

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE: ASPECTS OF THE “SOCIAL” PERSPECTIVE IN CURRENT SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN GREECE

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Abstract: The aim of the special issue of the Hellenic Journal of Psychology is to present a significant part of the current Greek research activity in the field of social psychology. The articles included cover a variety of topics and represent different epistemological traditions within the field, namely, the “sociological” and the “psychological” one. This special issue hosts research articles dealing with the formation of national policies through media faming, lay representations of racism, attitudes towards prostitution, and the construction of multiculturalism in the talk of educators.

Keywords: Media faming, Multiculturalism, Prostitution, Racism

Social psychology is considered as one of the fundamental disciplines of psychological science (Barrett, 2017). This ascertainment is based on a number of special features that characterize this discipline and can be summarized as follows: Social psychology is dealing with a wide variety of topics ranging from intra-individual processes to intergroup relations and phenomena related to ideology. Then, in studying these topics both quantitative and qualitative methodology is employed and almost the total of methodological approaches, techniques and practices is utilized. Moreover, social psychology accommodates scholars who hold different epistemological viewpoints stemming mainly from sociology and psychology and tend to choose respectively different methodological approaches in their effort to study individuals and groups in the context of everyday life (Smith & Mackie, 2007). Apart from the above, perhaps the most significant aspect of the distinctiveness of social psychology seems to be reflected in its label. Specifically, social psychology is the discipline that strives to

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study human behavior in intra-individual, inter-individual, intergroup and ideological level of analysis by assigning equal importance to both the social / collective and the psychological / individual aspect of human nature. The term “social” implies a direct reference to the group while the term “psychology” implies a direct reference to the individual as a separate unit. Still, in the case of social psychology a unique accomplishment is achieved; that is, it focuses its scientific lenses at the inconspicuous point in which the social and psychological are intersected since for social psychology individuals and society affect and form each other on a perpetual interplay (Παπαστάμου, 2001).

This unique advantage of social psychological theory and research raises crucial questions regarding the nature of the discipline itself. Specifically, how “social” and “psychological” are defined in the context of social psychology? Are they distinct aspects of the same construct or do they constitute separate conceptualizations of different constructs? One would argue that differences can be detected in the selection of topics with which social psychology is dealing. Closer to the “psychological” aspect when studying intra-individual processes and interpersonal behaviors, while closer to the “sociological” aspect when studying intergroup relations and phenomena related to ideology. Also, the methodological approach selected for the study of processes, behaviors and phenomena seems to follow different paths. For example, sociocognitive mechanisms and processes have been mostly studied through quantitative methodology (Lambert & Scherer, 2013), while social representations have been studied mainly through qualitative methodology (Flick & Foster, 2017). On the other hand, phenomena such as close relationships, prosocial behavior, prejudice and social influence have been studied by both methodological approaches (Hogg & Vaughan, 2013). Is it the selection of methodological approach for the investigation of an issue that places its study to the “sociological” or the “psychological” part of the discipline? A closer look at the topics covered by social psychological research publications in the last ten years or so worldwide, reveals an increasing tendency of scholars to denote –usually when discussing the limitations of their studies certain points of criticism and relative suggestions that can be summarized as follows: First, the so called “security” of large samples and the multilevel statistical models do not ensure an in depth understanding of the features and dynamics, both psychological and social, that form a tendency or determine a certain behavior. Second, an attempt through qualitative methods to bring to the surface deeper and hidden processes and dynamics underscoring behavior does not capture the multilevel and complex reality of individuals and groups. It rather seems to rush into an attempt to offer a “because” without having clarified the “what” and the “why”. A counterargument to these lines of criticism could be as such: One study

comes to compile the other or one study starts from where the other stops. This seems to be the basic argument by which, for several decades now, topics, methodologies and scholars appointed to one or the other “side”, and a vivid discussion regarding the superiority of the “sociological” or the “psychological” perspective probably continues to shape mentalities among social psychology scholars.

Nevertheless, in the last decade or so there is also a growing body of publications (McKim, 2017) supporting a turn towards the employment of mixed methodology in social psychological research. Perhaps the combination of methodological approaches, instruments and techniques might be able to offer a more integrated research option as it seems to give an opportunity not only to highlight a tendency, an attitude or a behavior and to pinpoint relations between variables but also to provide us with plausible explanations about the reasons for which certain variables were found to be related. Undoubtedly, such an approach cannot be applied in all cases and there are certain topics that require almost exclusively a more “psychological” or a more “sociological” approach in their study. Still, mixed methodology seems to constitute an interesting and rather challenging research option which, according to its adherents, seems able to introduce a new viewpoint in social psychological research.

This is the central idea that the contributors of this special issue of the Hellenic Journal of Psychology discussed on May 2016 in Komotini, Greece during a two-day symposium organized by the writer of the present introduction at the Department of History and Ethnology of the Democritus University of Thrace, Greece under the title “From the ‘psychological’ to the ‘social’: Epistemological determinants and methodological approaches of current social psychological research in Greece”. The main purpose of this meeting was to bring together to a certain scientific forum Greek social psychologists and note down their current research production in order to highlight not only the issues that attract an important part of the current social psychological research production in Greece, but also to become a starting point for a substantial discussion regarding the aspects of social psychological research and the possibility of applying mixed methods in an attempt to offer an alternative and perhaps more integrative methodological option. It should be mentioned that in the conclusions of this two-day symposium this specific issue was thoroughly discussed and positive remarks were put forth.

