

Deconstructing myths and reallocating borders: Contributions of clinical psychology beyond the office



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ABSTRACT

In this theoretical essay, we address the need to reposition Clinical Psychology, highlighting its challenges when it is confined by prejudices that limit it to the application of its knowledge to traditional therapeutic spaces. We reflect on the need to overcome, even if partially, the fragmentation of psychological knowledge in order to promote the development of more integrative approaches. We highlight the resistance arising from the generic association of Clinical Psychology with the medical model or with the dichotomy of health versus disease. In order to confront this misconception, we highlight the importance of carrying out an integrative articulation between the

knowledge constructed in various fields of Psychology. We bring examples to show the need to use innovative strategies in the integration of transversal and heterodox approaches, including contributions from Clinical Psychology in this regard. The application of adaptable clinical techniques to non-traditional contexts, such as Psychodrama in socio-emotional education, is highlighted, evidencing the relevance of this adaptation for coping with issues such as violence and the deconstruction of prejudices. It is concluded that the promotion of a more integrative Psychology is essential to deepen knowledge and find solutions to complex problems. By challenging prejudices and broadening the scope of application of practical-scientific knowledge from Clinical Psychology, we highlight its potential to contribute to the construction of a more comprehensive understanding of the human being.

Keywords: Clinical psychology, Health.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 DEMYSTIFYING LIMITATIONS AND EXPANDING HORIZONS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Clinical Psychology is a crucial area of study for understanding the complexity of human beings as a synthesis of their biopsychological processes. However, their work is often faced with prejudices and limitations that restrict them to a limited space, in most cases, the four walls of the office. In this context, the main objective of this article is to present and reflect on some of these prejudices, exploring the resistance to adapt the scientific knowledge constructed in research in Clinical Psychology to other areas of psychological knowledge.

Within the scope of this study, we adopted the understanding that prejudice consists of a belief, devoid of support in evidence, which is generalized and can predominate in the orientation of the human decision-making process (PIRES, 2023a).



The concern of scientific research in studying prejudices and stereotypes in relation to Psychology is an old one. De Almeida (1978) conducted a survey with 180 subjects, including physicians, engineers, professors and students of Psychology in which he sought to raise the social perception of the psychologist. Such research has shown that people conceive of the practice of Psychology as a place for observant, balanced and considerate people.

More recently, the fragmentation of Psychology into areas has been treated as an expression of diversity in the profession, as supported by the Federal Council of Psychology (2022) based on data from a survey that involved 20,207 professionals in the area. Notwithstanding what is suggested by this more current view, there are prejudices and one of the most persistent that Clinical Psychology faces is the conception that its application is restricted to the individual scope and the office (ZILIOOTTO *et al.*, 2014).

This has been historically mitigated by the possibility of the same professional assuming different professional identities. The Psychology census (CFP, 2022) also shows this trend. The survey shows us that 89% of the professionals who start their activities in Clinical Psychology declared to remain there. In this universe, 49.5% mentioned that they added another area of activity, a fact that collaborates with our thesis that the professional ends up transiting through various spaces and becoming the synthesis of their experiences, knowledge and practices. So, according to this tendency, the person himself can integrate his knowledge through professional practice in several areas.

Exemplifying this limited view, we observe the deep-seated belief that their view is pathologizing and necessarily linked to the medical model (MICHELS, 2005). In addition, it is often perceived as necessary only in the face of mental health interventions, which contributes to perpetuating the idea that its focus lies exclusively in problems of adjustment, adaptation and behavior, when a given individual is maladaptive, as in cases of self-mutilation, for example. In this context, we observed that psychological knowledge, coming from the clinic, was separated from certain spaces, such as the school and the organizational, for example.

This suggestion is supported by the reflections on the formation of identity in School and Educational Psychology. From these ideas we can perceive and infer the questions about the advantages, disadvantages and the possible use of knowledge from Clinical Psychology (SOUZA FILHO *et al.*, 2023), from the point of view of theorists of School and Educational Psychology. In the direction of seeking explanations for these observations, one of the aspects that we can raise is the indication of the fragmentation of the scientific view, even within the same area of knowledge. The incipience of an integrative vision makes it difficult for the knowledge produced in the field of Clinical Psychology to be adapted and to collaborate with other areas.

As an example and in opposition to this stance, we can argue that the knowledge, initially constructed from the perspective of the study of anxiety problems by the Cognitive-Behavioral Theory



(CBT), can be equally useful for the understanding of the healthy psychological arrangement. This is the case of the theoretical elements related to cognition errors (BECK, 2020), which refer to the intrapsychological forms of inference and generalization of concepts and how these processes relate to the elicitation of emotions, the operations between semiotic concepts and the orientation of the decision-making process. This knowledge is crucial, for example, for the detailed understanding of internalization, one of the key concepts of Cultural Psychology (PIRES, 2023b) and the formation of prejudices itself.

