

# Psychology in Latin America: Historical reflections and perspectives

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The present paper describes some of the most relevant events in the development of psychology in Latin America. After proposing a synthesis of antecedents, the paper addresses some scientific and professional activities leading to the birth of scientific psychology in several Latin American countries during the last decade of the 19th century. Next, the paper describes the foundation of university-level institutions for education and professional training of psychologists during the first half of the 20th century. Finally, some reflections comment on the mechanisms which led to the creation and maintenance of several scientific communities contributing to a thriving contemporary Latin American psychology.

Cet article décrit certains des événements les plus pertinents dans le développement de la psychologie en Amérique latine. Après une synthèse des antécédents, l'article présente certaines activités scientifiques et professionnelles menant à la naissance de la psychologie scientifique dans plusieurs pays d'Amérique latine durant la dernière décennie du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Puis, l'article décrit les fondements des établissements universitaires et de la formation professionnelle des psychologues durant la première moitié du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. Finalement, des commentaires sont formulés sur les mécanismes qui ont mené à la création et au maintien de plusieurs communautés scientifiques qui ont contribué à l'essor de la psychologie latino-américaine contemporaine.

Addressing the history of psychology in Latin America is a rather complex task. Despite sharing linguistic, cultural, historical, and social elements, the countries composing the subcontinent called Latin America have very diverse levels of economic, scientific, and cultural development. Their geographical location determines their trade contacts, their reciprocal influences on educational processes, and their communication with other parts of the world. These facts influence the evolution of their scientific development in general and that of psychology in particular. In general it could be said that those countries with proportionately higher economical development tend to be those with relatively higher psychological research and professional production. Among others, this would be the case of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico and, more recently, Colombia.

In other Latin American countries such as Bolivia, for example, political changes had a decisive effect on the progress of psychology since military coups nearly stopped its development (Aguilar, 1983). Many Chilean and Argentinian psychologists had to emigrate from their countries due to political persecution. Their arrival to other countries sometimes revitalized psychoanalytical practice, as was the case of Mexico. In other contexts, such as the case of Peru, complex social problems including

large-scale migration from rural to urban areas promoted the development of transcultural psychology (Alarcon, 1980). In Mexico the impact of educational policymaking, derived from the 1910–1917 revolutionary war, ultimately led to the government's establishment, in 1925, of a highly influential department of psycho-pedagogy and school hygiene. This department promoted an intense drive toward the adaptation and widespread use of psychological tests seeking to "assess the psychological characteristics of Mexican children" (Colotla, 1984). Thus, numerous social, educational, economic, and political influences affected the development of Latin American psychology for better or worse.

On the other hand, however, there are common elements that give Latin American psychology a certain degree of homogeneity and self-identity. Several stages of development of psychology in Latin America are very similar, although in some regions such development occurred at a faster pace than in others. This fact lends support to the purpose of attempting a sort of historical reconstruction, by stages, of Latin American psychology as a whole. The objective of the present paper is to identify some such stages and contribute some reflections on those elements which appear to be common in determining its evolution.

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# Latin America



## ANTECEDENTS

Not many scholars have studied the psychological knowledge expressed by pre-Columbian communities (Flores, 1984; Leon, 1982, 1983; Lopez-Austin, 1997). Some analyses have attempted to identify the possible existence of specific social practices aimed at producing psychotherapeutic effects. Some speculations derived from findings of trepanned skulls have suggested that the ancient Incas considered the brain to be the seat of the mind. Further north, descriptions by anthropologists and historians, based on ancient codex and other accounts, addressed other beliefs. During the conquest of the New Spain (Mexico) from the 16th to the 18th centuries, Catholic monks, whose responsibilities led to close contacts with culturally held beliefs and practices by the ancient Mexicans, made descriptions of the treatment of *susto* (fright). This health problem included both physical and emotional symptoms. Its story might well constitute the first description of a psychosomatic disorder in America (Sanchez Sosa, 1996). These historic times are, however, among those most requiring additional systematic research.

A separate line of historical accounts characterizes teaching and dissemination of philosophy during the colonial periods as a mechanism leading to the knowledge of European psychology. All Latin American regions received the influence of scholastic philosophy. Thus, Spanish philosophers adopted the teachings of Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of Aristotle's *De Anima*. Upon the inauguration of Mexico's Royal University in September 1551, one of the first (if not actually the first) classes or *cathedrae* taught included the teachings of Aristotelian psychology by Friar Alonso de la Vera Cruz (Curiel, 1962; Robles, 1942).

