

***Angela Biaggio: The Course of History of Brazil's
Socio-Moral Development Research***

215

IN MEMORIAM

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This article offers a bird's eye view of Angela Biaggio's research over 30 years and is based on several works by herself, including her own review entitled "Desenvolvimento Moral: vinte anos de pesquisa no Brasil" (Biaggio, 1988). Angela Maria Brasil Biaggio was born in Rio de Janeiro, in 1940. She got her B.Sc. in Psychology from Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ) and soon afterwards, in 1965, she went to the University of Wisconsin, at Madison, USA, where she got an M.Sc. She went on with her graduate studies at the same University, and wrote her Ph.D. thesis between the years of 1967 and 1969.

Robert E. Grinder supervised Biaggio's Ph.D. thesis, which approached several aspects of Moral Development: affective (guilt), cognitive (moral judgment according to Kohlberg) and behavioral (resistance to temptations in situations of transgression). The chief results of this study indicated a positive association between moral judgment and the level of internalized guilt – regardless of ego control – and a connection between motivation for social approval and transgression in situations of competition in which public recognition was at stake.

In 1969, Angela Biaggio examined the difference between Brazilian and North American children in relation to the internalization of guilt, and she concluded that North American children internalized considerably more guilt than Brazilian ones. From 1969 on, Biaggio applied herself to the study of morality according to the Kohlbergian theory. She was mainly concerned with such issues as the universality and sequentiality of the moral stages.

In 1975, Biaggio conducted a research using Kohlberg's MJI (Moral Judgment Interview) with both North American and Brazilian university students. She did not find any significant difference in the results of the average scores of the groups, but she obtained responses significantly indicative of a moral judgment based on respect to authority, law and order from the American group whereas the responses elicited from the Brazilian counterpart were more related to the morality of pleasure and to the morality directed to the questioning of the laws and to social welfare.

Later on in 1976, Biaggio compared Brazilian children and adolescents to children and adolescents from the USA, Taiwan and Mexico. She identified a

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number of similarities in the four samples of the results, except for a low usage of stage 4, and a high usage of stage 3 both in Brazil and in Mexico, which led her to ask herself whether there was something in Latin culture that favors the morality of affectivity. Biaggio also realized there were differences between the sexes: there was a higher usage of stage 3 among the girls. This data was further analyzed by Gilligan (1982), who also used Kohlberg's theory. According to Gilligan, Kohlberg's typology considered the responses respecting law and justice higher, and mainly concerning the male sex in American culture, whereas the responses respecting the morality of care were lower and mainly concerning the female sex. For Angela Biaggio, in spite of the differences found in her studies, the results generally confirm the idea of universality and sequentiality.

Following these studies, Angela Biaggio (1979) was interested in checking out intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can impair moral development. She studied such external factors as maternal attitudes of control, the type of school and the influence of school peers; she also analyzed the influence of the personality structure, of the *locus* of control and the anxiety to pass moral judgment on. Angela Biaggio both produced a number of papers and advised several graduate students on this topic.

In one of these studies (Biaggio, 1979), adolescents and university students responded MJJ and questionnaires about their perception of mothers' and school peers' attitudes. The results generally indicated that Brazilian adolescents were more strongly influenced by their peers than by their mothers. The only mother variables significantly correlated - though negatively - to the scores of moral maturity were those of strictness and hostile separation from mother (in the case of the adolescents), indicating that such mothers might delay the development of the moral structure of their children.

Gerbase (1984) carried out a research under Angela Biaggio's supervision, the Defining Issues Test (DIT), with adolescents from a liberal school and from a traditional one, and found out that there was a higher incidence of stage 6 among those students from the liberal school. Koller (1990) was more concerned with sex or gender differences and this led her to examine the influence of gender on moral judgment in her dissertation supervised by Biaggio. She used a highly complex experimental apparatus and carried out research with 306 university students who responded a questionnaire about sexual typification and MJJ. The results indicated that the androgynous type presented higher levels of moral judgment, followed by those subjects sexually typified, and last of all, the indifferent type, whose moral judgment was the lowest.

