


Toward an Integrative and Multi-Level Social Psychology: Measurement, Institutions, and Collective Life

Hacia una Psicología Social Integrativa y Multinivel: Medición, Instituciones y Vida Colectiva

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Acceso abierto diamante

Abstract

This editorial outlines a programmatic orientation for contemporary social psychology grounded in integrative and multi-level approaches that connect construct measurement, institutional processes, and collective life. Drawing on the contributions included in Issue 11(1) of *PSocial*, the editorial identifies convergent developments in the field, including advances in domain-sensitive measurement and construct validity, context-embedded models of stress and coping, gender- and inequality-aware analyses of well-being and institutional experience, and research on affective and relational dynamics in organizational contexts. The issue also features a special dossier on rituals and global community that extends the analytical scale toward collective emotional processes and humanity-wide identification. Together, these contributions illustrate a social psychology that is methodologically rigorous, theoretically plural, and attentive to the articulation between subjective experience, structural conditions, and collective processes. The editorial argues for a positioned contribution from Latin American research traditions that is regionally grounded and globally engaged, advancing a discipline capable of addressing contemporary social challenges through conceptual precision, contextual sensitivity, and multi-level integration.

Keywords: social psychology, multi-level analysis, construct validity, institutional processes, collective emotions, gender, well-being, global community.

Resumen

Este ensayo editorial propone una orientación programática para la psicología social contemporánea basada en enfoques integrativos y multinivel que articulan medición de constructos, procesos institucionales y vida colectiva. A partir de las contribuciones incluidas en el número 11(1) de PSocial, el editorial identifica desarrollos convergentes en el campo, entre ellos avances en medición sensible al dominio y validez de constructo, modelos contextuales del estrés y el afrontamiento, análisis del bienestar y la experiencia institucional sensibles al género y la desigualdad, y estudios sobre dinámicas afectivas y relacionales en contextos organizacionales. El número incluye además un dossier especial sobre rituales y comunidad global que amplía la escala analítica hacia procesos emocionales colectivos e identificación con la humanidad. En conjunto, estas contribuciones ilustran una psicología social metodológicamente rigurosa, teóricamente plural y atenta a la articulación entre experiencia subjetiva, condiciones estructurales y procesos colectivos. El editorial sostiene la necesidad de contribuciones situadas desde América Latina que, siendo regionalmente informadas y globalmente dialogantes, promuevan una disciplina capaz de abordar los desafíos sociales contemporáneos mediante precisión conceptual, sensibilidad contextual e integración multinivel.

Palabras clave: psicología social, análisis multinivel, validez de constructo, procesos institucionales, emociones colectivas, género, bienestar, comunidad global.

Introduction

Contemporary social psychology is undergoing a significant expansion in both its objects of study and its methodological sensibilities. Far from being confined to laboratory interactions or individual-level attitudinal processes, the field increasingly addresses complex intersections between construct validity, domain-sensitive measurement, subjective experience, structural inequality, institutional life, and collective emotional processes. This shift is not merely thematic; it reflects a deeper epistemic movement toward integrative, multi-level, and context-sensitive approaches that connect psychometric rigor with lived experience and macro-social dynamics, a trend also visible in recent research that emphasizes situated methodologies and relational frameworks within the discipline (see e.g., Paez et al., 2024).

Issue 11(1) of PSocial is organized around this broader transformation. The regular section brings together five contributions that, taken together, illustrate three convergent developments in current social psychology: (1) renewed attention to construct specificity and measurement precision, (2) a stronger focus on gendered and situated experience in the formation of subjectivity and well-being, and (3) the articulation between stress, coping, and relational or institutional contexts. Complementing this regular section, the special dossier edited by Joe de Rivera on rituals and global community (de Rivera, 2025) extends the analytical scale from interpersonal and organizational processes to collective gatherings, symbolic practices, and identification with all humanity. The issue thus moves from instruments to institutions, from subjective experience to community formation, and from local contexts to global belonging.

Rather than treating these contributions as isolated empirical efforts, this editorial proposes that they can be read as part of a shared program: a social psychology that is methodologically demanding, theoretically plural, normatively reflective, and globally oriented.