Although the sessions probably had a strong religious tone, it would only be reasonable to assume that many of this early academician's discussions revolved around ideas relating such issues as faith, lucid reasoning, discipline, and good family relations to human wellbeing or suffering, including madness (see, e.g., Chavero, 1868). In 1557 De la Vera Cruz published his book *Physica Speculatio* (which at the time probably translated better as "physical research"), in which he presented his students with the Aristotelian "hilo-morphism" theory on the relation of body-mind (Valderrama, 1975a).

The 18th century witnessed the arrival of new philosophical conceptions to the American continent. A modernized scholastic approach included the works of Descartes and others proclaiming the mechanistic conception of the world. Within this context, Latin American academicians started the production of original texts addressing the application of these new conceptions to psychological issues. In Mexico, Benito Diaz de Gamarra (1774) published his book *Elements of Modern Philosophy (Elementa Recentioris Philosophiae)* containing extensive reviews of the works by Descartes, Malebranche, and Christian Wolff. Concerning the polemic discussions on the seat of the human spirit, Diaz de Gamarra proposed "... it should certainly be affirmed that the spirit has its

own seat only in the brain, even though we cannot be certain about its exact location inside it" (cited by Navarro, 1983, p. 105).

Meanwhile, in Argentina, Joaquin Millas published his book *Psychological Institutions in 1797*, probably the first publication of its kind in the world (Ardila, 1986). In Colombia the naturist academician Francisco Jose de Caldas published in 1808 his *Monograph of the Influence of Weather on the Organized Beings*, probably the first publication on psychology written by a Colombian author (Ardila, 1973).

Without totally disappearing from the 19th-century Latin American scene, the scholastic tradition gradually gave way to new mechanistic and biologicistic conceptions of psychology arriving from France. Some examples include the incipient sensualism by Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, the ideology of Antoine Louise Claude Destruitt, Count of Tracy, and the phrenology of Franz Joseph Gall. According to Klappenbach and Pavesi (1994), the Argentinean academician Juan Crisostomo Lanifur published in 1808 his *Philosophy Course*, drawing mainly from Destruitt's ideas contained in *Elements de Philosophie*. The book served as basic reading for the course taught at Buenos Aires' Union del Sud College. Upon the foundation of the University of Buenos Aires in 1822, Juan Manuel Fernandez de Agüero became the main professor of the *cathedra* of ideology and published his *Elementary Principles of Ideology, Abstraction and Oratory* (1824). Later on, Diego de Alcorta succeeded Fernandez de Agüero as head of faculty. Let us be reminded that in the late 18th century, the term ideology, far from having political connotations, referred directly to the study of ideas.

In Chile, Jose Miguel Varas and Ventura Marin concluded a book titled *Elements of Philosophy of the Human Spirit*, finally published in 1830, which became the basic reading for the course *Theory of Ideas* taught in the National Institute of Santiago de Chile. A second edition appeared in 1872. By the same period, Andres Bello, the Venezuelan-born president of the University of Santiago, published his book *Philosophy of Understanding*, used to promote the ideas of the Scottish school (sensualism), with a second edition appearing in 1848. In Cuba, Jose de la Luz y Caballero also promoted, around 1840, the new sensualistic approaches. In his book *Objections to Cousin's Doctrine*, he challenges Cousin's analysis of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* from a sensualistic standpoint (Klappenbach & Pavesi, 1994).

In Mexico, at the end of its war of independence, two institutions were entrusted with the task of updating and modernising national educational programmes: the Endowment for the Study of Medical Sciences and the Endowment for the Humanities. Upon their foundation, Jose Maria Luis Mora taught courses on ideology during the decade of 1830. In the capital of the central Mexican state of Guanajuato, a Spanish translation of Condillac's book *Logic: The Primary Elements of the Art of Thought* became one of the texts used to help fulfill the endowments' purposes.

Also along these lines, Friar Francisco Frejes authored *The Art of Thinking and Expressing Our Thoughts* in 1839. This book shows the influence of the writings of Destrutt de Tracy. Seven years later a Mexican academician, Jose Julian Tornel y Mendivil (1846), published one of the first books dealing more systematically with psychological issues. This book addresses such themes as the senses, imagination, thinking, comprehension, consciousness, human reasoning, memory, volition, and free will. For almost 40 more years, several educational programmes in Latin America gravitated around these and other issues conceived as belonging to the more general realm of ideology. Perhaps the only exception to this relatively general trend was a somewhat erratic dissemination of the writings of Gall, whose ideas on phrenology tended to ignite heated debate. Such a polemic atmosphere sometimes led a few scholars to publish from anonymity. Two authors within the phrenologic tradition during those years included the Mexican Jose Ramon Pacheco (1835) and the Spaniard Mariano Cubi y Soler (Valderrama, 1985b).

