



## The Intersection of Ideology, Subjectivity, and Social Psychology: A Psychoanalytic Approach

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of ideology in social psychology and psychoanalysis by drawing on the theoretical approaches of key figures such as Martín-Baró, Moscovici, Lacan, and Žižek. The research highlights how ideology functions as a structure influencing human subjectivity and actions, particularly through the mechanism of fantasy as articulated in Lacanian theory. Ideology is not only seen as an explicit system of beliefs but also as an unconscious process that shapes identification and social interaction. Through in-depth analysis, this study demonstrates that fantasy plays a crucial role in reproducing ideological structures, thereby enabling the persistence of the existing social order. The study also expands our understanding of how gender and political ideologies are produced and reproduced in everyday life. By integrating psychoanalytic concepts and ideological analysis, this research offers a new perspective on understanding human subjectivity within a social context and proposes a more comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between social psychology and ideology. These findings are expected to contribute significantly to the existing literature and encourage further research in this field.

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### INTRODUCTION

In psychological studies, the role of ideology as an element shaping social and individual behavior is often overlooked or not given primary focus. Social psychology, in particular, faces challenges in examining the complex relationship between ideology and psychological phenomena, which are influenced by social and cultural realities. The fundamental question that underpins this research is: How does ideology function as a framework within social psychology and psychoanalysis?

Social psychology is fundamentally a discipline that employs scientific methods to understand and explain how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the presence of others, whether real, imagined, or implied (Allport, 1985). However, this traditional approach often overlooks how an individual's interpretation of social reality is influenced by broader ideologies. According to Ibáñez (2004), social phenomena are historical realities that are constantly changing, and the knowledge produced about these realities is provisional and historically

contingent. Thus, caution is necessary when granting definitive truth status to established knowledge.

Braunstein (1978) argues that psychology functions as an ideological apparatus within the state, where it plays a role in concealing and transforming the relationship between ideological subjects and the social processes they support. This perspective is relevant in analyzing how social psychology operates not only as a scientific discipline but also as a tool used to maintain the existing social order. In this context, psychology offers technical instruments and ideological rationalizations to meet social demands arising from needs in the organization of production (Porras Velásquez, 2014, 2016a, 2017b). This view aligns with Žižek's (2008) assertion that "ideology works when it is invisible," that is, when it becomes part of ourselves and is perceived as something natural.

Moscovici (1994) asserts that the primary object of social psychology is phenomena related to ideology and communication, which are structured according to their genesis, structure, and function. In this regard, ideology is seen as a system of social representations collectively constructed through daily interactions and functions to

shape social reality. This indicates that social representations not only shape individual perceptions but also influence social interactions at various levels, both among individuals and between groups (Porras Velásquez, 2010a, 2015; Salamanca Quiñones & Porras Velásquez, 2019, 2023).

Martín-Baró (1987) further proposes that social psychology should be understood as the scientific study of action as ideological understanding, where social interaction is viewed as an exchange of signs, symbols, emotions, feelings, and cognitions. This perspective underscores the importance of understanding how social and personal actions are shaped by broader social structures and how these actions reflect the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, between knowledge and evaluation, which are not always consciously recognized (Porras Velásquez, 2012, 2018, 2023a).

Drawing on these perspectives, this research aims to analyze the role of ideology in social psychology and psychoanalysis, with a focus on how ideology shapes subjects and social interactions. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering a new perspective on understanding how ideology operates within the context of social psychology, particularly through the theoretical lenses provided by Braunstein, Moscovici, Martín-Baró, and Zizek.

## Social psychology

Defining social psychology is not straightforward due to the complexity and breadth of the field. Since its inception, social psychology has evolved as a multidimensional discipline, integrating various theoretical and methodological perspectives to understand the interaction between individuals and society. There is no single definition that can fully capture the essence of social psychology, as the discipline continues to evolve alongside social and cultural changes.

Gordon Allport, a pioneer in social psychology in the United States, offered one of the most influential definitions. According to Allport (1985), social psychology is a scientific discipline that uses scientific methods to understand and explain how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the presence of others, whether real, imagined, or implied. This definition highlights the importance of social influence in shaping individual behavior and emphasizes the scientific approach in the study of social psychology. Allport also emphasized that social interaction affects not only observable behavior but also internal processes such as thoughts and emotions.

However, Allport's definition has been criticized for not sufficiently addressing the complexity of individual interpretations of social reality. Franzoi (2007) underscores that social psychology deals not only with the direct influence of others but also with how individuals interpret social situations. These interpretations, often influenced by broader social and cultural contexts, play a crucial role in shaping individual behavior. Franzoi argues that understanding how individuals make sense of social situations is essential for comprehensively understanding social behavior.

Furthermore, this view is supported by Ibáñez (2004), who adds that social psychology is a discipline that emphasizes the social determination and constitution of psychological phenomena. In this regard, Ibáñez highlights that social phenomena are not static but rather a constantly changing historical reality. Therefore, the knowledge generated by social psychology should be seen as provisional and contextual, always tied to specific historical and social

conditions. Ibáñez also cautions that granting definitive truth status to social psychological knowledge risks overlooking how this knowledge is often influenced by underlying ideological interests.

Ibáñez's perspective also aligns with broader critiques of social psychology voiced by critical theorists. For instance, Gergen (1973) posits that social psychology must be more critical of how social science can serve as a means to maintain the ideological status quo. In this view, social psychology functions not only as a tool to understand the social world but also as a way to question the ideological assumptions underlying our worldview.

