

## PSYCHOLOGY IN MEXICO, ITS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE †

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Only a year ago, in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, I published my most extensive report on the psychology of Mexico (Diaz-Guerrero, 1984a). I have never seen something become partially outdated so fast. My eyes already wide in surprise for the Annual Review article became wider upon the process of organizing and during the celebration of the XXIII International Congress of Psychology in Acapulco, Mexico, September 2-7, 1984. The paper contributions of Mexican psychologists amounted to over 240. Only second and not a far second in number of contributions to the psychologists of the United States of North America. This is in spite of the fact that several dozen nations contributed, and, among them, several highly industrialized. The advantage of being the hosts to the Congress is not a sufficient explanation for an international congress of the International Union of Scientific Psychology held in North America.

### The Early Past

Beyond the contributions to the history of psychology in Mexico reported in 1984 (Diaz-Guerrero, 1984a, 1984b), it is important to single out the research carried out by Pablo Valderrama Iturbe (1983 with Rivero del Pozo, 1984a, 1984b). His painstaking search has begun to clarify not only the factors, but the persons through which the philosophical positivism prevalent in Mexico at the end of the XX century promoted the development of psychology. The personality and work of Porfirio Parra, he has discovered, was particularly crucial in these developments. Another of his recent and a completely unanticipated discovery, is that there was a Mexican disciple.

### The Research Panorama

The vastness of what is going on in research, pure and applied and pure-applied defies a brief description. At the same time, with several exceptions, many of the efforts are beginning or in process rather than systematic or complete. Because even within areas such as neuropsychology or health psychology there are

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so diverse aims it appears that no generalization is possible. There is, however, an interesting consistency. Research in Mexico is fundamentally sociocentric. Almost every effort in research is designed, in one way or another, to be of service to society. Contrastingly, the other consistency of research in Mexico is, with very few exceptions, the lack of communication between researchers in a given field. In what follows I will concentrate on the areas of research and not on the researchers. Many of the names are to be found in a previous paper (Diaz-Guerrero, 1984) but many are new. The interested reader should study the Scientific Program of the XXIII International Congress for these new names (1984)

**Health Psychology.** Extremely heterogeneous, this area, with its clearly applied undertones, had the largest single number of Mexican contributions to the XXIII International Congress. It includes from government to civic and professional groups and individuals promoting and investigating health processes, the measurement of physical and mental health, epidemiological approaches to health and illness, the problems of treatment adherence and discontinuation, drug addiction research, proposals for rehabilitation programs including some evaluations and psychological interventions in medical patients.

**Neuropsychology and Psychopharmacology.** Ever since Hernández-Peón (Morgane, 1970) this area of research has been a favorite in Mexico. Much theory and research has been advanced on. 1) Neuroplasticity, experimental models of brain damage and factors on recuperation. 2) Evoked potentials. 3) The EEG, particularly regarding learning processes and learning disabilities. 4) The origins of mind. 5) Sleep research, and 6) Inter-hemispheric relations.

Psychopharmacology is also the center of interest. The effects of substances upon psychological processes and particularly the area of drug addictions, alcohol, tobacco and inhalants.

**Environmental Psychology.** There is a far greater abundance of contributions of several groups to health psychology, but the group working on environmental psychology appears more organized and its efforts at systematization are evident. The cognitive processes underpinning the research are becoming clearer. Aspects of the phenomena of complexity and other urban factors and (or) contaminants on some psychological processes. The interest on theory and models is also clear in this group.

**Social Psychology and Personality.** There are at least 3 groups and some individuals interested in doing social psychological research. The more systematic and advanced work is being done by teachers and graduate students in social psychology at the Faculty of Psychology of the National University. Here such well known processes and areas as empathy, prosocial behavior, self disclosure, masculinity, femininity, locus of control, etc, are being investigated with strict attention on methodology and with a strong motivation to clarify the extent to which they apply in the Mexican society and culture and to highlight idiosyncratic characteristics.

Another group in the highlands of Puebla (a state of Mexico) is doing what may be described best as social psychological and interdisciplinary research in action in a rural area. The dedication and interesting doings and findings of this group are becoming proverbial.

One more group and individuals are working with such processes and areas as Moscovici's social representation, the psychology of women, socialization, social problems and even isolated efforts of political psychology. The recently formed Association of Social Psychologists will help more communication among social psychologists.

**Industrial and Organizational.** There is intensive interest in organizational and labor psychology. There are groups and individuals contributing, organizational processes and variables have been investigated, motivation and satisfaction in the job. Fatigue, sickness, conflict, selection and training of personnel and even the status of women in the labor force have been considered. This field is on the threshold of systematic efforts and hopefully of greater communication among researchers.