Also in the mid 1800s, two important contributions outside sensualism or phrenology originated in Mexico and Colombia almost at the same time. In the northern Mexican state of Zacatecas, professor Teodosio Lares published in 1849 *Elements of Psychology*, the basis of his courses of psychology at the Zacatecas Literary Institute; and in 1851 Manuel Ancisar published in Bogota the book *Lessons of Psychology* (Sanchez Sosa, 2000).

## THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

The modern conception of psychology started in Europe and the United States in the last third of the 19th century. During the century's last decade psychology also took solid seat in Latin America. The main sources of inspiration for this widespread tendency included English positivism, especially through the writings of Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill; and German psychology headed by Wilhelm Wundt. Other early relevant influences arose from the work of French clinical or experimental psychologists such as Charcot, Ribot, and Binet, and French social psychologists such as Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde. A third key source of influence included the Geneva school scholars Claparede and Compayre.

In addition to France's influence, Mexico showed early signs of an important influence by US psychologists. Although at the beginning of the 1900s German structuralism became important through Titchener's interpretation, soon the work by James Mark Baldwin and Columbia's functionalistic school became widely known and accepted. During this time, Argentinean psychology started showing the influence of such Italian authors as Lombroso, Ferri, and Sergi. Independent formal courses of psychology were started in numerous higher education institutions conjointly with the creation of experimental psychology laboratories, the foundation of scientific societies, and the initiation of scientific periodical publica-

tions. Other related developments included the creation of applied research institutes and an intense interest in the relation between psychology and some psychosocial problems.

## Cathedrae

Formal endowed courses or *cathedrae* in well-established universities became a key indicator of the growth of psychology. In 1896 Professor Ezequiel A. Chavez of Mexico's Preparatory School was authorized to modify the curriculum and install a separate *cathedra* in psychology. The first such course was taught for the first time in 1897. In order to provide updated reading materials for the newly founded course, Chavez translated Titchener's *Elements of Psychology*, published in Spanish in 1904. In an article published in 1905 James Mark Baldwin declared Chavez the "first Mexican Psychologist" (p. 790).

Five years later, after a joint initiative between professor Justo Sierra, then minister of education, and Chavez himself, the University was declared "National", formally becoming the National University of Mexico. A key structure of the renewed university, the School of Higher Studies, was also founded, after its French counterpart in Paris. As part of the school's inaugural celebrations the Mexican government invited Baldwin to teach a course on psychosociology. This was in fact the first course taught in the renewed university (Valderrama, 1986).

Also in 1896, in Argentina, professor Roberto Rivarola taught the first psychology course at the School of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires (Papini, 1976). Rivarola was replaced in 1902 by Professor Horacio G. Piñero who taught the class until 1919 when Professor Enrique Mouchet took over. In 1906 a disciple of Wundt, Felix Kruger, inaugurated the second psychology course at the same school. In 1908 Professor Jose Ingenieros, who had previously taught the first course as interim faculty, replaced him. Finally, Professor Carlos Rodriguez-Etchart substituted Ingenieros in 1914 and taught the course in a more definitive way (Gottheld, 1969).

## Experimental psychology laboratories

These laboratories complemented the new courses from the beginning in several programmes along the subcontinent. Ingenieros himself asserts that the Argentinian academician Victor Mercante conducted experimental studies in a "modest psychophysiology laboratory" which started its activities in 1891. According to Papini (1976), Mercante was soon able to publish the results of his psychological experiences (p. 321). According to this account, this was the first psychology laboratory in Latin America, founded in the city of San Juan, Argentina (Klappenbach & Pavesi, 1994). Shortly after, in the National College of Buenos Aires, Professor Horacio Piñero founded another laboratory in 1898. In fact it appears that this led to the original invitation to teach at the University of Buenos Aires

(Papini, 1976). He brought the equipment from the National College to the university and, in 1901, he created a psychophysiology laboratory through the addition of newly acquired equipment.

During 1899, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Professor Mauricio de Madeiros also founded a laboratory of experimental psychology. According to Foladori (1954) this laboratory was organized so as to become a replica of Binet's laboratory at La Sorbonne in Paris.

In Chile, during 1908, Professor Guillermo Mann of the Pedagogical Institute of the University of Chile travelled to Germany in order to purchase laboratory instruments as part of the initiative to create an experimental psychology laboratory. Mann carried a recommendation from Professor Jorge Schneider, a former student of Wundt, who personally selected the instruments and materials for the new laboratory (Klappenbach & Pavesi, 1994). Mann was appointed first director of the laboratory.

