

The expression of stereotypes of criminals and human rights defenders: A comparative study

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Título: La expresión de los estereotipos de los delincuentes y los defensores de los derechos humanos: Un estudio comparado.

Resumen: Este estudio tiene como objetivo el evaluar en una muestra de participantes españoles y brasileños los estereotipos existentes sobre los delincuentes y los defensores de los derechos humanos, así como en qué medida éstos se ven influidos por el tipo de crimen y las teorías implícitas adoptadas para explicar una conducta delictiva. Aunque los resultados obtenidos indican diferencias en la atribución de estereotipos a delincuentes y defensores de los derechos humanos, no fue posible identificar ningún efecto del tipo de crimen o de las teorías implícitas. Aunque se puede demostrar una cierta homogeneidad en los estereotipos de los delincuentes, en el caso de los defensores de los derechos humanos la representación estereotípica obtenida es más compleja y contradictoria.

Palabras clave: Defensores de los derechos humanos; delincuentes; teorías implícitas; estereotipos.

Abstract: The present study aimed to evaluate, between Brazilian and Spanish participants, the stereotypes of criminals and human rights defenders, and the extent to which this assessment is affected by the type of crime and the implicit theories adopted to explain criminal behavior. Even though the results indicated differences in the attribution of stereotypes to criminals and human rights defenders, it was not possible to identify any effect on the expression of stereotypes from the type of crime or the implicit theories. Although a certain homogeneity in the stereotypes of criminals can be demonstrated, in the case of human rights defenders the stereotypical representation is more complex and contradictory.

Key words: Human rights defenders; criminals; implicit theories; stereotypes.

Introduction

In Brazil, as well as in many Latin American countries, the presence of a set of shared beliefs about security, particularly about public insecurity, becomes more pronounced. Radio and television, daily newspapers, and news weeklies frequently publish - sometimes more than desired - news about crimes that horrify public opinion and lead the popular imagination to the extreme, generating a set of stereotypical beliefs about criminals and their related universe. There is increasingly a shared sense that crime is a routine event in everyday life, and the belief that criminals are spreading to every nook and cranny. Despite the abandonment of Lombrosian theories about the hereditary nature of delinquency and criminality, it is still a common experience to encounter arguments that rely on stereotypical beliefs about the impossibility of rehabilitating criminals. This essentialist interpretation of crime promotes the rapid development of stereotypical beliefs about criminals, and ends up making it more difficult to assess, in an objective and neutral manner, the impact of the phenomenon of crime on everyday life.

Stereotypes can be defined as shared beliefs about the personality traits and other attributes of an individual, and the social category to which he/she belongs. They can be interpreted as the result of applying a categorical judgment that delineates and allocates individual entities as members of a system of categories (Allport, 1962; Fiske, 1998; Krüger, 2004; Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001), for example, ethnic group, gender, or religious affiliation. Stereotypes

arise in different contexts and serve a variety of functions related to the particularities of their emergence, expressing themselves in situations of group conflict, in the justification of differences in power, and in the formation and maintenance of social and collective identity (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). They help simplify the complex social world, allowing the individual to perform a wide range of mental operations, such as categorizing, forming impressions, and predicting the behavior of others. Although they may contain some truth about the attributes of the members of the categorized group, it is debatable whether the inferred characteristics are true (Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995).

From a methodological point of view, the interest of social psychologists concerning stereotypes organizes along two major lines of thought. Initially, interest was limited primarily to the identification, through techniques of self-report, of socially shared beliefs about the members of certain categories or social groups (Brigham, 1971; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Katz & Braly, 1933). Later, with the arrival on scene of the cognitive approach, the primary concern came to reside in the study of how stereotypes influence psychological processes such as social awareness and judgment, as well as different facets of the expression of social behavior (Hamilton, Stroessner, & Driscoll, 1994; Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadronek, 1994; Pereira, 2002). The definition of stereotypes adopted in this study is modeled on this dual tradition, and considers them as socially shared beliefs about certain social categories, whose referents are standards of conduct common to the members of the category, which are based on implicit theories, usually expressed in the form of essences or inferences about psychological traits or physical qualities that are supposedly shared by all individuals who belong to the same category or social group.