From Construct Measurement to Conceptual Precision

A persistent challenge in psychological science concerns the alignment between theoretical constructs and their operationalization. Social psychology has accumulated a vast repertoire of measures, yet this accumulation has not always been accompanied by sufficient clarity regarding scope conditions, dimensionality, and domain specificity. Recent methodological discussions have renewed this concern, emphasizing the need for domain-sensitive instruments, transparent factorial structure, and context-appropriate validation criteria (e.g., Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Messick, 1995; see also methodological discussions on confirmatory factor analysis fit criteria in Jordan Muiños, 2021).

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the gradual shift away from overly generic measures toward instruments capable of capturing differentiated forms of social cognition and emotion across specific targets and contexts. This movement reflects a broader correction within psychological measurement: rather than assuming cross-domain equivalence, contemporary work increasingly tests boundary conditions and target sensitivity as part of construct definition itself.

The instrumental study of the Animal Empathy Scale by Sorribas et al., (2025) exemplifies this precision-oriented approach. By examining internal structure and reliability in a Spanish-speaking context, the authors contribute not only a validated tool but also a conceptual clarification: empathy is not merely multidimensional but also target-sensitive. Measuring empathy toward animals is not a trivial extension of interpersonal empathy scales; it raises theoretically relevant questions about interspecies generalization, moral circle expansion, and prosocial orientation beyond strictly human targets. In this sense, measurement refinement does not simply improve technique — it reshapes the conceptual map of the construct under study and enables more discriminating comparative research.

Stress, Control, and Coping in Transforming Work Contexts

A second major line of development represented in this issue concerns psychosocial regulation under conditions of structural demand, particularly the relationship between individual resources, institutional constraints, and coping processes in work environments undergoing rapid transformation. Contemporary organizational contexts — shaped by post-pandemic restructuring, hybrid work modalities, and accelerated technological change — have intensified performance pressures while simultaneously redistributing perceived control, autonomy, and social support. These shifts have renewed theoretical and empirical interest in resource-based and context-embedded models of stress and adaptation within social psychology.

This line of research is grounded in well-established theoretical traditions, including transactional models of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and demand–control and demand–resources frameworks in occupational research (Karasek, 1979; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which emphasize that adaptive outcomes depend not only on exposure to demands but also on access to regulatory resources and perceived control. Rather than treating coping as a purely individual trait, these approaches conceptualize it as a dynamic process emerging from the interaction between subjective beliefs and structural conditions.

Within this framework, the study by Ciriame et al., (2025) examines how locus of control, social support, autonomy, and job demands jointly predict coping strategies among workers. Their multivariate analyses identify a consistent and theoretically coherent pattern: perceived control and social support are associated with more active coping strategies, whereas external locus of control predicts more passive forms of response. Beyond confirming established theoretical expectations, the study contributes contextualized and methodologically robust evidence, linking belief systems and organizational structures through predictive modeling. In doing so, it advances a social psychology of work that connects subjective orientations with institutional configurations and identifies actionable intervention points.

Importantly, this research trajectory also strengthens the bridge between social and clinical domains. Coping is not only an organizational variable but also a mental health resource, closely linked to vulnerability, resilience, and recovery processes. By situating coping strategies within networks of social support and autonomy conditions, this line of work reinforces a non-individualistic understanding of adaptation — one in which resilience is socially distributed and institutionally mediated rather than merely intrapsychic. Editorially, foregrounding such contributions signals a programmatic commitment to models that integrate belief structures, relational resources, and structural constraints in the analysis of psychosocial adjustment.

Well-Being, Psychopathology, and Gendered Developmental Contexts

A third major axis represented in the regular section concerns domain-differentiated models of well-being and their patterned relationship with psychopathology across gendered and developmental contexts. Contemporary research increasingly questions monolithic conceptions of well-being, emphasizing instead its multidimensional structure and the need to examine how distinct life domains relate differentially to mental health indicators. This approach aligns with broader developments in psychological science that treat well-being as a structured and context-sensitive construct, embedded in social roles, developmental stages, and relational environments rather than reducible to a single global index.

