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Family and Socialization Factors in Brazil: An Overview

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Family and Socialization Factors in Brazil: An Overview

Abstract

The structure of the Brazilian family is related to the five sub-cultures that, in turn, represent the geographic regions of the country. This chapter presents a brief characterization of the Brazilian culture and family and describes changes in the structural relations and in the redefinition of models of Brazilian family organization in the last century. In order to illustrate the subtle interactions among social factors that influence the family in Brazil, we point out some values, beliefs, and practices employed by middle and working class parents. It is also described some characteristics of parents-children relationships in middle and working class families, given an overview on child work, school, and home environment as they relate to the socialization in very poor families. We conclude this chapter emphasizing that the family has a privileged place in the creation, protection, support and maintenance of relationships in Brazilian society.

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Introduction

This paper examines social factors and their impact on the socialization process within Brazilian families. It is divided in to four sections. The first includes a brief description of Brazilian culture and its diversity, focusing on the five sub-cultures and their various characteristics. The second section presents an overview about families in Brazil, emphasizing their origins from a historical and sociological perspective and attempting to depict the changes in their roles during the 20th century. Thirdly, we review studies conducted with working and middle class families discussing parent-child relationships and presenting a picture of the socialization process concerning the work, school, and home environments in very poor families. Finally, it is highlighted the necessity of increasing studies on the family socialization process in Brazil, bearing in mind the country's cultural diversity.

Brazilian Culture and its Diversity

Brazil can be considered as a "big family", with few formal rules, but with its members emphasizing conformity and adaptation to social rules (Candido, 1972; Strohschneider & Güss, 1998). In other words, Brazilians have a tendency to accept situations as given, without inquiring about their causes, although they try to solve problems and difficult situations through improvisation. According to Pearson and Stephan (1998), Brazilians are significantly more collectivist than Americans and prefer a vertical cultural pattern, a term based upon the concepts defined by Triandis (1995) and Triandis and Gelfand (1998). Torres and Dessen (2002, p. 8) argue for "the fact that Brazilians see themselves as members of an in-group, that they accept inequality and differences in status (i.e., social hierarchy), and that they have high-income stratification (i.e., ratio of high and low income)".

Despite cultural homogeneity on one level, Brazil has huge cultural diversity. Its wide territorial area (8,547,403.5 square kilometer), its big population (176.1 million inhabitants, in 2000) formed by both European immigration and the African slave trade, and its extensive variety of climate and vegetation, are major contributors to the division of Brazilian culture into five sub-cultures, as proposed by Ribeiro (1997). The first sub-culture is denominated "crioula". It is observed in the Northeast region of the country whose history was constructed by African slaves who worked under the orders of the Portuguese colonizers. The second one is called "cabloca", in the North region, located in the Brazilian Amazon rain forest. Natives and non-voluntary immigrants like the African slaves are the remaining inhabitants of this sub-culture. Both sub-cultures, "cabloca" and "crioula", are characterized by an authoritarian and patriarchal social system emphasizing group norms and group loyalty. Torres and Dessen (2002) suggested that these regions have a preference for the vertical-collectivist cultural pattern, with people accepting inequality, rather than seeing each other as equals.

The third and fourth sub-cultures described by Ribeiro (1997) are labeled "caipira" and "ga£cha", concentrated, respectively, in the Southeast, particularly in the state of São

Paulo, and South region of the country. Both of them are distinct social groups composed of descendents of the large European immigration of the 17th and 18th centuries, especially Italians and Germans. The first sub-culture, "caipira", was devoted to coffee farms in the 18th century and, has subsequently become industrialized, while the second, "ga£cha", continues to be devoted to cattle production and sugar cane. Despite industrialization in these two regions, they still retain some European cultural characteristics. Torres and Dessen (2002) proposed that both regions would tend to prefer a vertical-individualist cultural pattern, with individuals who do not sanction the establishment of social norms that perpetuate inequality, but they recognize and accept the existence of it.