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A key feature of the definition outlined above refers to an implicit theory, essentialism, which posits that categorical thinking is activated automatically and unconditionally (Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000), whence derives a set of beliefs that each individual holds about people, human nature, and social groups (Estrada, Oyarzún, & Yzerbyt, 2007; Yzerbyt & Rocher, 2002). In the specific case of the stereotypes of criminals, an implicit theory of a biological nature is noteworthy, and involves the attribution of internal causes, impersonal and unintentional, which refers mainly to psychological traits and is sustained in the belief that people are endowed with essences, and as such, would be immutable and impervious to the passage of time (Keller, 2005).

In its broadest sense, essentialism seeks to explain how people develop their perceptions about themselves, about members of their own group, and about members of other social groups (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005; Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004). The study of essentialism aids in understanding how attitudes towards others are developed based on perceptual similarities and on previously accepted theories and beliefs. One of the central formulations of essentialist theories lies in understanding that social categorization depends as much on the similarities that are seen in appearances as it does on the beliefs expressed by those who make the categorization. Thus, a fundamental principle of essentialism rests on the assumption that members of the same group are perceived as beings who share a deep structure that makes them different from members of other social groups (Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadrón, 1997). Although it is impossible to speak of any essence inherent to the groups, people believe in that essence and adopt certain forms of categorical reasoning that support this assumption. Popular expressions and beliefs deeply rooted in society, such as the impossibility of rehabilitating criminals, reflect the heuristic power of essentialist reasoning. Beyond this strictly negative dimension, justifying and rationalizing, essentialist reasoning presents an intuitive understanding of human nature, for it plays an important role in social learning, favoring the expression of basic cognitive principles that enable the formulation of inferences about human diversity, particularly through the potential to create various human types and different social categories (Haslam, 1998).

In light of the essentialist theories, one may suppose that the perception of social insecurity has consequences whose manifestations spread across different spheres of contemporary society. One of the most striking dimensions of essentialist thinking refers to a certain intolerance towards human rights defenders. This is probably because they defend, indeed even as an official duty, those whom society, due to the effect of essentialist reasoning, tends to regard as irretrievable and potentially dangerous to life in the community. In an environment of intolerance towards crime, it can be assumed that the stereotypes about criminals are intensified and ultimately provide, in parallel, a manifestation of a constellation of axiologically negative beliefs about people mili-

tantly engaged in advocacy groups supporting human rights, to the precise extent that they are perceived as supportive of criminals, and ultimately, in connivance with their crimes.

In this context, the central objective of this research was to evaluate the socially shared contents of stereotypes of criminals and human rights defenders in two distinct cultures, Brazil and Spain, since these two countries have peculiarities in terms of both the actual situation of violence and the public and media exposure of crimes. The context in relation to violent crime is quite different between Brazil and Spain. In Brazil, the homicide rate is 25.8 per hundred thousand, while in Spain it is 0.9 per hundred thousand, which puts Brazil in sixth place in homicide ranking, while Spain ranks only 73rd, in an index composed of 91 countries (Waiselfisz, 2010). Additionally, Brazil has a homicide rate of about 3.9 women for every hundred thousand women, well above the international and the Spanish average, which are around 0.5 homicides per hundred thousand women. Although there are no official statistics for Brazil, according to the Violence Center at the University of São Paulo, a high percentage of crimes committed against women can be classified as gender violence. In Spain's case, in 2010, there were 73 victims of gender violence accounted for (Informe Ministerio de Sanidad, 2010), i.e. about 0.35 per hundred thousand of the total female population over 14 years of age. In summary, significant differences exist between these two countries with regard to both homicidal violence and gender violence. Moreover, these differences in relation to violent crime are reflected in the mass media of both countries unevenly. In Spain, although both crimes for economic reasons and gender violence crimes are relatively less frequent than in Brazil, gender crimes receive highlighted coverage in the mass media. In Brazil, by contrast, gender violence crimes, though not unusual, do not receive as much attention as economically motivated crimes, burglaries, robberies, or kidnappings.

A fundamental assumption governing this work is that people usually think about the vicissitudes of their lives and those of others (Malle, 1999; 2006), it being natural to postulate that they reflect on the causes, motives, and reasons for the most diverse individual and social phenomena, including criminal behavior. Thus, besides the interest in identifying the influence of the type of crime on the judgment that is made about the offender, this study sought to additionally assess the impact of two implicit theories, one biological in nature and another of a sociological bent, on the expression of stereotypical beliefs about criminals.