The contribution by Rubio et al. (2025) on domains of subjective well-being and psychopathology among Chilean adolescents advances a differentiated and stratified perspective. By modeling domain-specific well-being alongside mental health indicators and gender differences, the study shows that well-being is not only multidimensional but also socially patterned. Gender differences are not reducible to mean-level contrasts; they reflect structured variations in exposure, socialization processes, normative expectations, and vulnerability configurations, as shown in research linking gender role ideology, sexism, and inequality in care and social roles (e.g., Borro, 2021; Barbeitos & Modesto, 2023). Such findings support more fine-grained

explanatory models in which gender operates as a contextual and developmental organizer of psychosocial outcomes rather than as a simple categorical comparator.

This line of work reflects a broader shift toward intersectional and stratified approaches to well-being, where psychological adjustment is understood as embedded in gendered, institutional, and cultural contexts. From this perspective, well-being and psychopathology are not opposing poles on a single continuum but partially overlapping and domain-dependent configurations shaped by opportunity structures and constraint patterns. Editorially, foregrounding domain-specific and socially stratified analyses of well-being signals a commitment to theoretically nuanced and policy-relevant social psychology, capable of informing targeted prevention and intervention strategies.

These differentiated and context-embedded models of psychosocial outcomes become especially consequential when extended to institutional trajectories and recognition processes — a perspective further developed in the contributions on gendered experiences and organizational settings included in this issue.

A longstanding research interest of social psychology concerns how institutional contexts shape subjectivity, well-being, and relational life, moving beyond individualistic explanatory models toward analyses of governance regimes, recognition structures, and affective organization. In particular, the expansion of performance-driven and market-oriented governance models in higher education has drawn attention to the affective and relational dimensions of academic work, highlighting how evaluation systems, productivity demands, and competitive organizational environments structure everyday interactions and redistribute emotional and relational labor. This institutional and relational turn foregrounds affect, care, and recognition as central mechanisms through which power and inequality operate in organizational settings. The qualitative study by Corvalán-Navia and Fardella Cisternas (2025) examines friendship among women academics in contemporary Chilean universities as a situated social practice shaped by performance regimes, competition, and stratified recognition processes. Using an affective-discursive approach, the authors conceptualize friendship as a relational practice embedded in evaluation cultures and organizational pressures. Their identification of interpretative repertoires—friendships that sustain, recognize, and overflow—shows that relational bonds function not only as sources of support but also as sites of tension, negotiation, and boundary work. Friendship thus emerges as an affective infrastructure through which inequality, solidarity, and resistance are experienced and interpreted in everyday institutional life. By foregrounding affective ties as analytically central rather than peripheral, this contribution advances social psychology's engagement with institutions and relational processes. It aligns with growing scholarship on affect, care, and relational labor, and demonstrates how micro-relational practices both mitigate and reproduce structural pressures and gendered expectations. In doing so, it challenges models of academic life that privilege individual agency while neglecting the institutional organization of emotional and relational work, contributing to a politically informed psychology of everyday bonds and recognition dynamics.

Diagnostic Trajectories, Gender Bias, and Institutional Recognition

The paper by Naranjo Douglas et al. (2025) investigates the experiences of Chilean women who received late diagnoses of autism spectrum conditions, offering an analysis of diagnostic bias, camouflage strategies, and post-diagnosis identity transformations. The study demonstrates how diagnostic practices are embedded in gendered expectations and normative models of behavior that may obscure recognition of neurodivergent experiences. By documenting processes of masking, delayed identification, and subsequent identity reconstruction, the authors show how institutional recognition reshapes personal narratives and social positioning. The reported transition from chronic self-criticism to self-understanding following diagnosis

illustrates the psychological and moral consequences of recognition processes, highlighting how classification systems structure both suffering and empowerment.

From this standpoint, diagnostic systems are conceptualized as sites of social categorization and institutional recognition, where identities are defined, negotiated, and legitimized within normative and cultural frameworks. Rather than treating diagnosis as a purely clinical process, this perspective emphasizes how institutional classification interacts with gender norms, social expectations, and stigma processes, shaping both self-understanding and social inclusion. Diagnostic trajectories become key contexts for analyzing recognition and misrecognition, identity formation, and the social regulation of difference.

This contribution advances social psychology by linking categorization, stigma, gender norms, and institutional practice within a unified framework of recognition dynamics. It complements prior research on gendered expectations and normative social roles in Latin American contexts (e.g., Borro, 2021) and reinforces the need for gender-sensitive and culturally informed diagnostic approaches. More broadly, the study demonstrates the epistemic value of lived experience and qualitative inquiry for understanding how institutional processes shape subjectivity, identity negotiation, and social belonging.