The last sub-culture is described as "sertaneja", including people from the inland part of the Northeast and, particularly, from the savannas of the central area of Brazil. The development of this region has been remarkable since the country's administrative capital was transferred from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília, in 1960. Although this region was quite empty until that time, Torres and Dessen (2002) point out that the very emergence of a new city endorsed autonomy and social status differences. On the other hand, there are large rural sections in this area, with small populations devoted to subsistence. Thus, this region can be characterized by a preference for both vertical-individualism and vertical-collectivism patterns.

Is the Brazilian family affected by this cultural diversity? Is the family important for Brazilians? Has its roles changed drastically in recent decades? What is the socialization factors in Brazil and their implications for Brazilian children's development? Next, we will try briefly to answer these questions emphasizing the history of the organization of the Brazilian family.

Brazilian Families: A Historical and Sociological Overview

Models of Family Organization

There is not a single model of family organization in Brazilian society (Neder, 1998). The first one described here is that from the family of African origin. The Africans who were taken to Brazil from 1500 to 1850 (i.e., from its discovery until the end of the slave trade) came from several African cultural groups representing various types of family organizations - matriarchal, patriarchal, polygamous etc. Moreover, these had large differences in religion, language and tradition. Living and working in Brazil, the "slave family" was more affected by political-institutional forces than cultural factors. For example, the sale of slaves from their "owners" caused the separation of couples, parents, and their offspring. Today, this pattern of loose family bonds can be seen in the low-income classes of African origin, mainly in families from the states of the Northeast of the country.

The second model of family, the traditional family, was characterized by a patriarchal system formed by people of Iberian origin. These families, whose differentiation depended on the regional idiosyncrasies (South-North), lived alongside those of African origin. In 1889, the proclamation of the Republic initiated a reorganization of the family. The ensuing

Republican military project set up norms for the "new family". This was to legitimize only the white family of European origin and, as depicted by the Catholic Church, a patriarchal unit, with a clear presence of morality and social control (Neder, 1998).

In the Republican project did not have a specific policy towards the family and education in low class families of African origin. This policy continues in today's democratic Brazil - 20 years after democracy was established. However, over the last two decades, the family has gradually regained its place a political debate over service provision and social inclusion (Carvalho, 2000). It is also now agreed that families should play their role in the child's socialization, especially in terms of exerting authority and setting limits.

According to Romanelli (2000), the model of a Brazilian contemporary family includes a hierarchical structure, with husband/father exerting authority and power over the wife and children, a work division separating 'masculine' from 'feminine' tasks, and attribution and the bigger proximity between the mother and the children. Despite this overall structural similarity, the organization of the Brazilian family is also characterized by a diversity of forms of sociability, as described in this paper.

The contemporary family has been influenced by deep demographic, economic, and social changes, particularly since the 1940s, as discussed below. These factors have resulted in changes in their structural relations and in the redefinition of the traditional model of the nuclear family. For example, in 1990, this model represented only 61% of homes in Brazil and the average number of persons per family was 4.1, both in urban and rural areas. It is important to stress that differences between regions are noticeable. For instance, families from the North and Northeast regions have the largest families in the country (4.5) with 2.5 children per family whereas the figures from the Southeast region are 3.9 and 1.9, respectively.

Social Factors and Changes in the Role of the Brazilian Family

First, we would like to give you an idea about the social factors that have affected Latin American families across the continent. Nowadays, an increase in modernization [e.g., greater exchange within society] has not been accompanied by an increase in modernity [e.g., a commitment to social exchange within the home] (Arriagada, 2000). This is largely because wider social changes have been piecemeal. For example, the incorporation of women into the labor force has influenced the function of Latin American families, producing a shift in distributions of time and domestic work without being accompanied by a reallocation of such tasks from women to their men folk. Thus an increase in the stress of the mother's burden does not seem to have been accompanied by a shift in the man's power base.