In short, since this study sought to conduct a comparative investigation about the stereotypes of criminals and human rights defenders in two countries, the hypotheses tested were stated as follows: first, given the intensification of the perception of public insecurity, due to the constant mass media coverage of violent crimes, including crimes against children, it is expected that (H1a) the number of stereotypical traits attributed to criminals is higher in Brazil than in Spain; (H1b) the number of negative stereotypes about crim-

inals is higher in Brazil than in Spain; and (H1c) attribution of guilt to the alleged perpetrator of the crime is more intense in Brazil than in Spain. Due to the impact of mass media, it will be possible to identify (H2) differences in the characteristics of the expression of stereotypes, with the Spanish taking a more essentialist interpretation for gender violence crimes, while the Brazilian participants will tend to stereotype economically motivated crimes in a more essentialized manner. Depending on the type of implicit theory activated, it is expected that (H3) the participants submitted to priming of the biological explanation have a more negative perception of the offenders, regardless of country or type of crime. Given the sense of public insecurity in Brazil, regarding the evaluation of the social category of human rights defenders, (H4a) a greater number of stereotypes about human rights defenders will be identified in Brazil than in Spain; (H4b) a greater number of negative stereotypes about human rights defenders will be observed in Brazil than in Spain; and (H4c) due to the expectation of a more negative general perception about human rights defenders, the Brazilian participants will view a mistrial less favorably than will the Spanish.

Method

Testing of the hypotheses was conducted by implementing an experiment using a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design. The first dimension refers to the countries, Brazil and Spain; the second, to the type of crime, whether of gender violence or motivated by economic reasons; the third, to the impact of implicit biological or social theories.

Participants

In keeping with the research design, the sample was composed according to the distribution presented in table 1:

Table 1. Frequency of participants by experimental condition

Country	Type of crime	Type of Priming	N
Spain	Gender violence crime	Biological	22
Spain	Gender violence crime	Social	18
Spain	Economic motivation	Biological	17
Spain	Economic motivation	Social	16
Brazil	Gender violence crime	Biological	20
Brazil	Gender violence crime	Social	29
Brazil	Economic motivation	Biological	21
Brazil	Economic motivation	Social	20

Procedures

Those who agreed to participate in the research responded to an online questionnaire that evaluated stereotypical beliefs. Before the evaluation, participants read one of the descriptions of the crime:

Gender violence crime

"Carlos was sentenced to prison after being accused of murdering his wife with premeditation. Although he de-

clared his innocence, the jury accepted the prosecutor's arguments that he had killed his wife while she was asleep. The defense argued that the defendant was not at home at the time of the crime, but did not present any evidence that could refute the argument presented by the prosecution that the accused had tried unsuccessfully to kill his partner on two other occasions."

Crime motivated by economic reasons

"Carlos was sentenced to prison after being accused of committing a bank robbery during which a customer was killed. Although he declared his innocence, the jurors accepted the prosecutor's arguments that the defendant fired a gun and that the bullet that struck the victim came from the defendant's gun. The defense argued that the accused did not fire the gun, but did not provide any evidence that could refute the argument presented by the prosecution that the accused had committed two other robberies, in which two other people had died. "

Activation of primings

After reading the information about the crime, participants allocated to the group for activation of biological essentialist theories were presented with another paragraph, in which the following explanation was given for the events previously listed:

"In the final stage of the trial, both the defense attorney and the prosecutor opined that regardless of individual motivations, criminals have a biological tendency that inclines them to commit crimes, an explanation that, for both lawyers, finds support in the latest research in the field of forensic psychiatry, criminal psychology, and biological anthropology."

In the priming condition where the implicit theory of a social nature was activated, participants read the following text:

"In the final stage of the trial both the defense attorney and the prosecutor opined that regardless of individual motivations, criminals endure a tremendous influence from the social environment in which they live, which inclines them to commit crimes, an explanation that, for both lawyers, finds support in the latest research in the field of forensic psychiatry, criminal psychology, and biological anthropology."

Presentation of the category of human rights defenders

Next, and before answering questions about social categories, all participants read a new piece of information in which elements related to human rights defenders were introduced:

"During the sentencing, a representative of a rights defense group who was present at the trial charged that the trial was not fair, that the defense did not have access to

all the documents of the case, and that the result should be overturned and a new trial held, ensuring the defense and the accused open access to the entire contents of the case."

