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SOCIAL COGNITION: BRIEF CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article is to present contributions to the understanding of the concept of Social Cognition, a term used for studies related to mental processes and contents when people are in social interaction. The term was used in the 1960s during the studies of Fisk and Taylor when they were interested in relating topics of interest to Cognitive Psychology with the studies of Social Psychology. In this sense, issues such as, how I am perceived, how I influence the environment around me, how I am influenced by it, and how I am affected by belief systems, among others, are interested in the studies of Social Cognition. The fundamental question of this study is characterized by the question: what are the contributions of Social Cognition to the understanding of individual and collective behaviors and behaviors of people? It was then presented important themes in Psychology that dialogue with studies centered on Social Cognition, such as Beliefs, Attitudes, and Self-Efficacy, reaching the conclusion that these themes not only dialogue with Social Cognition and can be considered as subsumed themes in Social Cognition.

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INTRODUCTION

Social cognition refers to cognitive processes through which people understand and explain other people and themselves. Thus, it understands the possibility of occurring instantaneously, and almost instantaneously, and may involve detailed and slow considerations and analyses. Considering that people are complex and that the experience of social cognition usually occurs quickly, this ultimately influences how one understands and judges them. This speed of judgment has its price in itself: even if people are good evaluators, in general, they can make various mistakes when they judge what others are and what they themselves are. The study of Social Cognition benefits the possibility of reducing failures or difficulties resulting from social interaction, thus improving the self-knowledge and perceptual and interpretive capacity of others. Studies on Social Cognition are directly related to the way cognitive processes respond to social interaction between two or more people. In this way, the way people relate will determine how people think or feel that interaction. Thus, only the human being is able to experience social interaction consciously, because animals, for example, carefully scan the world in which they live and seek to share the aversive stimuli and approach the things that can generate well-being, already the human being, not only perceive what is happening, because the information is

processed, reason on the elements submitted to processing and seeks to identify the causes and reasons of human conducts and actions. In view of this ability to reason about the causes and reasons for a given event, the reasoning is one of the most important elements in the characterization of human nature and one of the basic premises of the study of Social Cognition (Moskowitz, 2005). Social Cognition is one of the main theoretical orientations of Social Psychology, and one can consider the theoretical orientation that occupies a position of relative hegemony in the last two decades of development of this area of research. Thus, it is an approach that establishes a very close relationship with Cognitive Psychology, has the tendency to privilege the plan of analysis adopted by this discipline, and, consequently, emphasizes the processes that can be explained through the action of an individual mind, thus having as characteristic an individual perspective of the study of social behavior. There is an interest of social psychologists to consider beliefs in their origin, formation, and structure, especially regarding the degree of subjective acceptance of such prepositions, in addition to the influence they exert on behavior. What is most important to them and what matters most to a person, which decisively influences their behavior, is not reality as such, but how you suppose or imagine it to be. Within the psychological products and processes, we can situate those beliefs are within the scope of the latter, being cognitive (perceive, thinking, and reasoning) the processes that give rise to them. In view of the beliefs the more they are central, the more relevant they will be to people because they refer to our identity and the greater the difficulty for their change and

thus more significant to the repercussions on the entire belief system, in the occurrence of changes. Thus, all psychological research of beliefs makes it possible to obtain clarifications about the wide variety of styles of sociocultural reality and social behaviors, so markedly distant in societies. The beliefs installed in participants of interactive processes can generate doubts, fears, mistrust, excessive expectations, or negative attitudes that will certainly exert some influence on the conduct of people engaged in such situations. Beliefs can be identified as opinions, rumors, dogmas, convictions, and stereotypes (widely generalized beliefs for a group of people), so we have other possibilities of classification, and participate when there is an effective relationship between a person and some social object, the attitude that manifests in relation to him. Finally, we will deal with an attitude, which would be an affective disposition, favorable (positive) or unfavorable (negative), to a social object. The affective component can add to two others that constitute the attitudinal structure, so it is the cognitive elements and behavioral tendency. It is worth mentioning that if there is a feeling for some social object, it is because it already has a cognitive representation, both contributing to establishing a preferential orientation of the conduct in relation to the object targeted by them. The effective, cognitive, and behavioral components of attitudes are associated in such a way that, if the feeling is denied, the representations and conduct will also tend to be so, and vice versa. In the field of attitudes, we have affective dispositions whether they are: favorable (positive) or unfavorable (negative), to a social object. This affective component is combined with two others, which together constitute the attitudinal structure. This is about the cognitive elements and the whole behavioral tendency. The concept of attitude speaks of some feeling for some social object, and because it already has a cognitive representation, both contribute to establishing a preferential orientation of conduct in relation to the object targeted by it. It does not seem reasonable to assume that one can nurture affection through something that is completely ignored. It may be that cognitive representations have not reached the symbolic level as they would be in the case of beliefs for example.

