significant differentiation. Nevertheless, both groups manifested substantive contents of *resting/relax* in all contexts. Yet Whites narrated these contents in a context of dwelling, while Blacks in

Table 3
Percentages of themes used to represent the body as an object in different contexts, according to groups who self-defined as Whites and Blacks

	Dwelling		Chosen place school		Classroom		Outside	
	W	B	W	B	W	B	W	B
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Aesthetic evaluation	19,7	20,0	17,5	17,8	**21,7**	10,0	**17,1**	13,3
Organic function	3,7	2,0	**7,0**	0	5,1	**10,0**	7,8	3,3
Weight/agility	3,7	**6,0**	5,2	**10,7**	3,8	**5,0**	4,6	0
Rest/relax	**48,1**	26,0	42,1	57,1	43,5	45,0	32,8	30,0
Strength	0	**6,0**	1,7	0	2,5	0	3,1	**6,6**
Movement/velocity	**4,9**	0	1,7	0	**5,1**	0	7,8	**10,0**
Smell/cleanliness	1,2	2,0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Body part	6,1	**22,0**	1,7	**7,1**	2,5	**15,0**	0	3,3
Physical alteration	4,9	4,0	1,7	3,5	1,2	**10,0**	1,5	3,3
Health/illness	2,4	**6,0**	**5,2**	0	2,5	**5,0**	4,6	**10,0**
External/internal milieu	**4,9**	0	**15,7**	0	**8,9**	0	**17,1**	3,3
Motor function	0	2,0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Muscles	0	2,0	0	3,5	0	0	0	**6,6**
Eroticism	0	2,0	0	0	2,5	0	3,1	**10,0**

c^2 W and B in the chosen place of dwelling = 26,658; gl=13; p< 0,0139. c^2 W and B in the chosen place at school = no significant. c^2 W and B in classroom = no significant. c^2 W and B in the chosen place out of dwelling/school = no significant.

Source: own work.

the chosen place of the school. Besides, Whites mentioned more themes on *external/internal milieu* in all the contexts, and *organic function* in two of them. Finally, Whites mentioned *aesthetic evaluation* in school, and out of dwelling/school. Blacks expressed contents about *parts of the body*, *health/illness* and *weight/agility* in three contexts. They also mentioned *strength* in two contexts, as well as *muscles* and *eroticism* out of dwelling/school.

In three contexts Whites tended to mention *norms/deviancies*, while Blacks stood out in *individual assertiveness* and, in a lesser degree, *sociocultural environment* in practically all the examined contexts. In addition, Whites mentioned more interpersonal interaction in the dwelling and in the school's realm, while Blacks out of dwelling and of school. Additionally, a general trend to mention the sociophysical environment was detected.

Finally, the comparison of body care types adopted by the groups did not show but discreet statistical differences over two aspects. White participants were more concerned with hygiene matters (31,1% versus 26,1%) and Blacks food/nourishment (12,5% versus 10,0%).

TABLE 4
Percentages of themes used to represent the body in terms of psychosocial/ideological implications in different contexts, according to groups self-defined as Whites and Blacks

	Dwelling		Chosen place school		Classroom		Outside	
	W	**B**	**W**	**B**	**W**	**B**	**W**	**B**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Norms/deviancies	**14,2**	11,9	7,0	**13,3**	**26,0**	7,6	**13,0**	7,4
Sociophysical environment	46,4	40,4	29,5	28,8	38,0	50,0	41,1	14,8
Moral/religious values	1,7	2,3	4,2	0	0	0	3,9	0
Individual assertiveness	26,7	**30,9**	22,5	**42,2**	16,0	23,0	23,5	**44,4**
Interpersonal interaction	**8,9**	7,1	29,5	11,1	**18,0**	0	13,7	25,9
Social identity	0	2,3	0	0	0	0	3,9	3,7
Socioprofessional milieu	1,7	0	4,2	0	2,0	**7,6**	0	0
Sociocultural environment	0	4,7	2,8	4,4	0	**11,5**	0	3,7

c^2 W and B in chosen place of dwelling = no significant. c^2 W and B in chosen place of school = 12,897; gl=6; p<0,0447. c^2 W and B in classroom =15,808; gl=5; p<0,0074. c^2 W and B in chosen place out of dwelling and school =11, 362; gl=6; p<0,0778.