Measurement of dependent variables

After reading this information, participants evaluated the two social groups subject to judgment.

Evaluation of the criminals and human rights defenders

The main process for evaluation of the criminals was a checklist task, in which participants had to indicate whether they agreed or not with the application of a series of adjectives to the two categories being judged. In short, four variables were obtained to gauge the direct measures of stereotyping: the number of negative stereotypes applied to criminals and human rights defenders, and the number of positive stereotypes applied to criminals and human rights defenders.

Another measure, the perception of guilt, an indirect measure of stereotyping, was obtained from the participant's response to the following question: "In your opinion, what is the degree of culpability of the accused?"

For an indirect evaluation of the stereotypes about human rights defenders, participants answered a new question: "In your opinion, is the human rights defender correct in requesting the annulment of the court's decision?"

Results

The initial hypothesis of the study was that the increased perception of public insecurity in Brazil would favor the expression of stereotypes, particularly negative ones, about criminals more intensely in Brazil than in Spain.

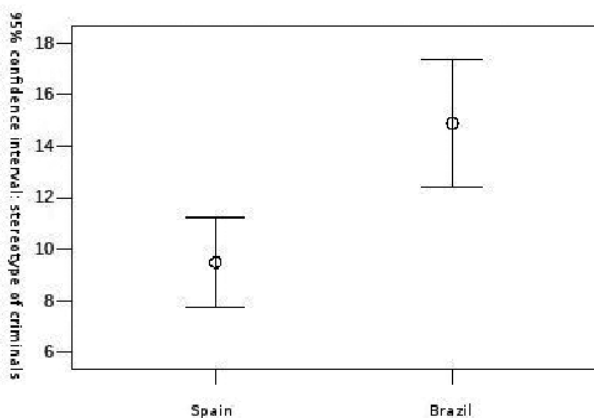


Figure 1. Graph of the 95% confidence interval for total stereotypes attributed to criminals by Spaniards and Brazilians.

The chart shown in Figure 1 depicts the 95% confidence interval for the number of traits attributed to criminals by Brazilian and Spanish participants. As is seen, there was no

overlap identified for the values in the confidence interval, which indicates a difference in the evaluation of stereotypes between the participants from the two countries. The Brazilians attributed many more stereotypes ($M = 14.89$, $SD = 12.49$), at the same time they presented a more variable distribution of this assignment, while the Spaniards attributed fewer stereotypes and presented a somewhat less variable distribution ($M = 9.49$, $SD = 6.99$).

For an additional assessment of the differences in judgments, a factorial ANOVA was conducted, comparing the number of stereotypical traits attributed to criminals among the participants of the two countries. The results confirm the statistical differences between countries ($F_{(1,154)} = 9.67$, $p < .05$), which suggests that the Brazilian participants applied more stereotypes to criminals than did the Spaniards.

These measurements, however, refer to the total number of stereotypes, hence the necessity to conduct further analysis that could identify possible differences in the assessment of positive and negative adjectives. As seen in the chart shown in Figure 2, in both countries negative stereotypes prevailed.

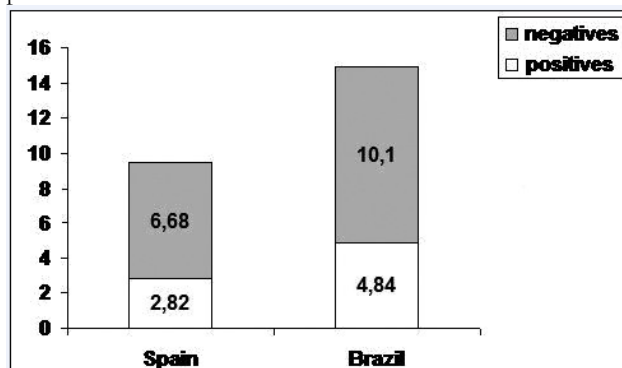


Figure 2. Proportion of positive and negative stereotypes attributed to criminals by Spaniards and Brazilians.

Additional comparative analyses conducted using *t*-tests left no doubt that Brazilians attributed more stereotyped traits to criminals, both in the case of negative adjectives ($t_{(160)} = 3.42$, $p < .001$), and in the attribution of positive ones ($t_{(153)} = 2.23$, $p < .05$).