In Mexico, after 1902 the higher education authorities authorized the purchase of the necessary equipment to set up an experimental psychology laboratory. The instruments were sent to the Normal Teachers School in Mexico City but little occurred with them until 1914. In this year Enrique O. Aragon, professor of psychology at the National Preparatory School, formally requested its transfer. In 1916, on the occasion of the establishment of the new psychology curriculum at the School of Higher Studies of Mexico's National University, Aragon himself was appointed to teach the *cathedra* and the equipment brought from Germany was finally assigned to him. On October 27, 1916 a "demonstrative lecture on experimental psychology" marked the official inauguration of the university's "Experimental Psychology Cabinet" (Valderrama, Colotla, Jurado, & Gallegos, 1997).

The first Brazilian laboratory in an experimental tradition different to that of Binet was founded by the Polish psychologist Waclaw Radecki, who arrived in Brazil in 1923 and was appointed professor of psychology at the School of Juridical Sciences of the University of Curitiba. In 1924, with the support of Brazil's Ministry of the Interior and Public Health, Radecki set up a psychology laboratory in a facility for mental patients named Colonia de Alienados de Engenho de Dentro (Ardila, 1986).

### Scientific psychological societies

On April 6, 1907, the most influential Mexico City newspaper *El Imparcial* informed its readers about the foundation of the Society for Psychological Studies (*Sociedad de Estudios Psicologicos*). The society's founding members included Ezequiel A. Chavez, who presided over it, Juvenia Ramirez, Enrique O. Aragon, Luis Cabrera, Manuel Flores, Federico Mariscal, Rafael Martinez-Freg, Juan R. Orci, Celso Pineda, Alfonso Pruneda, and Gregorio Torres-Quintero. The same year they published the Spanish version of portions of Wundt's book *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, from the English

version by Titchener (Sociedad de Estudios Psicologicos, 1907). In 1925 Ezequiel Chavez led attempts to revitalize the society by naming Baldwin (who was at the time in Paris) as an honorary member (Jurado, 1982).

One year later, in 1908, Argentinean psychologists founded the second psychological association of Latin America, the Society of Psychology of Buenos Aires. According to Rios and Talak (1998) the founding members included Florentino Ameghino, Carlos Octavio Bunge, Jose Ingenieros, Alejandro Korn, Victor Mercante, Horacio Piñero, Jose Maria Ramos-Mejia, Rodolfo Rivarola, Jose Semprun, and Rodolfo Senet. This society published three volumes (1910, 1911, 1914) of its *Annals of the Society of Psychology*, one of the first psychological periodicals in Latin America.

### The Institutes of Criminology

Upon the inauguration, in 1891 by President Porfirio Diaz, of the Penitentiary for Men in the Mexican eastern state of Puebla, a Department of Criminal Anthropology was also established in the new prison. Rafael Serrano, a psychiatrist, designed the department, and its first director was Rafael Martinez-Baca and his assistant, Manuel Vergara, both physicians. The department's purpose was to study the psychological and anthropological characteristics of criminals (Jurado, 1982). The programme's main rationale was expressed as follows: ". . .the perfection of the means used for the correction of criminals occurs in direct proportion to the psychological knowledge we have of him" (Martinez-Baca & Vergara, 1892).

The department conducted a psychological study of each inmate. The assessment included his degree of intelligence, memory, imagination status, types of feelings, affects, predominating passions, main personality traits, schooling, type of slang used, tattoos, and writing style (Martinez-Baca & Vergara, 1892, pp. 7-8). These activities mark the beginning of clinical work in criminology in Mexico. Among other, this department retained such items as skulls, brains, signatures, writings, and tattoos of deceased inmates "in order to try to understand the (psychological) nature of crime. . ." On the basis of these experiences the two professionals authored a book titled *Studies in Criminal Anthropology*. The book was soon translated into Italian and published in Torino in 1894 as *Volume II* of the *Anthropology Library*, edited by Cesar Lombroso. Several years later Martinez-Baca (1899) published *Tattoos: A psychological, medical and legal study in criminals and military personnel*.

In Argentina in 1907, Jose Ingenieros founded a clinic for the study of criminals and mental patients at a major Buenos Aires penitentiary. As a product of his work he published numerous articles on psychology, psychopathology, criminology, and legal medicine (Gottheld, 1969). In 1902 Ingenieros founded the *Archives of Criminology, Legal Medicine and Psychiatry*, and stayed as its editor until 1913.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY OR "PSYCHOTECHNICS"

During the first half of the 20th century, Latin American psychologists progressively increased their presence in educational settings and institutions. The applications of psychology toward the knowledge of children and adolescents became a fundamental task and a key endeavour leading to an expanded bearing on institutional work and contributions by psychologists. This general area, called psychotechnics in Latin America, became strengthened on the basis of the application of psychological tests. Two key instruments used to achieve various professional objectives included the Binet-Simon intelligence test or its Stanford adaptation by Terman.