**Ethno-Psychology and Cross-Cultural Psychology.** There is only one group and individuals interested in cross-cultural psychology. This group, however, which formed in the sixties has provided what may be considered the most systematic theoretical foundation and data available regarding Ethnopsychology in general and the psychology of the Mexican in particular and several books and many other nationalities. The group, because of economic and other factors has desintegrated and only enthusiastic individuals remain active. The Ethno-psychology of the Mexican, however, is presently interesting other groups of researchers, particularly social psychologists.

**General Psychology.** Learning by far leads research in general psychology a strong group of behaviorists has organized a society and publishes a journal. They contributed relatively little to the XXIII International Congress because they had a few days before their own Mexican Congress. They do pure and particularly applied research, but, unfortunately, they have not kept me abreast of their developments. Cognition follows, particularly on concept formation and cognitive, language and abilities development. There is little work on perception, motivation, thinking and emotion.

**Miscellaneous.** There is work aimed at understanding the psychology student, his expectations and vocational alternatives as well as about the teaching of psychology and the psychology of instruction generally. Work on general vocational guidance and university entrance examinations has been done for many years. Much work, some of it sophisticated research is executed in clinical psychology, particularly regarding children, but also for the family, the couple, etc.

## The Teaching of Psychology

If the panorama of research is exciting the vista of the teaching of psychology in Mexico is close to disastrous. A recent report cited by Ribes-Iniesta (1984) indicates that there are sixty six institutions granting professional degrees in psychology of which only eighteen are state universities and all the other private organisms very often in the provinces. A great many of these, including some state universities, have as instructors not only psychologists without the M.A. or Ph.D. degrees but individuals from other professions. The total number of students is estimated at 25,000.

The good news here is that just a month ago, Dr. Juan Jose Sanchez Sosa became the head or, as we call it, the Director of the Faculty of Psychology at UNAM. This is the first time that a Mexican psychologist, holding a Ph. D. from the U.S., is appointed for a four-year term. There is much enthusiasm for he is strongly for academic and scientific pursuits. This is badly needed for there have been rumblings that the professional level of education, in contrast with the graduate school in our faculty, has dangerously lowered its standards.

But the only remedy for the many smaller private and some public schools of psychology is to radically improve their teaching staff. Local, national and international societies would do well by bombarding the directors of these schools with the realization that they must improve their staff. I believe there is a poignant need for a publication such as "Who is who in Psychology in Mexico" that can be sent to these organisms. After all, the colleagues that are doing the research reported above, would likely be good candidates to rehabilitate the staff of many provincial private and state institutions.

### The Year 2,000

The over all view of Mexican psychology is sweet and sour. There is a big problem particularly in teaching of quantity versus quality. The recent acute and dangerous economic crisis in Mexico darkens the picture. We, psychologists must not forget what happened to psychology and its experts in China during the cultural revolution, a result of economic and political crisis. Some psychologists were eliminated others sent to do menial work and psychology disappeared for many years.

Actually, given the nature of the Mexican revolution and particularly its culture such ominous future can be discarded. Furthermore, psychology in Mexico is often sociocentric, socially conscious. The look the research panorama is clearly optimistic. An excellent happening to scientific research in general and psychological research in particular is President's La Madrid move to establish the Investigador Nacional (National Researcher). In this official program bona fide researchers receive a monthly grant to help them continue their research actions. A number of research psychologists are now "Investigadores Nacionales".

Research it is felt will be doing well in the year 2,000, particularly in the better organized areas described above. there are dark clouds regarding the teaching of psychology. Only strong programs can dissolve them by the year 2,000.

There is on the other hand , the feeling in this writer that the basic problems of Mexico are the result of certain aspects of the psychology of the Mexican. If this is so, the future of psychology is assured.

## RESUMEN

El trabajo revisa las áreas de mayor peso en la investigación actual en psicología, teniendo en cuenta las aportaciones de los psicólogos mexicanos al XXIII Congreso Internacional de Psicología (Acapulco, 1984).

El autor considera que la investigación en México es 'sociocéntrica', y la revisión ofrece datos sobre la aportación mexicana a las diversas áreas psicológicas, así como la situación de la enseñanza de la psicología envuelta en luces y sombras

## SUMMARY

This work offers a view of the main research subjects of actual psychology, taking into account their contributions to the XXIII International Congress of Psychology (Acapulco, 1984).

The author defines Mexican research as sociocentric, and gives data about contributions of Mexican psychologists to different psychological subjects

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