This initial assessment can be complemented by an indirect assessment measure, the assignment of culpability to the alleged offender. Comparison of the averages for Brazilians ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.91$) and Spaniards ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.60$) indicates that although the means are different, they are not sufficiently disparate to produce a statistically significant difference ($F_{(1,154)} = 0.65$, $p = .420$), suggesting a similarity in the assessment of guilt between the two countries' participants.

Considering the initial results, we can state that hypotheses (H1a) and (H1b) were confirmed, which did not occur in the case of the indirect measure of stereotyping (H1c), although the values turned out to be in the direction postulated.

Moreover, it is pertinent to ask which of the stereotypical representations are most adopted in the two countries.

Table 2 highlights the negative stereotypes about criminals. The criterion for inclusion of a stereotype in the table was that at least half of the participants in one or both countries agreed with the application of the adjective to that category.

Table 2. Adjectives most often applied to criminals, by country.

Stereotypes	Spain (n = 63)		Brazil (n = 99)		p
	Observed (expected)	%	Observed (expected)	%	
Aggressive	38 (42.0)	60.3	70 (66.0)	70.7	.171
Impulsive	37 (40.1)	58.7	66 (62.9)	66.7	.306
Vindictive	28 (39.3)	44.4	73 (61.7)	73.7	.001
Cruel	32 (37.3)	50.8	64 (58.7)	64.6	.080
Hotheaded	24 (32.3)	38.1	59 (50.7)	59.6	.008
Treacherous	20 (29.6)	31.7	56 (46.4)	56.6	.002
Cowardly	33 (26.8)	52.4	36 (42.4)	36.4	.044

The results suggest that the stereotypical representation of criminals among the Spanish participants is composed of four traits - aggressive, impulsive, cruel, and cowardly - while Brazilians perceive criminals as aggressive, impulsive, vindictive, cruel, treacherous, and hotheaded. It is important to consider that no significant differences were identified in the assessment of the two countries' participants for the adjectives aggressive ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.87, p = .171$) and impulsive ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.05, p = .306$). In contrast, the adjective cowardly ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.04, p = .044$) was adopted in the majority only by the Spanish participants, while the characteristics vindictive ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 14.1, p < .001$), cruel ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 3.06, p = .080$), hotheaded ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 7.12, p = .008$), and treacherous ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.52, p = .002$) were cited in the majority only by the Brazilian participants.

The second research hypothesis posited that it would be possible to identify a difference in the characteristics of stereotyping between the two countries, with Spanish participants tending to adopt a more stereotypical interpretation for gender violence crimes, while the Brazilians would tend to adopt a more stereotypical judgment when the crime was characterized as committed for economic reasons. The third hypothesis posited that regardless of the country and type of crime, priming of the biological explanation would provoke an increase in the number of negative stereotypes, as well as intensification of the assignment of guilt.

To test hypotheses 2 and 3, different ANOVAS were conducted with the variables country, type of crime, and explanatory theory as independent variables, and the two measures previously assessed, the amount of negative stereotyping and the assignment of guilt to the criminals, as dependent variables. The results of these can be seen in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of the number of negative stereotypes attributed to criminals, by country, implicit theory, and type of crime.

Type of crime	Spain		Brazil	
	Biological M (SD)	Social M (SD)	Biological M (SD)	Social M (SD)
Gender violence	6.91 (4.72)	6.83 (4.59)	12.24 (8.00)	9.52 (6.80)
Economic	3.86 (2.91)	7.44 (5.31)	8.76 (6.66)	9.25 (6.92)

In the case of the number of negative stereotypes, the absence of statistical interaction between variables was normative, given that statistically significant differences were not obtained between the country and type of crime ($F_{(1,154)} = .089, p = .766$), between the country and implicit theory ($F_{(1,154)} = 1.734, p = .190$), and among country, type of crime, and implicit theory ($F_{(2,154)} = .010, p = .919$).

Table 4 shows the results for the assignment of guilt to the alleged offender. As noted earlier, there were no differences found for country. Additionally, no interactions were identified between the variables country and type of crime, ($F_{(1,162)} = .055, p = .814$), country and implicit theory ($F_{(1,154)} = .235, p = .628$), and among country, type of crime, and implicit theory ($F_{(2,154)} = .743, p = .390$).