A Colombian psychiatrist-psychologist-sociologist, Lopez de Mesa, was probably the first to conduct studies with Terman's revision of the Binet-Simon scale as early as 1917. After such pioneering efforts, it is not until the decade of the 1930s that more systematic programmes involving psychological testing are clearly identified. Earlier, in 1914, Villamizar Peña published his book on *School Low Achievers (Atrasados Escolares)*. Ten years later, Fajardo Escobar published the book *Mental Anomalies of Bogota's Scholars* (Ardila, 1973).

The Chilean Guillermo Mann published in 1911 the book *General Orientation on Mental Anomalies as Basis for Pedagogical Treatment* (Bravo-Valdivieso, 1969). Mann's successor, professor Tirapegui, conducted the Chilean adaptation of the Binet-Simon-Terman scale in 1920.

In Peru, Hermilio Valdizan, also in 1920, translated and used the scale to diagnose mental patients and did dissemination work on psychopedagogical themes (Alarcon, 1980).

Four years after creating the Ministry of Public Education in 1921, the Mexican government founded a department of psychopedagogy and school hygiene as part of this secretariat (Colotla, 1984). Some officers of the new department had travelled to Paris on the occasion of the Third International Congress of School Hygiene held in 1910. They met Alfred Binet and became familiar with his intelligence scale, which was later used on patients of Mexico City's main asylum for the mentally insane, and in numerous elementary education schools during an assessment programme conducted in 1918. One of the department's main objectives included the standardization of scales by Fay, Descoudres, Ebbinghaus, and others, in addition to Binet (Valderrama, Colotla, Gallegos, & Jurado, 1994).

Soon after, in 1924, David Pablo Boder, a Russian psychologist who had immigrated to Mexico, founded a section of psychotechnics within the mayor's office in Mexico City. In it, Boder conducted more systematic studies seeking to standardize the Stanford version of the Binet-Simon scale (Boder, Molina, Gonzalez, & Deutsch, 1925). The department's production led to the publication of two volumes of a newly founded *Psychotechnics Bulletin*. Ten

years later Roberto Solis Quiroga founded the Medical and Pedagogical Institute for Mentally Educable Abnormal Children, in 1935, preceding the foundation in 1936 of the National Institute of Psycho-Pedagogy. One of the directors of the institute was professor Guillermo Davila who, a few years later, would become a key piece in the foundation of one of the most influential groups of clinical psychologists in the country. All these institutional settings helped the advancement of psychological testing on problems related to educating both normal and abnormal children.

In South America, during the same decade, several developments also signalled a sustained growth of applied psychology. In 1925 the Institute for Psychotechnics and Professional Orientation started working in Argentina under the directorship of Carl Jesinghaus, also a former student of Wundt's. The institute stayed open until 1931 when it became a section of the Argentinian Social Museum. After the initiative of Jose Aberdini, the University of Buenos Aires created the Institute of Psychology within its School of Philosophy and Letters under the direction of Enrique Mouchet. The institute harboured the publication of three volumes of its own *Annals* in 1935, 1938, and 1941. Also in 1930, within the Argentinian National Institute for Biotypology, an Austrian-born academician, Heriberto Brugger, started a psychotechnics laboratory (Papini, 1978).

The first systematic research work on the scientific study of personality in Argentina probably started at the Institute of Experimental Psychology of the University of Cuyo. Here, the late 1930s and early 1940s marked some pioneering work by professors Horacio Rimoldi and Nuria Cortada (Papini & Mustaca, 1979, p. 355).

Peruvian applied psychology was also active during these two decades. In 1935 the Institute of Psychology and Psychotechnics was inaugurated as part of the Saint Mark's Major and National University (*Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos*), and was initially directed by the German-born professor Walter Blumenfield (Alarcon, 1980; Leon, 1983). Blumenfield and his Peruvian colleague Miguel Sardon conducted an important series of studies on psychometrical assessment of Peruvian children and adolescents (Blumenfield, 1939; Blumenfield & Sardon, 1943).

Also in Lima, in 1941, Peruvian psychologists Luis Guerra and Enrique Solari, together with Blumenfield and the Belgian-born psychologist Maurice Simon, founded the National Psycho-Pedagogical Institute. As in other countries, the institute's objective included the integral study of Peruvian children and adolescents. The institute published its own bulletin and featured five specialized departments: normal child development, special child development, career counseling, sociology of education, and anthropology. Alarcon (1980) points out that an aggregate analysis of the work done at this institute indeed suggests that most studies involving psychological testing definitely had an applied purpose and had psychometrics as a defined line of research (p. 208).