There is also Biaggio and Spada's (1982) study of the relation between morality and different intra-psycho variables, carried out with 100 university students. These students responded Hogan's Ethical Attitude Scale (1970, 1975, quoted by Biaggio, 1988), and Comrey's Personality Scale (1973, quoted by Biaggio, 1988). Among other findings, there was a positive correlation between a social

responsibility ethics and the scales of conformism versus rebellion, and order v. lack of compulsion, and the first poles of either were valid.

Biaggio and Guazzelli (1984) also used this approach to analyze the connection between moral judgment maturity and the internalization of the *locus* of control. They found a positive connection with graduate students but not with the undergraduates. The authors claimed that the correlation found was due to a greater variation of scores among graduate students.

From 1983 on, Angela Biaggio turned her attention also to intervention studies. Basing her studies on Blatt and Kohlberg's (1975) findings, she promoted activities envisaging the promotion of moral judgment. According to this approach, if a cognitive conflict arises among the members of a group – due to different individual standpoints as to a moral dilemma - the search for a solution of the conflict would make the part whose argumentation was less advanced change their argumentation when they are faced with the more advanced arguments of the other part. That is, the conflicting subjects would always prefer those arguments that are stronger than their own.

Biaggio (1989) went on with her analyses of the connection between moral judgment and intra-psychic variables and she conducted an experimental study in which she used a group dynamics and assessed – by means of pre and post-tests – the anxiety of the participants. In order to assess the level of anxiety Biaggio used Spielberger's Trace-State of Anxiety Inventory (Biaggio, Natalício & Spielberger, 1976). She identified an increase of anxiety in the results of the post-test and she linked this to the morality discussions of the group. A further result she identified was the negative correlation between anxiety traces and moral judgment maturity of male subjects. It is important to emphasize the relevance of the connection Biaggio established between anxiety and morality, mainly because those who worked with Kohlberg's theory failed to identify, partly or thoroughly, the emotional aspects of the issue. Even Kohlberg himself can be said to have underestimated the importance of affectivity in his work.

Biaggio (1983, quoted in Biaggio, 1988) carried out an intervention activity with advisees and educators of a High School in the city of Porto Alegre (RS). After administering pre and post-tests she realized that participants of the group had improved in maturity judgment. Then, advisees who had participated in the previous intervention carried out some further activities. One of these was carried out with 33 seventh grade students in which the data of the post-test, in comparison to the pre-test, reveals an average score of moral judgment considerably higher than that of the pre-test; the second one was carried out with eighth grade students of a public school and a control group was used this time. The results reveal there was an improvement in both groups.

Generally speaking, these experiences assured Biaggio that the conductor of the experience and the coordinator of the group should deal with dilemmas proposed by the students themselves. The author interpreted this requirement

as being related to the low incidence of stage 3 (law and order) among Brazilians – a certain degree of nonconformity towards authority.

Further research on intervention was carried out through the 80s and 90s. Jussará Lummertz's (1991) conducted hers within this period, and she was one of Angela Biaggio PhD advisees. Lummertz worked with 30 male adolescents, and she used Berkowitz's (1982, quoted by Lummertz, 1991) discourse method: the discussion of dilemmas by pairs. The results evidenced the importance of the intervention.

Biaggio carried out further interventions with education students aiming at improving their moral maturity stage and training them so that they would be able to use this technique with their future students. In their theoretical work, Biaggio and Marosine (1987) and Morosine and Biaggio (1985) have also discussed the connection between post-conventional thought and the possibility of social transgression, taking into account the role of school in social transformation.