It is important to emphasize that, within the broad field of Clinical Psychology, it is necessary to recognize the richness and diversity of theoretical and practical approaches that coexist. Our previous example focuses on a contribution from the cognitive-behavioral perspective. However, we emphasize that our intention is to reinforce the idea that Clinical Psychology encompasses a variety of theories and methods, from psychodynamic to humanistic and integrative approaches. Each of these strands offers a unique understanding of human behavior, broadening the theoretical scope beyond cognitive processes, an opportunity that should be seized by us.

Highlighting this conception of the contributions of Clinical Psychology in a diversified panorama, we wish to focus on the high capacity of this field of Psychology to adapt and respond to a wide range of psychological questions that arise throughout history. In addition, it provides a wealth of therapeutic strategies and diverse forms of intervention to deal with day-to-day issues. Therefore, by overcoming prejudices in relation to Clinical Psychology, it is possible to articulate a vast conceptual set that can significantly contribute to the understanding and promotion of psychological well-being in environments in general.

In this context, the study of intrapsychological processes has always been a permanent challenge for Psychology, because the methodological arsenal has always been very small. Several methods do not present sufficient sensitivity to highlight hidden aspects and complex processes, such as emotions, for example. Recently, with the development of new techniques and equipment, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging, some significant scientific advances have been made (SANTOS, 2022). These advances have helped to overcome the body-mind dilemma and to broaden our conceptions of the relationship between psychological processes and the brain.

We therefore need to challenge the belief that the knowledge produced in the clinical context is trapped somewhere between the normal and abnormal poles or between the states of health and disease. This objective can be achieved when we adopt systemic frameworks whose concepts help us to articulate various productions from different areas of psychological knowledge.

In this sense, although it is not our objective to deepen the reflection on the possible broader articulation between areas of psychological knowledge, we indicate that the General Theory of Systems (DE ARAUJO, 2020) and the Theory of Complexity (MORIN, 2005, 2015) provide support



for the realization of an integrative approach. They emphasize the completeness and importance of the relationships between systems and their subsystems. So, when we fragment the studies in Psychology, we end up eliminating relevant perspectives and knowledge for the much desired understanding of intrapsychological and relational aspects. By confronting these well-known, but little visible, prejudices, we emphasize the need to promote a broader and more integrative view in Psychology, a purpose to which this reflection proposes to contribute.

1.2 PREJUDICES AND STIGMAS IN THE APPLICATION OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN NON-TRADITIONAL CONTEXTS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Clinical Psychology, although it is a fundamental theoretical-practical area for the understanding of the human being, faces prejudices and stigmas when its theoretical body is applied outside the traditional context of the office. There is a fear of adopting clinical theoretical frameworks in other areas of Psychology, such as in schools or companies. This is often supported by the assumption that this knowledge is rooted in the medical model or associated with the historical pathologization of behaviors (REBOUÇAS; DUTRA, 2010). In this context, it is relevant that we explain these ideas in order to influence the deconstruction and demystification of such fears, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of using the knowledge from Clinical Psychology in different scenarios.

Consequently, our priority focus on the possible prejudices suffered by Clinical Psychology does not imply that we wish to point to it as the only solution to psychological problems. Its relative isolation stems from the intense fragmentation that all fields of knowledge have undergone throughout the twentieth century. XX (HIBBERD; PETOCZ, 2023). This did not occur only with Psychology, becoming a standard for which we highlight the need to adopt a more comprehensive approach that is oriented in the opposite direction to fragmentation. From this perspective, while Clinical Psychology provides details on individual and intrapsychological aspects, Social, Educational, and Organizational Psychology, for example, offer equally valuable perspectives for understanding the social, educational, and organizational dynamics that also make up the human ecosystem (PIRES, 2023b).

Our argument points to the need to articulate these different areas of psychological knowledge in order not only to enrich the understanding of the phenomena, but also to expand the possibilities of intervention, which can promote the elaboration of more integral and adaptive solutions to the various contexts in which psychological challenges manifest themselves. Therefore, a transdisciplinary approach, considering the synergy between different areas of Psychology, can provide more complete and effective perceptions to face the issues that arise in scenarios of increasing complexity.

However, differently from what we have just presented, Psychology, when entering school or business environments, often hesitates to incorporate clinical perspectives due to the possibility of



association with the pathologization of behaviors (RONDINI; MARTINS; INCAU, 2020). For example, when dealing with behavioral issues in the classroom, educators may be afraid to apply knowledge and practices from clinics, even if adapted, fearing that this will generate a reductionist view of school failure in the face of the challenges faced by students. This subject is extensively addressed in the specialized literature of School Psychology (MARTINS, 2019; FIRBIDA; VASCONCELOS, 2019; MIRALLIA *et al.*, 2023). We mention this aspect, although it is not our purpose to delve into the reasons why this prejudice may have been established, simply by consulting the referenced literature, from which many details on this subject can be analyzed.