From Interpersonal and Institutional Processes to Global Community: The Special Dossier on Rituals

While the regular section of this issue centers on measurement, coping, well-being, gender, and institutional life, the special dossier edited by Joe de Rivera extends the analytical horizon of the volume toward rituals, collective gatherings, and processes of global community formation. Without duplicating the guest editor's introduction, it is important to emphasize the programmatic significance of incorporating this dossier, which situates social psychology within ongoing debates on collective emotion, symbolic practices, and the foundations of social cohesion in an increasingly interconnected world.

The contributions by de Rivera, Rincón-Unigarro (2025), and Páez and da-Costa (2025) converge on a central proposition: rituals and collective emotional experiences should not be understood as residual cultural phenomena but as core mechanisms in the production of solidarity, identity, and moral concern across social scales. Concepts such as collective effervescence, self-transcendent emotions, and identification with all humanity point toward a macro-social social psychology capable of linking affective experience, symbolic interaction, and global ethical orientations. In this sense, the dossier advances a research agenda that connects psychological processes with broader questions of social integration, cooperation, and shared meaning.

The inclusion of this dossier also reflects broader transformations in contemporary social psychology, characterized by increasing attention to collective processes, global interdependence, and the affective foundations of social life. In line with prior editorial reflections emphasizing pluralism, regional dialogue, and theoretical integration in the field (Páez et al., 2024), the dossier contributes to expanding the discipline's analytical scale and conceptual repertoire.

Placed alongside the regular articles, the dossier creates a productive vertical integration of levels of analysis: from psychometric instruments and coping beliefs, through gendered and institutional experiences, to large-scale ritual processes and global identification. This multi-level architecture illustrates a central direction in contemporary social psychology—one that seeks to articulate individual experience, social structure, and collective meaning within a unified analytical framework.

A Programmatic Direction for P*Social*: Discussion and Conclusions

Taken together, the contributions included in this issue illustrate a broader transformation in contemporary social psychology and outline a programmatic direction for the journal. The articles in this issue converge on a shared orientation toward integrative, context-sensitive, and multi-level approaches that connect construct precision, lived experience, institutional dynamics, and collective processes.

By showcasing Sorribas et al. (2025), the journal lends explicit support to rigorous, context-sensitive instrumental contributions — work that mainstream editorial hierarchies too often marginalize in favor of topical novelty. From the standpoint of cumulative science, however, such efforts are indispensable: without reliable, structurally validated, and contextually grounded instruments, theoretical disputes remain indeterminate and empirical comparisons fragile. Continuing this effort to foreground contexts, the contributions of Ciriame et al. (2025) and Rubio et al. (2025) advance resource- and context-aware approaches that move beyond intrapersonal framings of copying, stress, and well-being, recasting them as socially conditioned phenomena. Gender emerges as a central axis of analysis in Corvalán-Navia and Fardella Cisternas (2025), as well as in Naranjo Douglas et al. (2025), whose work interrogates institutional practices, lived experiences, and the inequalities and tensions they sustain. Also, by foregrounding qualitative and affect-centered examinations of institutional life, these studies expand social psychology’s explanatory repertoire and reaffirm a pluralistic methodological orientation—one attuned to meaning, power, and relational experience as constitutive features of social reality. Finally, the special dossier on rituals and collective emotional processes introduces a complementary macro-social perspective, linking symbolic practices, shared emotions, and identification with broader forms of community, including humanity-wide concern. This expansion toward collective and global levels of analysis reflects an emerging research agenda capable of articulating individual experience, institutional organization, and large-scale social integration within a unified framework.

From an editorial perspective, these convergent developments point to theoretical pluralism, methodological diversity, and multi-level explanation as essential conditions for the continued advancement of social psychology. In this sense, the journal seeks to encourage a shift beyond entrenched dichotomies—individual and collective, micro and macro, subjective and structural—toward integrative approaches capable of capturing the layered and context-embedded complexity of contemporary social life, with methodological robustness, while sustaining a productive balance between regional sensitivity and global engagement.

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