Source: own work.

Discussion

The contextual method of analysis allowed for an inference of social representation regarding the body, mainly to turn easier the expression and communication of active individuals and minority groups. Therefore, we verified that the opportunity of individual choice provided by the instruction given to participants in this study was more effective for the expression of differentiated, autonomous and demarcated psychosocial contents in the case of the active minority ethnic groups (Blacks). In contrast, the majority group (Whites) mentioned more often existence/following (diverting from) norms, which were likely seen as generic/universal in a large extent of the analyzed contexts. Additionally, we observed a strong trend among Whites to express sentimental/affective aspects of the body; "psychologization" of their experience with it.

By contrast, drawing on intergroup comparison we could verify that African-Brazilians presented a freer social representation of the body in most social contexts, mainly because of their multicultural approach. Those who self-defined as Blacks tended to be ready/self-controlled for action, individual assertion, as well as an approach to the own body that we could depict as self-integrated. That is, Blacks' approach considers the body in itself, in comparison with Whites, who were more orientated toward an adaptation/integration to the external social and physical environment, similar to some results found among Catholics in France (Jodelet, 1994, p. 50). Actually, our study highlights that Brazilian Whites are usually more concerned with whether they are normal/deviant and avoid talking about body in itself in terms of sexuality like enjoying/desiring, eroticism and so on.

Actually the body in its existential concreteness is lived in the ordinary every day's private or public realm in a quite controlled way. Nevertheless, ethnic groups express such historical situation in ways that are subjectively differentiated. As we

foresaw, the verbal language on the body that those self-defined as Whites present conveyed a weaker assertion of the self in terms of the body's inner vitality/organicity; or even less of more elaborated contents such as freedom. The socio-cultural model adopted by Blacks (despite the limitations we have pointed out), tells more about the search of a subject-object relation with small or no intermediation of other subjects or, even, the object. Yet, for Whites it would be a rational and contextual model in the sense that they would be constantly under the impact of the immediate and distant social. The public space's context has got the force of a normative social power for the groups in (or near) ruling positions. Yet, we believe that the social influence exerted by the public space would be smaller in the case of groups who psychologically seek autonomy, differentiation and marking out of social boundaries; for instance Blacks and other active social groups.

In a society in transformation, in which the "superior" White Catholic groups are striving to reinforce their self-valorization relative to other groups, Blacks and other ethnic minorities marked by some external physical features, became the favorite target of interindividual and intergroup comparisons, even if at times inexplicitly. In this case the search for incomparability turns out to be a less weary alternative for individuals and minority ethnic groups; this pushes them to a more radical liberation from the context and the public space's influence.

In general we observed a stronger sentimental trend in relation to the body among students self-defined as Whites. It went together with a significant presence of concern with normative/deviance implications of the body experience. In Rio de Janeiro, many White people came from Europe at the end of the Ninetieth century in traumatic conditions and looking for a better economic life. When they arrived to work in rural areas of Rio de Janeiro most of them were illiterate (Fausto, 1994). Because at that time agricultural activities in these regions started to decay, they moved to urban places to look for jobs where they were forced to live with different ethnic groups in a more

competitive situation. We could suppose that this was the outset of reinforcement of external self-valorization among them of aspects such as ethnic physical traits. It can be highlighted that in general they had enjoyed quick social mobility in the city, which did not involve cultural breaking with their rural worldviews which were kept "pickled". Nowadays these people need a kind of a "psychodrama" (Moreno, 1946/1997), and they tend to a dramatization of everyday life as an attempt to overcome normative conflicts regarding sexual liberty and individual rights that remain still unresolved. Thus, Whites tend to propose a sentimental approach to the body experience which is best reflected in the famous Brazilian soap-opera that permits a distant catharsis and vicarious experience of emotions. It is necessary to stress that the "psychologization" of body life we observed among Whites comes together with a private life, which is rather contemplative, yet active in relation to the body (observing/exploring, watching TV/game). This contrasted with the Blacks' integrative approach in the same context, including body in itself (appropriation/possessing, enjoying/desiring, and so on). Apparently, it is only outside the dwelling and the school environment that Whites feel mastering themselves in terms of body.