Elsewhere in the Andean region other advances also deserved historical analysis. In 1939 the National University of Colombia founded its Section for Psychotechnics, inaugurated by professor Alfonso Esquerro-Gomez, a physician who taught physiology and was particularly interested in Viola's biotopology. Also in 1939 the Spanish-born psychologist Mercedes Rodrigo, a former psychotechnics student of Claparede, arrived in Bogota. She conducted the first applications of psychological tests aimed at screening student candidates to Colombia's National University. The section later became the University's Institute of Applied Psychology in 1947.

A Cuban-born psychologist who studied in Spain, Emilio Mira y Lopez, promoted the foundation of the first Brazilian Institute for Screening and Professional Counseling in Rio de Janeiro in 1947 (Ardila, 1986). In Caracas, within the School of Philosophy and Letters of Venezuela's Central University, the Institute of Applied Psychology was founded during 1950. Also in Venezuela, Hungarian-born psychologist Oliver Brachfeld was the first director of the Institute for Psycho-Synthesis and Human Relations founded in the University of Merida. This institute was probably the first one in Latin America specifically aimed at studying (and developing recommendations) in areas related to behaviour of the masses, public opinion, and the intersections of psychology with problems in the areas of economy, politics, and the adaptation of immigrants (Leon, 1997).

Finally, the decade of the 1960s marked the foundation of key institutions in Bolivia and Nicaragua. The first included the inauguration, in 1967, of the department of psychopedagogy at the Catholic University of Bolivia in La Paz, directed by professor Alberto Conessa (Aguilar, 1983). The first Bolivian psychologists were formally trained as such in this department. In Managua, the National University of Nicaragua opened its section of Orientation (counseling) at the Department for Student Welfare. The section's main services included psychological assessment aimed at providing career counseling (Whitford, 1985).

### TRAINING OF PSYCHOLOGISTS AS PROFESSIONALS

As elsewhere in the world, in Latin America the earliest interest in studying and applying psychology was not expressed by formally educated psychologists but by other professionals such as physicians, lawyers, educators, etc. The progress that was derived from the initial applications of psychological knowledge and the need for professionally trained psychologists able to offer essential services led to the foundation of university-level educational programmes for psychology proper. Many of the institutes of applied psychology later became schools whose primary purpose was to educate and train psychologists. Thus the germinal *cathedrae* gradually diversified into fully developed university curricula.

In 1937, Ezequiel A. Chavez formally proposed the foundation of a masters degree in psychology within Mexico's National University. In time, this degree would eventually evolve into the basic licensing-oriented programme, and it was formally launched in 1938. Among other students who would later become important in Latin American psychology was Rogelio Diaz-Guerrero, who subsequently studied the doctorate degree under Kurt Lewin in Iowa, USA.

Chile founded its first department of psychology in 1947 within its main public university. According to Bravo-Valdivieso (1969) this led to the issue of the actual professional title "psychologist". The programme offered four specialties: clinical, industrial, psychopedagogical, and criminological. Soon, the Catholic University in Santiago opened another similar programme directed by the Hungarian-born Bela Szekely in 1955, also offering the diploma title of psychologist (p. 97).

The Institute of Applied Psychology of Colombia's National University, started in 1948, offered the diploma title of licensed psychologist for the first time in 1952. Later, following the initiative of its director Beatriz de la Vega, the institute became the first school (*facultad*) of psychology in Latin America (Ardila, 1973). The first school of psychology in Cuba opened in 1950 at the University of Villanueva. Twelve years later the University of Havana opened its own programme, in 1962 (Ardila, 1986). The initiative, which had already occurred while the socialists were in government, was mainly undertaken by professor Juan Jose Guevara-Valdes, a founding member of Cuba's Communist Party initially appointed first vice-minister of tourism under the new regime. During those years Guevara's directorship was a key element in the development of contemporary Cuban psychology.

Argentina inaugurated its first programme on 14 March, 1957 at the University of Buenos Aires (Papini & Mustaca, 1979); followed by programmes at the universities of La Plata, Cordoba, and Tucuman (Papini, 1978). Almost simultaneously, in 1956, Venezuela started its first programme at its Central University. Next, the universities of Saint Mark in Peru (1963) started their own programme (Alarcon, 1980) followed in 1969 by Nicaragua's National University (Whitford, 1985). In terms of governmental official recognition as an independent profession it was Brazil, in 1962, that was the first country to grant psychology such legal status (Ardila, 1969).

### SOME RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL AREAS OF PRACTICE

The present section attempts to describe briefly some of the schools of thought or application areas that showed special relevance in Latin America. Three principal such fields include psychoanalysis, cross-cultural psychology, and the experimental analysis of behaviour. Most such areas or specialties are still active today.