The main function of social attitudes is evaluative, and through it, it is possible to organize behavior in the planes of cognition, affections, and action. Attitudes also continue in the orientation of conduct and to the extent that they give effective discrimination of everything and all those who are available in the field of our psychological environment, it also favors the elaboration of arguments. Social attitudes are intervening variables with theoretical relevance since they provide behavioral predictions. Thus, we can perceive that attitudes, prejudices, and values are stable structures, resulting from individual experiences, having learned as one of them. According to Newcomb (1943), the stability of attitudes is more assured when there is a basis of social support. In the field of the formation of attitudes such as prejudices and values, we see that the influence of groups is significant, and among these are family and even political groups and friends. Throughout this social interaction, new roles with the experience of social interaction are assumed and played, thus increasing opportunities for reinforcement and imitation. So, it is in the game of interactions that we will find the origin of our attitudes. Within this perspective, I close by talking about prosocial behavior. What does prosocial behavior mean? In a certain way, we can argue that any behavior that is not characteristically antisocial (i.e., aggression, destruction, etc.), and that involves the interaction of two or more individuals, may be termed as prosocial, in the sense that it contributes to the promotion of contact between them, that is, social interaction. From this, it becomes clear that the option of designating certain types of social behaviors as prosocial and not others will always be an arbitrary decision. Since, however, the behaviors are precisely defined and specified, the use of the term is justified and is understood as "pro-social behavior" and related concepts such as "altruism" and "restitution".

In its definition, Bar-Tal refers first to "altruism", characterized as an end, and secondly to "restitution", which can take the form of behavior that aims to repay a favor rendered or compensate a particular individual for an injury to him previously caused. Wispé

(1972), on the other hand, suggests that the term pro-social be used to "describe behaviors that are the antithesis of aggressive behavior, that is, sympathy, altruism, charity, donation, etc." Let's look at other definitions, now explicitly of "altruism", undoubtedly the most popular term in prosocial literature. According to different authors, "altruism" consists of: - a) "those acts in which the individual shares or sacrifices a supposed positive reinforcer for no apparent gain of material or social order" (Bryan and Test, 1967, p. 400); -b) "a subcategory of aid, referring to aid actions, which represent some cost to the individual while representing a small or zero gain, in view of the magnitude of the investment made" (Midlarsky, 1968, p. 229); - c)"those behaviors whose intention is to benefit another individual, but which seem to have a high cost for the one who performs them, with little possibility of material or social reward" (Bryan and London, 1970, p. 200); or else, - "altruistic behavior is generally regarded as behavior that benefits the other person more than the individual himself as if he were executed for a matter of kindness" (Walster and Piliavin, 1972, p. 166). Studies and research on Social Cognition contemplate social influence, in psychic processes, as well as in emotional functions and dynamism that are intertwined in social interactions. Thus, in these relationships and social interactions, beliefs are present. These beliefs can be belief systems about various aspects of culture, territory, race, social identity, values, and formation of attitudes; perceptions, and emotions; (Krüger, 2018), thus contributing to the realization of studies that, among themselves have a close relationship to expand knowledge about psychic processes and interpersonal relationships.