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation of assigning guilt to the offender, by country, implicit theory, and type of crime.

Type of crime	Spain		Brazil	
	Biological M (SD)	Social M (SD)	Biological M (SD)	Social M (SD)
Gender violence	3.91 (1.51)	4.11 (1.60)	4.21 (1.72)	4.17 (2.16)
Economic	4.43 (1.81)	3.75 (1.73)	4.33 (2.01)	4.50 (1.82)

In short, the absence of any interaction, whether in the test on the number of negative stereotypes or on the degree of guilt, allowed us to reject hypotheses 2 and 3, which supports the interpretation that the results of the first hypothesis are independent of the type of crime or the implicit theory.

The fourth hypothesis asserted that the intensified sense of public insecurity would lead to a greater number of stereotypes about the human rights defenders in Brazil than in Spain, and a less negative evaluation in Spain than in Brazil. The results for the first measure, the number of stereotypes attributed to human rights defenders can be seen in the graph shown in Figure 3, and immediately suggests, the lack of significant difference in the number of stereotypes of human rights defenders between the two countries' participants.

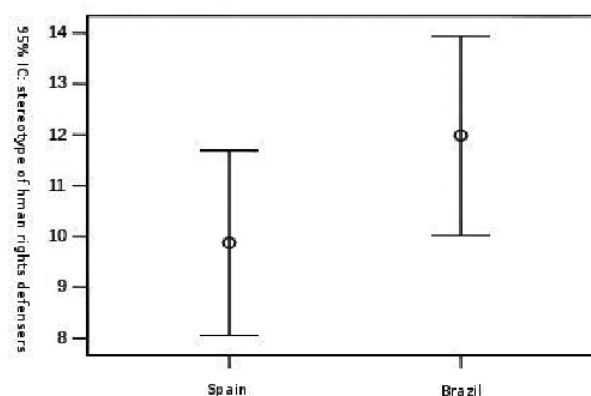


Figure 3. Graph of the 95% confidence interval total stereotypes attributed to human rights defenders by Spaniards and Brazilians.

Comparison of the averages for positive stereotypes of human rights defenders for Brazilians ($M = 5.11$; $SD = 2.19$) and Spaniards ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.64$) indicates no significant difference ($F_{(1, 154)} = 2.65$, $p = .105$). However, the measure of negative stereotypes about human rights defenders identified a marginal statistical difference between the two countries ($F_{(1, 154)} = 3.85$, $p = .05$), although it was not possible to identify any other potential interaction between country and type of crime ($F_{(1, 162)} = 0.02$, $p = .88$), between country and implicit theory ($F_{(1, 162)} = 0.22$, $p = .89$), and between country, type of crime and implicit theory ($F_{(2, 162)} = 0.48$, $p = .49$).

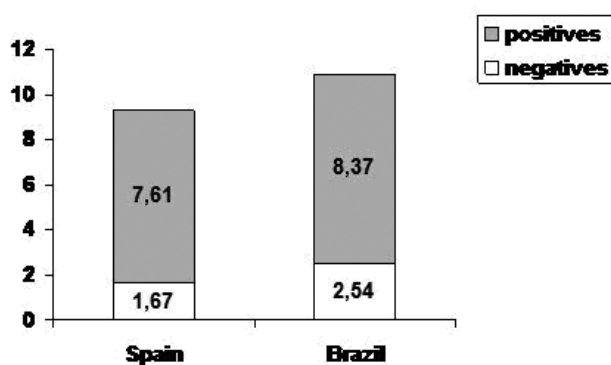


Figure 4. Proportion of positive and negative stereotypes attributed to human rights defenders by Spaniards and Brazilians.

In evaluating the request for a mistrial, main effects were not identified for country ($F_{(1, 162)} = 0.07$, $p = .779$). Additionally, no interactions between variables were identified, whether in the case of country and type of crime ($F_{(1, 162)} = 0.098$, $p = .754$), country and implicit theory ($F_{(1, 162)} = 0.01$, $p = .913$), and country, type of crime, and implicit theory ($F_{(2, 162)} = .004$, $p = .952$). In short, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed in the case of negative stereotypes, which compels a recognition that differences exist in the assessment of human rights defenders between the Brazilian and the Spanish participants, in the direction postulated by hypothesis (4b), a result that is independent of both the type crime and the implicit theory adopted in both priming conditions. With regard to hypotheses (4a) and (4c), although no statistically significant differences were identified, it is important to note that the values seen were compatible with the direction of the postulated hypotheses.