Thus our results pointed out that socialization/exchanges among ethnic groups in Brazil, have not significantly altered each group's representations, discourses and practices regarding the body, including sexuality. In other words, these results suggest that studies involving sociocultural matters like ethnic and religious representations and practices (which tend to be very much subjects of political mobilization) of minority groups and individuals in less democratic societies, can be very influenced by dominant culture discourses that are strategically used in public spheres. At first glance this looks as if minorities did abide by dominant discourses and tried to justify a system that African-Brazilians (and individuals) might consider legitimate and very stable or difficult to change (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Yet, this rather highlights the necessity of indirect approaches to reach those utterances that express namely autonomy and differentiation

even if such contents seem to contradict explicit discourses minorities might express in more public contexts (Billig, 1996). That is, certain group and collective regularities in terms of body could give the impression that the groups share representations and practices. However, we could say that it does not affect intergroup ethnic relations, because it reflects necessities of an urban life (movements/stopping, walking/practicing sports, rest/relax), which is stressful for all in different social contexts like school or work realms. Yet, for Blacks the school was the environment where they felt the strongest normative pressure (13, 3%), bringing them to experience much stress in terms of body; and they tended to seek relief outside the classroom (dancing/playing, observing/exploring, feeding). Unfortunately, in the same context the amount of psychological conflict between the simultaneous search for relief and reflection/concern was so important that Blacks conveyed even states of anxiety/distress. This indicates that one of the important challenges for African-Brazilians is how to achieve schooling progress in contexts which are usually represented as dominated by White Christian teachers'/students' representations/practices. Such models of thought/action underpin a system of domination of White-European cultural patterns that students who self-identify as Blacks often perceive as repressive and illegitimate.

It is known that African-Brazilians, before and after the slavery's abolition, have spent a bigger part of their recent history in segregated social environments, what facilitated the sociocultural preservation made possible by the country's geographical-physical immensity. With urbanization and modernization African-Brazilians had to survive in environments where interindividual competition predominated. Thereafter, the group's sociocultural dimension started to be used more often as an element of valuation/devaluation. Big transformations took place in the Black people's world since then, even Candomblé and other forms of African-Brazilian religious expressions were re-created producing a unity within the group across Brazil, in an active self-transformation process (Moscovici, 1979). Then, they were gradually

surrounded by non-black groups; and the nature of social interactions was substantially modified. Thereupon they were able to face the obstacles to organize their groups, by developing effective individual and cultural minority assertive formulas. This is similar to what Lewin (1948) depicted as "the marginal man", in relation to members of minority groups (especially Jews and African-Americans) in North America at the beginning of the Twentieth century. That is, African-Brazilians faced the necessity to study and to work in environments that were dominated by White-Christians in Brazil, by assuming a multicultural stance. Thereby, they recognized part of the White culture's values and, simultaneously preserved and transformed their African-Brazilian sociocultural heritage.

Meanwhile, among Whites, the worldwide competition's challenge favored the emergence of biological racism, mainly adopted by those who faced other ethnic groups, in an almost "hand-to-hand" contact. It also favored a worshiping practice of specific sociocultural models that often operate as social distinction feature for Whites (Bourdieu, 1984): the physical beauty of dominant models is idealized, whether channeled through the media or not. Such models provoke a self-demand that can easily have implications for the intergroup ethnic coexistence, and can boost racism. In sum, the racism that in the Ninetieth and Twentieth centuries was related to economic fights, gave way to a new kind of sociocultural racism.