Because of editorial constraints it was decided that the present publication attempt would be divided into two separate issues of the Hellenic Journal of Psychology (HJP). The first issue is entitled: “Aspects of the ‘social’ perspective in current social psychological research in Greece”. It hosts four research papers by Greek social psychologists; the topic selection and –to a certain point the methodological choices can be considered as offering a “sociological” point of view

to social psychological research. Likewise, the second issue of the same publication attempt entitled “Aspects of the ‘psychological’ perspective in current social psychological research in Greece” hosts five research papers which, for the same reasons as above, seems to offer a “psychological” point of view to social psychological research. It should be clarified that in both cases the distinction between “sociological” and “psychological” aspects of social psychological research that appears in the titles of the two special issues of HJP is rather ostensible since the main reason for this publication is to capture an important part of the current social psychological research activity in Greece and by doing so to give rise to a fruitful, hopefully, dialogue concerning the advantages of mixed methodologies in future research endeavors in the context of our discipline.

As mentioned above the present issue hosts four research papers. The study by Gardikiotis, Xanthopoulos, Katsaounidou, Papasarafianou, and Fourkalidou entitled “What should we do now? Support of critical national policies depends on social psychological processes and media framing” investigated the formation of critical national policies during the economic crisis in Greece. The study draws upon two broad theoretical stands, psychological and media effects research; the paradigm opted served the recording of the standpoints of the Greek society towards the crucial dilemma of Grexit during the spring of 2015. The authors wanted to examine whether support of national policies is predicted by social psychological predictors such as perceived injustice, emotions, collective efficacy, and social identity. Moreover, they explored the effects of exposure to media framing on these relationships. National identity, perceived injustice and collective efficacy were found to be important variables predicting policy preferences of the participants. Specifically, the empirical evidence regarding perceived injustice and emotional reactions to media framing is a significant theoretical contribution and a very useful tool to understanding the issue in hand. Another important contribution of the findings of this study concerns the impact that media frames have on people’s understanding of their socioeconomic situation.

The paper authored by Iatridis is entitled “Individual diversity and lay representations of racism: Perseverance of the prejudice problematic”. In this exploratory in nature empirical study the author focuses on the lay representations of racism and discrimination on the grounds of the “prejudice problematic”. The paper theoretically highlights the crucial role of individual diversity in the understanding of the “prejudice problematic” as it has been suggested by Wetherell (2012) and by doing so offers a very interesting point of view regarding the study and understanding of prejudice nowadays. The study employed participants from the general population and aimed to explore the relationship between personal endorsement of individual

diversity beliefs and lay representations of racism and discrimination. It should be mentioned that T. Iatridis used evidence from semi-structured interviews to construct questionnaires assessing explanations of racism and perceived impact of racism. The results showed that individual diversity beliefs were selectively associated with some lay representations of racism. Yet, as the author points out, further research is needed in order for associations to individual diversity ideology to become generalized. Also, results highlight the importance of focusing on the contextual determinants of lay representations of racism to achieve a more substantial understanding of this phenomenon.

Digidiki and Baka contributed a research paper entitled: "Attitudes towards prostitution: Do belief in a just world and previous experience as a client of prostitution matter?" This study is part of a broader project exploring attitudes towards the victims and clients of sex trafficking and is one of the few studies in Greece addressing attitudes towards prostitution. In doing so the authors place on a central position the beliefs in a just world theory introduced by Lerner in 1970. Furthermore, they aimed to assess attitudes towards prostitution men and women hold by highlighting both micro- and macro- social factors related to the justification and normalization of these attitudes. The results showed that females tend to adopt more negative attitudes towards prostitution than male participants. Also, analyses revealed that the higher the level of education of the participants, the less likely they were to adopt positive attitudes towards prostitution. Moreover, the results indicated that beliefs in ultimate justice and in an unjust world are relevant predictors of negative attitudes towards prostitution offering insight in the justification processes of stereotype formation.

The present issue, finally, hosts the research paper authored by Sapountzis and Papanikolaou. Their contribution is entitled "Multiculturalism and cultural diversity in discourse: Kindergarten teachers and primary schoolteachers talk about the Muslim minority in Thrace, Greece". In this paper Sapountzis and Papanikolaou examined the way in which kindergarten teachers and primary schoolteachers construct multiculturalism and the identity of the Muslim minority in Thrace, Greece. The authors discuss elaborately in the context of intergroup relations the concept and relative evidence regarding multiculturalism and offer an integrated argumentation about the theoretical dispute between multiculturalism and colour-blindness viewpoints on this issue. Further, they carried out semi-structured interviews and, initially, employed thematic analysis to categorize the research material of the interviews. After that they approached their data based on the principles of rhetorical psychology as outlined by Billig (1996). Remarkably, the results highlighted the important role that framing (religious vs. ethnic) plays in the conception of minority.

Also, findings point out the special dynamics taking place in the regulation of prejudice with respect to the negotiation of professional identities of educators – members of the dominant group.

At this point I would like to thank the authors of the two special issues of HJP as they believed in this publication initiative and contributed to it. Also, I would like to thank the reviewers of the papers appearing here. Their positive comments and insightful notes helped the authors and enhanced the quality of the present publication. Also, I would like to thank Pr. Anastasia Efkliides, editor in chief of the HJP. Professor Efkliides strongly supported the present initiative from the beginning and through all phases of the process showed confidence and patience providing this effort with strength to carry on and get completed.

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