## Psychoanalysis

The acceptance of psychoanalytical theory has had very diverse levels and modes in Latin America. Cultural, religious, and scientific factors have determined full acceptance, as is the case in Argentina. Others have shown relative selectivity of some theoretical elements or modes, as is the case in Mexico, and still others show relative indifference, as is the case for Nicaragua and Cuba among others.

According to Ardila (1986), the Chilean-born German Greve studied with Freud and is, in fact, cited by the founder of psychoanalysis in his historical account of the specialty. During the psychoanalytical congress held in Buenos Aires in 1910 Greve defended the existence of infant sexuality (Bravo-Valdivieso, 1969). In Peru, Honorio Delgado promoted psychoanalysis as early as 1919 through two books: *Psychoanalysis* and *Sigmund Freud*, this latter one published in 1926. Later on, however, Delgado's personal position evolved toward a more spiritualistic one and ended up vigorously attacking Freud's pan-sexualistic approach (Alarcon, 1980).

Numerous lawyers tried to apply psychoanalytical theory to their profession, especially in the field of criminology. At the end of 1933, the Mexican lawyer Raul Carranca y Trujillo, who had criminological experience, wrote an article and sent Freud a copy and a letter asking for his opinion. Freud answered as follows:

February 13, 1934.

Very honourable Sir:

I had the satisfaction, in my youth, of having learned your beautiful language and I am in the possibility of appreciating and have an interest in enjoying what you have said about our psychoanalysis. I am also interested in your participation concerning its applications in terms of dedication to your work. Unfortunately, I do not enjoy the merit of being able to write in Spanish so I entreat you to kindly accept corresponding in German.

It has always been a wish of the psychoanalyst to win two persons for our way of thinking: the young professor and the judge.

Yours cordially addict.

Freud

Angel Garma, a Spanish psychologist who received his psychoanalytical training in Berlin, got his academic credentials as physician authenticated in Argentina and became, in 1842, author of what may well be the first thesis on psychoanalysis in Latin America (Klappenbach & Pavesi, 1994). In Mexico, a group headed by Santiago Ramirez, Ramon Parres, and Luis Feder, who had been trained in Argentina and/or the USA promoted this orthodox psychoanalysis tradition. In 1952 this group founded the Mexican Group of Psychoanalytical Studies under the auspices of the Argentinean Psychoanalytical Association. This led to the foundation in 1957 of the Mexican

Psychoanalytical Association. Later, the 1980s marked a revitalization of some Mexican psychoanalytical groups because of the immigration of several Argentinian colleagues who fled political persecution in their country. These group leaders included Marie Langer and Nestor Braunstein.

In the realm of another psychoanalytical tradition, the Mexican psychiatrists Guillermo Davila and Raul Gonzalez-Enriquez, among others, invited Erich Fromm, creator of the cultural branch of psychoanalysis, for an academic stay in Mexico. Their goal was to train psychoanalysts in Mexico's National University Graduate School. In 1956 their students created the Mexican Society of Psychoanalysis and, in 1963, the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis. Also in Colombia, during the 1960s, several psychoanalytical societies of various modalities carried the message of psychodynamic psychology. Jose Gutierrez, trained by Fromm in Mexico, founded the Colombian Psychoanalytical Society in 1962, aided by Guillermo Davila.

## Cross-cultural, social and political psychology

Social and economic conditions in Latin American countries probably helped promote an interest in social and political psychology in the context of culture. Jose Bustamante in Cuba, Carlos Alberto Seguin in Peru, and Guillermo Davila in Mexico initially formed the seminal groups. Other academicians soon joined these initial efforts, among others: Arrigo Angelini, Angela Biaggio, and Aroldo Rodrigues from Brazil, Rogelio Diaz-Guerrero, Luis Lara-Tapia, and Hector Cappello from Mexico; Gerardo Marin from Colombia, Jose Salazar and Maritza Montero from Venezuela, Alberto Merani and Angel Rodriguez-Kauth from Argentina, and Ignacio Martin-Baro from Ecuador.

## Experimental analysis of behaviour

In the mid 1960s, Fred S. Keller visited Brazil, especially the University of Brasilia, and Sidney W. Bijou made several visits to Mexico, especially to the University of Xalapa, capital of the eastern Mexican state of Veracruz. An event that marked the recognition of Latin American behaviour analysts was B.F. Skinner's visit to Mexico on the occasion of the Latin American Congress of Behavior Analysis in 1975 (Colotla & Ribes, 1981). The strength of these contacts between Latin American and US behaviour analysts started a stream of sustained production in basic research. It also fostered a long chain of academic and societal events which have given support to the gradual development of groups promoting such applications as behavioural and cognitive therapy and behavioural medicine, especially in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and, more recently, Argentina. Postgraduate degrees have been established in these countries and societies have become more solid and productive, including the publication of scientific journals. Some such societies go back as far as 1974 in

Brazil and 1975 in Mexico. Outstanding contributions in these areas are probably best represented by Emilio Ribes in Mexico, Sergio Yulis and Jorge Luzoro in Chile, Ruben Ardila in Colombia, Rodolpho Carbonari and Maria Luiza Marinho in Brazil, and Alba Mustaca in Argentina.