According to Arriagada (2000), changes in the basic conditions caused by globalization and modernization like migration, new patterns of consumption and a greater flexibility in the labor market have influenced Latin Americans' perceptions of themselves and their families, particularly attitudes towards extended kin. In relation to the new patterns of consumption, for instance, an increase in consumer expectations has been frustrated leading to an increase in illicit earning, delinquency, drug trafficking, corruption

and other forms of violence and social exclusion. The impact of these factors upon family functioning is more than clear, with drastic effects on parent-child relationships, children's relationships and the transmission of social values, particularly in poor families (Dessen & Biasoli-Alves, 2001). A fundamental tension concerns these shifts in social relations in the face of little change in the patriarchal authority, which men still attempt to exert on their wives and children.

Cultural factors explain differences between each country. In Brazil, the majority of families live in precarious conditions, with more than one-third living below the poverty line (Ribeiro, Sabóia, Branco, & Bregman, 1998). The transition to democracy in the country, coupled with rapid urbanization and industrialization have resulted in changes in values, a redefinition of the social role of Brazilian women, particularly in terms of their greater involvement in the work place (Kaloustian, 1998). As a consequence, families have also changed, particularly in the last two decades. Serious economic crises and insufficient governmental policies have had serious effects upon the Brazilian population. Families have been forced to change their life styles to obtain a sustainable income. Kaloustian's data show that increasing poverty has led to (a) an increase in family separations due largely to enforced by inter-region migration, (b) changes in the man's role as family provider; (c) an increase in families sustained by women alone. The participation of Brazilian women in the workforce has, in turn, led to a pressure to redistribute domestic tasks between wife and husband (Dessen & Braz, 2000). It has caused marital and family discord, given the traditional gender segregation of such tasks. Sometimes, domestic violence has been attributable simply to the man's opposition to the new economic roles of women and problems faced in negotiating greater sharing of domestic activities (Arriagada, 2000).

In which ways have all these changes influenced family functioning in Brazil? It is interesting to note that, in the last century, there were both continuities and changes in the role of Brazilian families. Biasoli-Alves' (1997) insightful qualitative analyses clearly describe these shifts in middle class families. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the family was larger, in that there were more children and it was extended, with daily contact between generations who sometimes lived under the same roof. Children spent their day in a wider social space in play, supervised by a peer or sibling. Thus there was a great difference between the adult and child worlds. Moral values were transmitted across the generations in a rigid way, with an emphasis upon the work ethic.

Between 1930 and 1980, the child's space shrunk gradually but by the latter date it was very small, particularly in urban areas. This change was coupled with a reduction in-group activities and an increase in solitary activity within the home. A preoccupation for parents is to provide both sufficient play materials, closely supervised within the home. The appearance of TV into the home in the 1950s also contributed to the acceptance of the ideas of modernity within the household. In the following years, TV came to dominate the spacing and timing of family interactions, particularly in low status families. The predominant media images depicted the urban lifestyles of nuclear families, even though in most households strong inter-generational links persisted.

The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by a further limiting of children's freedom and by an emphasis upon developing autonomy and competitiveness to prepare children for adult life in the city. At that time religious practices became more free as did many individuals' commitments to beliefs. At the same time that more activities, like bathing children, came to be defined as private, mothers came to allow children to make more decisions in the home. So, as the child's activity became more centered within the home, children were given more autonomy within the household.

In sum, Biasoli-Alves' (1997) research strongly suggests that Brazilian society ended the twentieth century adapting to profound changes in beliefs about relationships within the home focused upon notions of the 'ideal child', the nature of maturity [e.g., autonomy] and new beliefs in acceptable child care strategies [e.g., close supervision in a highly stimulating environment], coupled with different understandings of the public roles of women and men. We now move to the discussion of the socialization of Brazilian children, in which mothers have played an important role while fathers provide "authority", despite a diversity of contexts and family types.

Socialization in the Brazilian Family Context

The very combination of cultural diversity and the transmission of deeply held traditional values has forced theoretical analyses of socialization in Brazil to consider the subtle interaction between a range of contextual factors - social processes, cultural forces, economics, history and beliefs systems about the behavior and personality of children. For example, to comprehend children's daily routine it is necessary to understand daily life in families, the nature of the domestic division of labor, the relationship between the different subsystems within the family [e.g., siblings vs. parent-child relationships], the social support network, cultural values and beliefs and parental practices. To illustrate these interactions, we will briefly discuss values, beliefs, and practices employed by Brazilian parents.