It is also worth mentioning Biaggio's (1995) efforts to establish a fair community. After her post-doctorate, in 1994, when she worked with Clark Power on fair communities, Biaggio started a program for the establishment of a fair community in a public school in Porto Alegre. She introduced the activity by lecturing and conducting discussions on Kohlberg's theory with teachers, coordination and the school principal. However, according to the author herself, these discussions were of little consequence because the teachers missed a great number of meetings: they had to teach elsewhere and, on top of that, there was a school strike at the same time the research started. On the second part of it, two psychologists who worked with Biaggio were invited to discuss with eighth grade students those dilemmas having ecological and non-violence contents. Nevertheless, this activity was also interrupted because there was a change in the school coordination. In spite of all that, the analysis of the discussions led Biaggio to realize that there had been some progress in the concept of justice among the students. In 1996, Biaggio provoked the discussion of ecological themes by psychology students, in an attempt to train them for intervention actions in the area of social-moral cognitions.

Biaggio (1999) also conducted research in order to understand people's attitudes towards the environment. This research involved 108 university students from five different countries: Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Germany and the United States. The students responded to questionnaires containing open and closed questions. After proceeding to a content analysis the author realized that, among other results, the responses from the Portuguese and the Chileans were more elaborate and contained suggestions as how to deal with environmental problems; the Brazilians were more concerned with practical activities; the Germans were more pessimistic than the others. The US students were more tolerant with such issues as the use of pesticides and nuclear power.

Biaggio also focused on world peace. In this sense Biaggio and Sousa (to be published) investigated the attitudes of Brazilian citizens regarding issues

like peace, war and violence. The two authors compared attitudes towards peace, war and violence in five Brazilian cities, in five different geographical regions in the country: Belo Horizonte (Southeast); Niterói (Southeast); Rio de Janeiro (Southeast); João Pessoa (Northeast); Manaus (North); Porto Alegre (South). The investigation focus of this study was violence in three different scopes: worldwide (wars), nationwide (urban violence) and individual violence.

In another transcultural research, Biaggio and Sousa (in press) have also focused on attitudes towards peace among 171 students, from two different school levels, from Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Germany and the United States. The students responded to a questionnaire containing 11 open questions. After proceeding to the content analysis, the authors identified common categories to all five countries whereas others differed from country to country. The results of this research also reveal differences in the school levels of the subjects.

The bulk of Angela Biaggio's work was only briefly sketched here, but even so, it reveals some of the characteristics of her humane and intellectual concerns worth noting. From the social-moral development standpoint, one can perceive an initial approach to the individual social-moral development that is later addressed to the development of social-morality in interpersonal relationships, and there is finally the concern with the development of moral and ethical attitudes, i.e., with the way humankind deals with environmental issues and with world peace.

As far as the dynamics and the structure of the 'moral development' phenomenon goes, one can visualize an initial phase whose uppermost preoccupation is checking out the constitutive elements of morality. Then it proceeds by checking out the intra and extra-psychic factors (family, school, classmates) that could be associated to this development and, last but not least, a preoccupation with the development of activities that will enhance social-moral and ethical development. Although these phases do not necessarily follow each other, there is nevertheless a marked tendency in the early stages of the research to investigate theoretical notions whereas the last ones are more connected with intervention actions.

When one analyzes Angela Biaggio's production, there is a further aspect worth noting: the fact that she is constantly trying to identify which is universal and which is relative in the way people think about morality, peace, violence and the environment. This concern is translated into much of the transcultural research she was engaged in the course of her academic career.

Additionally, one can conclude that although Biaggio's based most of her research on Kohlberg's theories, she also used the constructivist approach in much of her empirical work, articulating it with different theoretical approaches, namely behaviorism. All this activity is an evidence of Biaggio's belief in change, and her will to contribute to the transformation of social reality. It also shows her key role in the process of diffusion of Kohlberg's thought in Brazil. Her work is

also an evidence of the richness of a tool of diagnosis and intervention that she either adapted or constructed along the years, with the aid of her collaborators, as well as the immense wealth of the data contained in the bulk of her research.

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