### Cognitive psychology

The experimental study of perceptual and cognitive processes probably started receiving attention in the mid-1970s in Latin American countries. As was also the case for the experimental behavioural approach, cognitive research has endured many years of lack of resources due to the economic conditions in Latin America. Such conditions have frequently reduced the possibility of acquisition of research equipment and materials. Despite this fact, research groups have been founded in both the basic and applied fields since the early 1970s. Some outstanding contributions include the work of Horacio Rimoldi and Miguelina Guiao in Argentina, Maria Coria-Sabini, Antonio Penna, and Maria de Moura in Brazil, and Luis Lara-Tapia, Gustavo Fernandez, Javier Aguilar, and Serafin Mercado in Mexico.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

“Science has no nationality but scientists do” was a frequent tenet of Venezuelan-born science historian Marcel Roche. Six basic conditions are indispensable if a scientific discipline is to develop and compete in any region of the world. First, facilities, materials, and equipment. Second, a scientific community willing and able to generate, adopt, and adapt knowledge. Third, suitable periodical publication sources supporting the dissemination of findings and theoretical proposals. Fourth, educational institutions to facilitate the systematic communication of research products in order to train new scientists and professionals. Fifth, applied professionals able to contribute to the solution of human problems through the application of research-based interventions. And sixth, intelligent authorities, administrators, and politicians willing to aim decision-making toward long-term development and strengthening of disciplines.

Latin American psychology, from its incipient beginnings, has progressed in the formation of its scientific communities. The route has sometimes seen so many hurdles that scientific communities have sporadically verged on the edge of extinction, and then flourished when conditions improved. They sometimes receive decisive support from governments and corporations and sometimes are forced to work in almost complete isolation. Through the occurrence of political and social changes, certain historical periods have favoured the production of scientific knowledge and others have, even purposefully, inhibited it. Such has been the history of psychology in Latin America, but it has never been inactive.

Concerning the sources of the main influence on the development of psychology in Latin America, from the

beginning, Latin American psychology has kept close contact with European and US psychology. Two main contact modalities have systematically linked Latin American psychology with that of the US and Europe: first, many psychologists from abroad actually emigrated to a Latin American country or did academic and scientific stays (of various lengths and effects). Second, many Latin American psychologists have either formally obtained degrees in Canadian, European, and US universities, or held exchanges through shorter academic stays, or participated in joint research projects. This last case involves some early examples: among others, the Mexican David Berlanga studied under both Wundt and Binet; the Colombian Edmundo Rico studied at La Salpetriere and worked with George Dumas; Julio Asuad (also Colombian) studied in Paris, later becoming professor of psychopathology; the Chilean German Greve studied with Freud. More recent cases might well end up listing examples by the hundreds.

Another mechanism through which psychology in Latin America has gained vitality, ever since its early beginnings, includes the exchange among Latin American psychologists themselves. Just to list a few examples spanning nearly 100 years: the Mexican Oswaldo Robles taught several courses in Colombia, the Argentinean Anibal Ponce taught several courses in Mexico, the Argentinean Horacio Rimoldi (himself a student of Leon Thurstone) taught courses in Colombia, the Salvadoran Victor Navas worked and taught in Nicaragua, the Colombian Ruben Ardila introduced behaviour analysis in Cuyo, Argentina; the Bolivian Erick Roth studied in Mexico; the Nicaraguan pioneer Nasere Haded-Lopez studied in Chile; the Dominican modernizer Enerio Rodriguez studied in Mexico, and the list could well keep on and on (Aguilar, 1983; Ardila, 1973; Valderrama et al., 1997; Whitford, 1985).

In conclusion, Latin American psychology has lived what could only be described as a vibrant and dynamic existence for over a century. Sometimes it has postponed contributing to theoretical development in order to tend to circumstantial demands such as practical applications, as has been described by Ardila (1986) and Valderrama and Molina (1990). The contributions of Latin American psychology to world psychology need to be considered in the context of its own social reality. Its future as science and profession certainly looks promising. Latin American psychologists, on the other hand, need to be aware of another vital agenda: conducting serious and systematic research aimed at constructing our own history. This task will add sense to our scientific and professional quest in the context of a new millennium loaded with challenges. Fortunately, there are many colleagues already working on it.

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