What are the stereotypical representations about human rights defenders more frequently used in the two countries? Table 5 allows a comparison among the main stereotypes, having adopted an inclusion criterion similar to that used for the negative stereotypes of criminals. It can be noted, additionally, that this procedure only identified the presence of positive stereotypic traits.

The results in Table 5 suggest that the Spanish participants' stereotypical representation of about human rights defenders was composed of two features, idealistic and humanitarian, while for the Brazilians they were perceived as

humanitarian, persuasive, idealistic, persistent, and intelligent. No significant differences were detected between the countries in the evaluation of the traits humanitarian ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.27$, $p = .260$) and idealistic ($\chi^2_{(1)} = .04$, $p = .84$). The traits persuasive ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 9.74$, $p = .002$), intelligent ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 8.29$, $p = .004$), and persistent ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 14.64$, $p < .001$) were chosen in the majority exclusively by the Brazilian participants.

Table 5. Values obtained and expected relative to positive stereotypes attributed to defenders of human rights in the two countries

Stereotypes	Spain ($n=63$)		Brazil ($n=99$)		p
	Observed (expected)	%	Observed (expected)	%	
Humanitarian	49 (45.9)	77.8	69 (72.1)	69.7	.260
Persuasive	27 (36.6)	42.9	67 (57.4)	67.7	.002
Idealistic	34 (34.6)	54.0	55 (54.4)	55.6	.843
Intelligent	18 (26.8)	28.6	51 (42.2)	51.5	.004
Persistent	14 (25.7)	22.2	52 (40.3)	52.5	<.001

Discussion

The results are consistent with the hypothesis that in Brazil negative stereotypes about criminals are more intense than in Spain, which is reinforced by evidence that the type of crime or theory adopted in explaining the crime are insufficient to modify this general tendency. It is important to note, however, that this result holds only when a procedure for direct measurement of stereotype content, the checklist, was considered. An indirect measurement, attribution of guilt for the criminal act, adopted, for example, in the classic study by Bodenhausen (1980), was unable to demonstrate any influence of country on the expression of stereotypes. This result seems to align with the critical admonition made by Olson (2009) that indirect measurement procedures can not always be indicated as the most appropriate for research of stereotyping, and that direct measurements obtained using self-reporting strategies can continue to be used by researchers.

Regarding the content of stereotypes, it seems questionable to assume that the distinction between the dimensions competence vs. warmth, traditionally adopted for the study of racial, ethnic, or gender stereotypes, can be applied to this case (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Although there is some homogeneity in the evaluation of the stereotypes (aggressive, impulsive, and cruel), certain differences in the content of the stereotypical beliefs were glaring. One difference applies in the analysis of these three common adjectives; two of them, aggression and impulsivity suggests a trend toward dehumanization of the traits of criminals (Betancour, Rodríguez, Quiles, & Rodríguez, 2005; Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee, & Bastian, 2005). Humans and animals share similar attributes, for both may act aggressively and impulsively, as opposed to cruelty, which involves assigning a uniquely human trait, especially when one considers the expression 'of coldly calculated cruelty,' commonly used to describe certain types crimes.

With regard to differences in judgment between the two countries, some discrepancies were identified. Cowardice, for example, was a characteristic attributed solely by the Spaniards. Could this have resulted from the increased visibility of gender violence crime in the Spanish mass media, it being known that these crimes are usually committed by men, and almost always have females as victims? And would the absence of this trait among Brazilian participants have been the result of a certain glamorization of crime, which is echoed in some sectors of Brazilian society? The adjectives vindictive, treacherous, and hotheaded were used predominantly by the Brazilians. With the exception of the adjective hotheaded, which involves the dimension of automatism or even lack of control, the other two terms presuppose some control over one's own actions. Revenge is usually planned, while treachery is ruminated and reflected. Does this result indicate that in Brazilian society crime may be perceived as a means of survival or, more precisely, the only alternative perceived as viable for certain population groups?