In the case of Blacks, they expressed specific themes that indicate a stance/approach that is more physicist regarding the body (parts of the body, health/illness, physical alterations, weight/agility, strength, muscles), which deserves more reflection. It is known that a considerable part of the Black population in the Brazilian society still tends to be inserted in work activities in which the value of physical strength predominates. This trend is reinforced by the focus on racial and biological differences and the stance of unrecognition regarding the African-Brazilians' sociocultural contribution that Whites do often adopt.

Yet, Afro-Brazilians enjoy a freedom of individual initiative with their bodies that Whites in

the same countries do not. This is a freedom from which a very good use can be made in many situations, even to play tricks in football, which are thoroughly loved and admired. Our thesis is that, despite all the discipline they endured, Blacks still relate to their body in a freer way than Whites.

These facts are important, but not enough to comprehend the results. Even many of those African-Brazilians who have abandoned (partially or totally) the original religions, have maintained practices that are transmitted within their groups. Thus the above mentioned self-integrated stance among Blacks in relation to the body can be mainly related to the psychology of African religions. These religions put much emphasis on the individual work, given that in the religious initiation/practice each one finds his/her own existential organization by diving in the inner self, and drawing upon a rich mythology and dynamic of the Orixás and other entities (Bastide, 1971). In turn, Christian religions emphasize norms/deviance shaped in the commandments and other rules oriented to the public realm. The different manifestations of current introduction of collective administration's forms of social life (State and industry) appear to have effected all Whites in the sense of trying to maintain some sociocultural patterns, although Christian Whites seem to have suffered a higher impact of such pressures. It happens mainly in countries without consolidate experiences of individual and collective freedom initiative encouragement. In this sense, all the possible criticism directed against the economic and political inequality seems to have been channeled to the establishment of societies that are leveled around common norms/patterns.

In this context African-Brazilians developed an ethics of individual assertiveness, which is different from the classic sociological individualism, and tends to break the dominant belief in norms/deviance. This happens in a context where the African-Brazilians' social mobility/promotion is hard and difficult, given that there are many and very poor White and Dark-skinned groups. In addition, other influential element is the existence of a "racial democracy" in Brazil, which traditionally had been used as a paternalistic device to minimize the

subordinate groups' resistance to being exploited (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jackman, 1994). According to this ideology ethnic groups coexist in interpersonal terms sharing many situations without conflicts, in a mutual sociocultural exchange, which implies that the ordinary White man could be considered a 'good majority'. Still engaged in the cordial man's pre-civic culture, political parties and public institutions and organizations do not yet give priority to the ethnic dimension in their guidelines/agendas (Van Dijk, 2007).

It seems that in a historical moment when in many societies the main political parties practice similar politics on general economic matters, which is currently reproduced even in a global scale, the economic fight among groups within/between these countries has become an almost secondary problem. For this reason, monocultural dominant politics in public spaces became necessary to guarantee relative advantages -sometimes rather symbolic- for the formerly exclusive culturally dominant groups and to keep some groups in a defensive/dominated position, as it happens in multicultural countries like Brazil. Therefore, many parts of the world turn out to practice increasingly a cult of Whiteness and Christianity, with implications such as reinforcement of ethnic and religious traits of non-White-Christian cultures, the Islamic for example, when otherwise religion's influence would tend to remain weak. In this sense, studies in social representations about topics like body in public spheres become often a group's imposition. However, while majority groups tend to monopolize the public space with their practices and representations over non-White people; it is often overlooked the existence among African-Brazilians of active individuals who can elaborate their strategies in a different way. Meanwhile, it has become commonplace to call biological and sociocultural whitening the assimilation of African-Brazilians to the dominant cultural models. Nonetheless, there is something that has been less examined: the African-Brazilian individual's search of social autonomy, differentiation and, even, the quest to have their own space, which can be found in their representations on the body.

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