The thought, attention, perception, attitudes, among other cognitive functions, occur in a natural and spontaneous way, in the human being in relation to him, to the other, and to the world when, there is an understanding that is something that has always been connected, sometimes not perceived and therefore without reflection, these relate to automatic thinking. Automatic thoughts reinforce personal beliefs, attitudes, and experiences in relation to the social environment, environmental factors, which relate to beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and knowledge, together with environmental factors, using tools that are sometimes generated by the social environment itself endorse individual and subjective behavior, which influence and are influenced by each other undoubtedly, as something cycle. (Bandura, 1986). For Krüger, there are two levels of belief that can be represented: internal and external. The internal one concerns cognitive processes, such as memory, thought, imagination, directly influencing our attitudes; the external, however, is based on social perception, in the cultural and socio-affective environment in which we are inserted (Krüger & France, 2016), and are formed through the establishment between the object and the person, and can be evidenced by its consistency and acceptance of it. "The greater the consistency of this belief system, the higher the probability of acceptance" (Krüger & France 2016, p.13).

Bandura (1986) understands that these influences of interpersonal relationships are related as something decisive in this existential area, in which people are inserted, determine the way of being, thinking, and behaving, these are determined by the beliefs experienced, by a person, by a group or by a nation, and can be called: central, shared or distributed (Krüger, 2018). According to Bandura (1986), the belief that the person acquires of himself will provide the way he sees and reacts to his behavior and emotion will also influence his conduct concerning his plans of effectiveness or less effectiveness. The belief in self-efficacy, which according to Azzi, and Polydor (2006. 2009) and Pajares and Olaz (2008) is the central point of importance in Bandura's learning theory, concerns the "individual's belief in his/her ability to organize and execute action courses required to perform a specific task, which plays a role between the individual's abilities, performance, and prospective behavior." (2009, p. 77). Thus, the belief of self-efficacy allows the individual to develop in a broad and courageous way, always seeking to self-evaluate to continue with more assertiveness and thus aim at the plan to be developed with more reflection to be able to achieve the desired goal with efficiency and effectiveness. For Bzuneck (2001), the belief of self-efficacy is a self-assessment or personal perception that the person makes about

their skills and abilities, their intelligence, their previous knowledge, and their ability to think and reflect to face specific situations. It is worth highlighting the concept that Krüger (2020) brings in his book: *Social Cognition. Theory, Research, and Applications*, about beliefs: They come from their own experiences, in groups being a social construct, always present in psychological processes, which can be from the conscious or unconscious level. Thus, Beliefs can be described as "any statements we express, originated in personal experiences of consciously processed perception and cognition, combined with the unconscious". (Krüger 2020, p.14), Self-efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort people will devote to an activity, how long they have persevered when they face obstacles, and how resilient they will be in adverse situations. The greater the sense of effectiveness, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience. As a consequence, self-efficacy beliefs also influence the choices people make and the courses of action they seek. Individuals tend to select tasks and activities in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those who do not feel that way" (Pajares & Orlaz, 2008, p. 108). Self-efficacy beliefs, according to Bandura (1977), engage in activities and tasks, as it brings personal satisfaction to performance. This internal disposition that determines the execution of activity with mastery enables more and more success in its strengths factors that contribute to the process motivation in performing, performing, and finalizing a task. This previous disposition needs some other factors, such as the preservation of psychic functions, specific mastery of a given skill, and especially the action of the human agency. Human agency, which comes from this belief system of personal efficacy, (Bandura, 1999) concerns that people have to be able to influence their own actions in order to produce certain satisfactory results strategically causing a change in themselves and perhaps in the environment that is inserted. "People of high effectiveness show greater cognitive resourcefulness and strategic flexibility that allows the management of their environment more effectively and productively. [...] one of the main functions of thought is to allow people to predict events and create ways to exercise control over those who are important to them, Bandura, (1989, p.29)

The concept of agency (Bandura): The concept of agency according to Bandura (1989, 29) concerns: "the person's ability to self-regulate, to be proactive and self-reflective, about the processes of thought, motivation, affection and action and not only react to stimulus and social modeling". Thinking is a complex act, which mainly needs to know how to think, reflect, and discern what was thought, for so much need for assertive direction and self-regulation for its agency, thus allowing the construction of critical thinking about the situations of life and the world. One needs to educate to think about one's own thoughts and seek a possible reflection of how much our beliefs subvert our thoughts. From the agency, I am the one who directs my thinking and acting, with the aim of the search for good and truth. This capacity makes us free and responsible for our existences and choices, as well as helps us maintain our self-regulation, aiming at balancing our actions and assertiveness in our decisions. The Agency refers to how much the person is able to influence his/her acts in order to produce certain results. The ability to exercise self-regulation on control of cognitive processes brings benefits to the person who is available to access it. Bandura refers to this type of agency as emerging and interactive because they have perspectives of social cognition and make contributions to structures, using their own motivations to act, using reciprocal causation (Bandura 2001).