Parental Values, Beliefs, and Practices in Brazil

Biasoli-Alves (2000) conducted a three-generational study including the elderly who were around the turn of the twentieth century and two successive generations, the latter having been born in the 1970s. Each respondent was interviewed about its approach to parenting and comparisons were made across each generation in this middle class sample. The data suggested that from 1890 to 1930 values concerning respect, honesty, obedience and the work ethic were transmitted to both sexes, while notions of submission and a need to be pure, delicate and cooperative were inculcated predominantly upon girls. In addition, responsibility for all domestic tasks was handed down from one female kin member to another. At that time, these traditional values showed clearly that, in Brazil, the socialization processes employed by adults were directed primarily at girls in order to ensure that they were closely supervised and confined mainly to the home. Severe sanctions were employed if daughters transgressed. Marriage was arranged for daughters and women did not need to study or plan for an independent life. Indeed higher education

was seen to disrupt the woman's preparation for her adult role as wife, homemaker and mother. Biasoli-Alves points out that when the Universities emerged in the two largest cities in early twentieth century Brazil [Rio and São Paulo] there were insufficient places so few women entered higher education. At the same time, there was an abundance of schooling provided by religious communities that simply reinforced 'traditional' values, particularly a division between the sexes. Upper and middle class girls in such settings were educated for marriage, parenthood and caring for extended kin, especially the elderly.

Biasoli-Alves (1995) suggests that in the middle of the twentieth century, from 1940 to 1970, the same values persisted. Family values shifted to allow secondary school girls to enter the professions, as long as such involvement did not interfere with their family responsibilities. Perceptions of women as naive, fragile and susceptible to the influence of others also persisted. So even with higher education qualifications, women prioritized their domestic responsibilities, while the provider role remained firmly associated with the husband.

At the end of the twentieth century, Biasoli-Alves' (2000) analysis revealed a major escalation of the numbers of middle class women entering into higher education and the professions. This facilitated their social contacts and raised questions about the persistence of the sexual imbalance in the home and expectations about the submission of women in particular. Even today in dual earner couples, the woman continues to run the house and care for the children and her husband. A daughter continues to be under close emotional control by her mother, while boys used to be subject to harsh physical sanctions, particularly up until the 1980s. Mothers continue to be given license to exert strict control over their families, and often express their irritation on their children who do not obey clearly prescribed roles. However, this traditional maternal role has been under much debate in the press over the past two decades because it conflicts with a more child-centered approach to parenting that has become popular. Many mothers are concerned about the negative consequences of permissiveness towards children (Biasoli-Alves, Caldana, & Dias-da-Silva, 1997).

As in all industrialized societies at the end of the twentieth century, the Brazilian middle class had also to come to terms with an extension of the period of dependency into early adulthood (Biasoli-Alves, 2001). The belief systems surrounding freedom and choice in one's actions produced greater conflict between for children and teenagers with their parents. We will move to discuss, briefly, parent-children relationships in both middle and working class families.

Parent-Children Relationships in Middle and Working Class Families

A close relationship between parents and children has become a principal aim within middle class families. Parental authority in Brazilian society over the past 4-5 decades has undergone a major re-evaluation and more extreme values have been abandoned. Children are no longer completely accountable to senior family members and there is notably less affective control characterized by strong moral pressure. The new norm is for

a free and open exchange of emotion, often reflecting the Brazilian's tendency towards saying what you want and mean, even if this means acting impulsively (Biasoli-Alves, 2001). The results of her research show that, during the transitions to adolescence and adulthood, conflicts are often mainly when old values concerning parental authority are set within ideals of greater individual freedom.