However, our emphasis is on pointing out that this resistance, understandable from certain points of view and from certain concrete examples (FIRBIDA; VASCONCELOS, 2019; SCARIN; SOUZA, 2020), can result in the loss of valuable opportunities to address psychological issues and promote well-being, in a variety of contexts.

One of the aspects that we must highlight is the fact that Clinical Psychology is not limited to solving problems after their manifestation, but also offers valuable knowledge for the prevention and promotion of mental health. Community projects, for example, can incorporate strategies, originally developed in the clinical context, to strengthen well-being from an early age, thus mitigating the exclusive association with merely reactive and curative approaches.

In this context, there are strategies, developed within Clinical Psychology, that are collective, such as Psychodrama, for example. This technique, proposed by Moreno (1993), can be very successful in a social-emotional education program or in coping with prejudice. Similarly, in companies, the application of clinical strategies can contribute to the development of more equitable, collaborative, and less violent work environments.

This fragmenting conception is opposed to an integrative vision that would allow the knowledge produced in Clinical Psychology to collaborate more effectively with other areas. In addition, it cherishes the imaginary that it would be possible to perform asepsis within the field of knowledge itself, banishing Clinical Psychology from other practices in the area as a whole. At best, what happens is the confinement of clinical practices and knowledge to their therapeutic spaces.

Thus, the desire, not always explicit and easily identifiable, to delimit one's own field of action and to build new practices, without the theoretical support of other areas, can have the secondary effect of rejecting what already exists. The lack of an integrative approach can therefore limit the understanding, adaptation and application of existing knowledge, making it difficult to answer complex questions involving different psychological systems and subsystems.

Even in the field of integrative-inspired approaches, such as Cultural Psychology (PIRES, 2023b), for example, there is a lack of methodology and instruments capable of providing intelligibility about intrapsychological processes. This lack is perceived when important concepts such as inclusive



separation, internalization and externalization, among others, are not presented or described in detail. In addition to the initiatives of Cultural Psychology to overcome these limitations (WATZLAWIK; SALDEN, 2022), the contribution of Clinical Psychology can be fundamental. In this sense, the first initiatives for reflection on Clinical Cultural Psychology (PIRES, 2023c; SNORING-MORENO; OCAMPO-CEPEDA ; CLEVES-VALENCIA, 2023).

On the way to overcome this gap, the articulation of concepts of integrative theories, such as the General Systems Theory (DOS SANTOS, 2020) or Morin's Complexity Theory (2005, 2015) can be used as a larger framework from which various contributions, even if produced in a fragmented way, can make sense, as a whole. This way of thinking emphasizes integrality and the relations between systems, suggesting that the fragmentation of the scientific view may, as a result of its disastrous results, promote the invisibilization of crucial aspects for the understanding of certain psychological phenomena. Therefore, by integrating concepts from Clinical Psychology approaches with other areas, such as Social Psychology, Educational and School Psychology, and Developmental Psychology, just to mention a few, we can obtain a more comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of the human being.

1.3 INNOVATIVE WAYS TO ARTICULATE PSYCHOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

From the theoretical articulation that we are carrying out, it is possible to affirm that the contribution from Clinical Psychology is fundamental for the elaboration of innovative strategies that transcend the traditional approach to problems and, mainly, for the understanding of complex intrapsychological processes. For example, when we need to trace the interconnections between the recursive action of emotions, the various cognitive elements, and the organization of the cultural ecosystem at the social level, we lack details about possible models of how the recursive operations of psychological processes occur among themselves.

Then, there are approaches, such as CBT, for example, that highlight the influence of automatic beliefs and thoughts on individual emotions and behaviors, offering a solid conceptual and empirical basis (ALFORD; BECK; JONES JR, 1997) for the elaboration of transversal and innovative theoretical understandings, for application outside the clinical context.

Applying this point of view to our case, the interaction between emotions, beliefs, and automatic thoughts can be exemplified by the tendency of hasty generalization that occurs in the formation of prejudices, such as those we are presenting and of which Clinical Psychology is a victim. In situations of confrontation with the object of prejudice, negative emotions, such as fear or aversion, can intensify distorted automatic thoughts, promoting a recursive effect and permanence of harmful



stereotypes. This can be evidenced by the distancing that attempts are made to impose on clinical psychologists from environments such as schools or companies.