The freedom that agency provides can be challenged by the belief system since the agency can be affected by the structure of cognitive beliefs that may have been formed through the experiences of someone or the perceptions of society and the individual, as well as the structures and circumstances of the environmental and social factors in which it is born. We know that beliefs are formed from the beginning of a person's life and extend throughout their life, which result from the processes of socialization, the processes of social interaction, from the processes social learning. The study on beliefs applies to all contexts of human life individually and collectively, as in the case of studies applied to self-efficacy, motivation, agency, and other themes of social cognition, according to Camino et al. (2013, p.

87) "it is not a theory, but rather a vast field of research and theoretical elaborations", aimed at investigating mental processes and contents in the context of social interactions. This field of study has a second, Moskowitz (2005) is dedicated to seeking philosophical knowledge with the intention of better understanding the nature of human consciousness, adding to the previous contributions of both Cognitive Psychology and Social Psychology, in order to answer questions about how people think and reflect on their own knowledge, be they of themselves, (self-knowledge) and others, within the perspective of the diversity of information and perception of the construction of this social world. According to Campos et al (2021) *The Belief Systems: Belief systems have personal experiences as the cognitive basis for their formation, both conscious and unconscious. Part of this process is the subject's interests, imagination, and intellectual capacity, the latter of which includes the extent of language proficiency, and it activates logical rules and semantic criteria that give meaning to the systems under construction. These systems guide thought and conduct according to their strength and influence. Belief systems can be private or collectively accepted.*

Beliefs: Beliefs are sometimes interpreted as religious convictions specific to the scope of the study of theology, however, there are other forms of understanding of this word that is not only religious/theological, making it observable that this word also has other concepts from other areas of knowledge, understanding that it is independent of the order of importance of those who evaluate, beliefs are interconnected, whether they are common sense or academic and are related to the studies of attitudes, prejudices, values among others and are confirmed or not by the person or groups that admit them. In psychologists, beliefs are understood as "any statement accepted by at least one person, originated, this belief, in their personal experience" (Krüger, 2016, p.9). Therefore, beliefs are departing from individual experiences, and these are especially present in cognitive psychological processes, resulting in attitudes corroborated or not by what is believed. The belief originates and is based according to Krüger & France (2016) on two different but complementary levels: the internal one supported by cognitive processes, such as memory, thought, and imagination, directly influencing our attitudes, and the external, based on social perception, in the cultural and socio-affective environment in which we are inserted. In this line of thought, we have the possibility of assuming that the acceptance or even denial of a given belief can directly influence attitudes towards this object and that this attitude will allow a chain of similar attitudes thus intervening in collective social processes, changing the way of thinking, and acting. Beliefs, when experienced by more than one person, according to Krüger (2016), form shared beliefs. Beliefs are formed from the beginning of children's lives and throughout a person's life and stem from socialization processes, social interaction processes, and social learning processes. The perception that individuals present about their abilities guide the way they behave and plan their actions in the face of life events, is mainly related to the judgment of how well they will be able to perform these actions (Bandura, 1986). The study on beliefs applies to all contexts of human life individually and collectively, as in the case of studies applied to self-efficacy. Silveira's beliefs and fake news (2021) presented the importance of studying beliefs in their social influence including politics. The sources originating from the beliefs of self-efficacy, according to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1993) in the face of a behavior can be four: 1- experiences of a personal domain of performance; 2 - experiences through social models; 3- Social persuasion and 4- emotional and physiological states. However, it is worth mentioning at this moment only the third source, which can be explained by the influence of the second perception on the performance of the person, and when the evaluation of others positively or negatively influences the execution of their tasks, thus changing their course.

Final Considerations

This paper presented important terms in Psychology that dialogue with studies centered on Social Cognition, such as Beliefs, Attitudes, and Self-Efficacy, and can admit that these themes not only dialogue

with Social Cognition and can be considered as subsumed themes in Social Cognition.

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