Parents report problems over their children's social and sexual relationships, their leisure activities and friendship networks, the teenager school grades, and the time they should return home in the evening (Romanelli, 1998). In relation to boy/girlfriends and sexuality parents attempt to enforce clear and conservative rules about their daughters', but not their sons' behavior. Indeed there is some suggestion that the opposite is the case for boys - it is expected that they should be allowed to develop their sexual prowess. In Romanelli's study, parents also reported two basic preoccupations: children's school progress and their safety. They worry not only about problems within the neighborhood [robberies, traffic and drugs], but also with the lack protection given to all individuals within the judicial system. This usually boils down to a deep mistrust in the government's ability to solve social problems, particularly corruption within the legal system. Thus parents are caught in a trap because they value children's independence but want them to remain within the protective network of the family: "In these cases, paternalism within families reflects a paternalism within society, indeed they mutually reinforce one another" (Romanelli, 1998, p. 135).

Daily life in working class families[1] usually reflects pressing economic necessities. Thus, one aim of socialization is to employ strategies that will train children to become independent as quickly as possible, even if this means that the child will not participate in the education system. Ordinarily, children are required to participate in activities that maintain the family, including domestic tasks and paid labor. Parents describe this practice as a "formadora-educadora", which is loosely translated as 'formative education' (Bazon, 2000, p. 44). At the same time, the child's participation in such practices is perceived as a means to make the family a more efficient economic and social unit. Sometimes, the responsibility for child-care is shared by relatives and neighbors and this often makes children circulate between different social units (Dessen & Braz, 2000), assimilating subtle differences in behaviors and family relationships.

Biasoli-Alves and Zamberlan (1996) suggested that children from the highest socioeconomic and educational levels engage in more frequent and varied interactions and exploration activities than children from the remaining levels. The results of their study show that Brazilian children's social and educational practices are directly linked to socioeconomic conditions. They obtained demographic data from 75 low socioeconomic status families, living in a particular urban area of the state of Sao Paulo. Socio-educational conditions were measured by standards of living, health care, food intake patterns, childrearing strategies, leisure time and play activities. Parents from this sample,

[1] We refer here to working class families in general, although it should be noted that a large proportion of families in Brazil live below the poverty line and might be considered to experience family relationships which are very different from those discussed here (Ribeiro et al., 1998).

whose educational level was higher, promote their children's academic activities more, but asked them for less help in housework duties and daily routine. Illiterate parents, on the contrary, asked their children for more help in the same duties. They also found that in the higher income families, the child was never left alone. On the other hand, in low-income families, very young children (3 to 4 years old) were usually left alone to take care of themselves. Unfortunately, studies describing parental relationships in working class in the similar way we can see in middle class are quite rare. So, we cannot say much about this specific subject in working class families. However, there are few studies examining how the socialization process in poor families concerning child employment, school, and the home environment.

Socialization in Poor Families: Child Work, School, and Home Environment

In working class families, the traditional pattern of authority is hierarchical and has not changed as much as those in the middle class (Romanelli & Bezerra, 1999). The structure of households in very poor families is characterized by the dominance of the husband but this has reduced in recent years. In both city and rural areas, work is central and forms the basis of interpersonal relationships and group mores. In rural areas in particular where work involvement is from dawn to dusk, socialization occurs "in work, with work and through work" (Gomes, 1998, p. 56: trans). Gomes suggests that, even across a plurality of family types and despite a shift towards the notion that childhood is a time of 'play', the majority of poor families still subscribe to the belief that children's socialization occurs through work and parental regulation of such activity.

In working class families above the poverty line, parents expect the school to take on part of the role of preparing children for work and to face the difficulties faced in everyday life (Zago, 1998). As Zago points out, parents also expect school to take on a care-giving role while they are at work. Such care is needed as school protects children from the dangers of street life. School is seen as a guardian for children that, as an extension of the family, with a continuity in value systems. At the same time, education is seen to represent a crucial means for social improvement.