Similarly, and applying reverse reasoning, the adoption of collective strategies that mobilize emotions at an experiential level can have positive cross-cutting impacts on various elements of the cognitive structure for the deconstruction of these same prejudices. So, according to this view, it is precisely articulation, joint work and collaboration that will be the most effective strategies to face the isolation of Clinical Psychology.

In addition, as highlighted in the introduction, the appropriation of clinical techniques can be very positive in other contexts. An example is the use of Psychodrama, a therapeutic technique proposed by Moreno (1993) as a way to explore social and individual dynamics in a dramatic and participatory way. In psychodrama, participants act out roles in specific situations, promoting a deeper understanding of the subjects' emotions, beliefs, and day-to-day social interactions.

In the school context, for example, psychodrama can be adapted beyond its clinical applications and in an innovative way to confront prejudice. Through psychodramatic activities, students can experience and explore emotions associated with prejudice, promoting empathy and mutual understanding. For example, an activity could involve dramatic representations of situations where discrimination occurs in the day-to-day life of an educational establishment, allowing participants to experience the emotions involved. Despite the brevity of our explanation, it is important to highlight that psychodrama is not only a theatrical technique, but an instrument of intervention, in psychotherapy, which requires specialized training for its proper adaptation and conduction.

Another innovative approach could be the integration of virtual reality techniques to create immersive experiences that evoke emotions related to prejudice. These virtual experiences can be guided by CBT principles, based on the elements of collective culture that guide overt and veiled social practices, raised by the methods of Cultural Psychology (PIRES, 2023b).

However, such an integrative vision presents not only advantages but also great challenges. Thus, the present analysis recognizes the urgent need to address not only the benefits, but also the possible limitations associated with the integration of scientific knowledge produced in Clinical Psychology in non-conventional environments. Firstly, the adequacy and adaptation of clinical approaches to meet the specific demands of settings such as schools, businesses and communities require careful reflection on the generalization and effectiveness of these techniques in relation to the characteristics and specificities of each context.

In addition, the interaction with professionals from different areas of Psychology, such as Social, Educational and Organizational Psychology, can raise challenges in the integration of different perspectives. The discussion of these potential difficulties not only improves the understanding of the



complexity involved, but also enables professionals to deal adaptively with emerging obstacles and should be the subject of specific studies.

It is necessary, therefore, that the synergy promoted through the articulation of what was previously fragmented be taken advantage of. This favors the emergence of hybrid, heterodox and experiential strategies that may prove to be able to guide the understanding of complex psychological processes that only one approach would be unable to highlight. In this regard, we must get rid of our own prejudices regarding the adaptation of techniques from Clinical Psychology for community use. This can play a crucial role in driving meaningful change, contributing to building more inclusive and respectful environments.

2 CONCLUSION: DECONSTRUCTING PREJUDICES TO AMPLIFY POSITIVE IMPACTS

Throughout our argument, we seek to highlight the challenges faced by Clinical Psychology when it is limited by prejudices that confine it to psychotherapeutic spaces, restricting its acceptance and use in non-traditional contexts.

When we exemplify, using the reflection on the construction of the identity of School Psychology, we seek to highlight the fragmentation of the scientific view, the demarcation of boundaries between different visions within the same area of knowledge, which hinders the integration of different knowledges. We show that naïve and understandable resistance to associating with the medical model or to accepting the dichotomy of health versus disease can result in the elimination of important relationships between different psychological approaches.

We then point to the construction of an integrative articulation, emphasizing the need to overcome reductionist conceptions. In this context, we argue that General Systems Theory and Complexity Theory can be more general and valuable conceptual frameworks to promote this convergence. We point to the provision of a broader view that can facilitate collaboration between different areas and promote a more comprehensive understanding of intrapsychological phenomena.

Exemplifying using innovative forms of articulation of psychological knowledge, we emphasize the importance of Clinical Psychology in the elaboration of transversal and heterodox strategies. We highlight the application of techniques derived from clinical expertise, adapted to other contexts, can become effective strategies for coping with violence and for deconstructing prejudices, for example.

By overcoming the fragmentation of knowledge, the resulting synergy favors the emergence of hybrid and experiential strategies, opening new horizons for the occurrence of significant changes in community environments. We point out that Clinical Psychology, figuratively represented by the Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, by studying intrapsychological processes in detail, offers a practical example of how a clinical approach can indicate clues, not only about pathological functioning, but



also for the healthy development of these processes. Thus, we show that Clinical Psychology is not limited to solving problems after their manifestation, but offers valuable knowledge for the prevention and promotion of mental health.

Therefore, we conclude that the promotion of a more integrative and innovative Psychology is fundamental for the deepening of the construction of knowledge and for the search for solutions to complex problems. By challenging our own biases and broadening the reach of Clinical Psychology, we contribute to the construction of more inclusive and respectful interactive environments, reflecting a more comprehensive view of human behavior in the contemporary scenario.



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