Although the present study aimed to examine the differences in the expression of stereotypes between Brazilians and Spaniards, it was designed as experimental research to assess the impact of a specific type of priming, the mindset, i.e. preparation through the development of mental habits (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000), on the tasks of judging criminals and human rights defenders. The results were plainly incompatible with those expected, because neither the type of crime nor the implicit theory adopted to explain the crime had any effect on the societal judgment. Given the various studies that show the effects of priming (Bussche, Noortgate, & Reynvoet, 2009; Dasgupta, 2009), in particular the sub- and supraliminal semantic primings, it seems reasonable to assume that the lack of effect reported here is a result of inherent problems in the experimental design adopted for the conduct of this investigation. Perhaps the pure and simple reading of a few paragraphs is not sufficient to bring about the manifestation of a mental state intense enough to elicit changes in judgment consistent with the hypotheses postulated.

Analysis of the fourth hypothesis of the study revealed that on the one hand, a tendency was identified for the Brazilian participants to choose more negative traits to judge human rights defenders than for the Spaniards. A further analysis showed that Brazilians and Spaniards differ in regard to the representation of positive traits. Possibly, this result reflects the inherent complexity of the reputation of human rights defenders in Brazil, for even though they are perceived in some contexts as defenders of outlaws, it is recognized, especially when reports from organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch are released, that prison conditions and human rights abuses remain a problem whose solution seems distant, and that without the intervention of these professionals the situation would possibly be more critical than it is currently, which is confirmed by attributing traits such as persistence, intelligence, and persuasiveness to human rights defenders in Brazil.

Conclusions

The main hypothesis of this comparative work was that significant differences would be found in the judgment of criminal stereotypes between Brazilian and Spanish participants. This hypothesis reflects the belief concerning the general impression among the Brazilian population that public safety is one of the main challenges to be faced by Brazilian society in the coming years. The evidence found corroborated this hypothesis, especially when procedures were adopted for direct measurement of the contents of stereotypes. Regarding stereotypical traits applicable to criminals, they were plainly negative, even though they were distributed differently between the two countries.

The stereotypes of human rights defenders were mostly positive and relatively similar in both contexts, although a more negative assessment among the Brazilian participants was detected in the evaluation of negative traits. With regard to content, however, the assessment by the Brazilian participants was, paradoxically, more generous than that by the Spaniards. These results make it clear that the perception of human rights defenders is still relatively heterogeneous, particularly in the Brazilian case. This result, however, can be interpreted as worrisome, because while on one hand it was possible to identify a predominantly positive assessment of the content, on the other hand, it gave indications that the perception of human rights defenders is as close to the notion of defenders of outlaws as to that of defenders of the rights of any and all human beings.

A second dimension of the study reported here refers to the process of stereotyping. Priming can be interpreted as an attempt to simulate some effects of automatic mechanisms. These effects act as a sort of preparation or anticipation, whose consequences are manifested mainly as a tendency to adjust the judgment to the parameters of what is defined as automatic. Stereotyping, being affected by automatism, can be considered as an exceptional setting for the study of the effects of priming. This study sought to evaluate the effect of a specific type of priming on social judgment, in particular on the evaluation of criminals and, indirectly, human rights defenders. Experimentally designed, the study sought to activate two types of priming, one for the type of crime, either of gender violence or motivated on economic bases, and another for the type of explanatory theory about the motivations of the crime, either a biological theory or a social theory. The results, however, did not show any influence of priming.

Given the inconsistency of the results obtained here with the literature on automatism and control in the expression of stereotypes, further research on the topic must be conducted. Since the priming effect was not manifested as expected, it seems conceivable to modify the procedures for activating priming. Activation of verbal content, while effective in some contexts, may not be sufficient to capture all

the dimensions inherent in the manifestation of stereotypes, particularly in the case of stereotypes more nuanced by an affectively negative dimension (Pereira, Martins, Cupertino, & Ferrera, 2002). With the new capabilities offered by information technology for conducting online surveys, it is becoming presently viable to draw up research designs in which priming can be activated by the presentation of mul-

timedia content. This new direction in research will not only contribute to an increase in the ecological validity of new experimental studies in this area of research, but will also allow potentially valid effects, while insignificant in view of the type of activation obtained by the procedures adopted in this research, to ultimately find expression.

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