Rabinovich (1998) argues that poverty cannot be perceived as a homogeneous phenomenon, because for some it provides good conditions for parents to foster development. In order to understand how the concrete way of living influences parental practices and subsequently the child development, she provided data on children's sleeping patterns in different income groups, including 60 0-2 year olds in their family homes in Sao Paulo city, a similar group of 28 children living as homeless under a viaduct nearby and 28 0-3 year olds in family homes in a rural area in Northeast of Brazil. Parents provided good enough but different types of care in each setting that does not conform to the individualist approaches of middle class parents. All three groups allowed to let their children sleep with them, although in the city they shared space in a bed, while in the north-east they used a hammock. The youngest is in closest proximity to the parents and each moves one place away when the new baby is born. Sharing a close physical space was regarded as a positive attribute of family closeness and the child's affective

development, not an infringement upon the parents' individual liberties. Such data suggest that we need to learn more about similar Brazilian child-rearing patterns and beliefs among different cultural groups and social classes, particularly those from poor families, and to consider their implications for children's development.

Conclusions

We would like to conclude this paper by emphasizing that the family has a privileged place in the creation, protection, support and maintenance of relationships in Brazilian society (Biasoli-Alves, 2000; Romanelli, 1997). These characteristics seem to be strongly present in all sub-cultures mentioned in this paper, especially in relation to the family's socialization functions. Brazil is experiencing sociopolitical changes associated with major social problems, just like other modern societies. As it is not culturally homogeneous, having several types of families of different social and ethnic origins, there is still much to learn about Brazilian families and their socialization practices. We need to develop research comparing process of child socialization in different collectivist-individualist groups from the perspective not only to discover how cultural variations influence communication styles, child-rearing practices, cultural values and beliefs systems, but also to explore whether these factors differentially shape the nature of parenting and child behavior in Brazil. As pointed out by Bornstein and Cote (2001):

> The degree of individualism or collectivism is believed to affect a variety of psychological variables and to contribute to differences in maternal (and perhaps infant) behaviors and interactions [...], including, on the individualist side, parental socialization for self-reliance, exploration, and independence in children versus, on the collectivist side, parental socialization for sensitivity to others, obedience, and duty; independence versus dependence on social support; and adoption of a 'self' versus an 'others' orientation [...]. (p. 550)

However, to attain these goals Brazilian researchers need to diversify their research methods, moving from predominantly qualitative studies of self-report data based on small samples to the use of multi-methodological approaches, including data from behavior observation, based on large samples across the five sub-cultures. This would allow us to interpret cultural similarities and sub-cultural differences in family types. Given the size of the country and its major regional and cultural diversity, Brazil provides an ideal medium for such comparisons.

If we want to understand family processes more clearly we should also consider that the majority of Latin American countries face high rates of unemployment, economic hardship and instability in the labor market. Thus labor is cheap and it is necessary in most social groups to include all family members in its work force to stave off financial destitution. Obviously these economic circumstances have a dynamic influence on different family structures such as parent households, two parent families and extended networks.

However, we should be careful about generalizing 'the' effects of poverty on social problems in childhood, particularly as most research uses methods that are devised for privileged populations in the northern countries of the world. Dessen and Biasoli-Alves (2001) call attention to the scientific community and organizations [both governmental and non-governmental] to avoid making simplistic links between poverty and social problems when constructing development programs. They point out the necessity of clarifying the detrimental influence upon family interactions when a family receives simple governmental support to put food on the table on a regular basis. Although, we are far from having a complete set of data on Brazilian families, let alone from across Latin America, we feel that such an endeavor would produce a new set of theories of family relationships appropriate to a greater proportion of the World's children.[i]

AUTHOR NOTE

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Questions for Discussion

1. Do Brazilians prefer a vertical or collectivist cultural pattern?
2. How do you describe, in few words, the Brazilian culture?
3. Is the family affected by the Brazilian cultural diversity?
4. Why there is not a single model of family organization in Brazil?
5. What does it mean "modernization without modernity" in Latin America?
6. Have the social changes influenced the family functioning in Latin America and Brazil? In which aspects?
7. Is the family socialization process of Brazilian children different from middle and working class? Was it different across the last century?
8. Are parental values, beliefs, and practices different for boys and girls in Brazilian society?
9. What are the main differences between middle and working class families in Brazil?
10. What is the role of child work in very poor families?