The influence of ideology in social psychology is also acknowledged by other scholars such as Moscovici (1984), who emphasizes the importance of social representations in shaping how individuals and groups perceive social reality. Moscovici argues that social representations not only reflect existing worldviews but also function to construct and maintain dominant ideologies within society.

Therefore, understanding social psychology requires awareness of how ideology operates in shaping individuals' perceptions and interpretations of the social world. Ideology influences not only how we behave in social contexts but also how we understand and interpret our experiences in the world. Thus, the study of social psychology must always consider the ideological dynamics underlying social interactions and how these influence broader psychological phenomena.

Traditional social psychology has often been considered a sub-discipline of psychology focused on studying individual behavior in social contexts. In this context, social psychology is viewed as a branch of science that seeks to examine how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the presence of others, whether real or imagined. However, this approach has evolved over time, particularly with the emergence of more contemporary views on the role of social factors in shaping individual and collective identities.

Moscovici (1994) made a significant contribution to the redefinition of social psychology as a broader perspective. He argued that social psychology is not merely the study of individuals in social contexts but rather a way of viewing social processes that assumes the individual and collective dimensions of social phenomena are not only difficult to separate but also constitutive parts of social reality itself. This perspective emphasizes that the relationship between individuals and society is mutually constitutive, where individual actions are influenced by social structures, and in turn, social structures are shaped through collective individual actions.

According to Martín-Baró (1987), social psychology has the task of understanding human behavior within the context of the meaning and values assigned by society. In this sense, human behavior cannot be separated from the social context in which it occurs. Martín-Baró argues that social psychology examines the moments when social aspects become part of personal experience and how these personal experiences subsequently influence and are influenced by the broader social context. This approach is particularly relevant in the analysis of ideology, as ideology often functions as an unconscious mechanism that guides social interaction and shapes individual identity.

Moscovici (1994) also highlighted that social psychology is "the science of conflict between the individual and society." This conflict arises from the tension between the individual's need to maintain personal identity and societal pressure to conform to collective norms. Moscovici further

noted that the primary object of social psychology is phenomena related to ideology and communication. In his view, ideology is a system of social representations collectively constructed through everyday interactions. These representations not only reflect social reality but also shape it in ways that reinforce the dominant worldview of the group.

Moscovici's emphasis on social representations provides a strong foundation for understanding how social groups construct and maintain their worldviews through ideological mechanisms. These social representations play a crucial role in facilitating communication among group members while maintaining social cohesion. In this context, social psychology studies not only how individuals think about the social world but also how these thoughts are shaped by and contribute to existing ideological systems.

Additionally, Martín-Baró (1987) expands this understanding by defining social psychology as the scientific study of action as ideological understanding. He emphasizes that social interaction must be understood as a process of exchanging signs, symbols, emotions, feelings, and cognitions that occur within an ideological context. This perspective underscores the importance of understanding how social and personal actions are shaped by broader social structures. In this sense, human action is always the result of a complex interaction between individual subjectivity and social objectivity.

This concept also reflects the views of Porras Velásquez (2012, 2018, 2023a), who emphasizes the importance of understanding the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, as well as between knowledge and judgment, which are often unconscious to individuals. In this context, social psychology serves as a tool to uncover how ideology operates behind the scenes, shaping perceptions and determining actions without the conscious awareness of the individuals involved.

Drawing on these various perspectives, this paper aims to analyze the role of ideology in social psychology, with a particular focus on how ideology shapes subjects and social interactions. This article contributes to the existing literature by offering a new perspective on understanding how ideology operates within the context of social psychology, especially through the theoretical lens provided by Allport, Ibáñez, Moscovici, and Martín-Baró. This approach not only enriches our understanding of social psychology but also broadens our insight into how ideology influences every aspect of social life.

### What do we understand by ideologies?

Ideology is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and interpreted in various ways by different scholars. According to Van Dijk (2003), ideologies are fundamental systems of social cognition composed of shared mental representations specific to a group, inscribed within the "general beliefs (knowledge, opinions, values, criteria of truth, etc.) of entire societies or cultures" (p. 92). In this perspective, the primary function of ideology within social cognition is to organize mental representations, linking the social with the personal, and connecting cognitive elements with social practices. This conceptualization underscores the idea that mental models serve as the subjective and particular systems through which individuals perceive and represent the realities surrounding them.

Similarly, Franzoi (2007) views ideology as a set of beliefs and values held by members of a social group, which explains their culture both to themselves and to other

groups. These beliefs and values produce a psychological reality that promotes a particular way of life within the culture. Franzoi's perspective suggests that, much like individuals have a self-concept that guides their behavior, societies have ideologies that guide collective behavior. Ideology, therefore, functions as a theory that a social group has about itself, shaping the norms and practices of that group.

Martín-Baró (1987) offers a broader analysis by differentiating between two fundamental conceptions of ideology: the functionalist and the Marxist. The functionalist conception views ideology as a coherent set of ideas and values that guide and direct the actions of a given society, thereby fulfilling a normative function concerning the actions of its members. On the other hand, the Marxist conception, with roots in Machiavelli and Hegel, sees ideology as a false consciousness that presents an image of reality that does not correspond to the truth, but rather conceals and justifies the interests of the dominant social class (Porras Velásquez, 2017, 2017a, 2022).

Expanding on the Marxist perspective, Althusser (1973) introduces the idea of ideology as a system or structure imposed on individuals, operating through them, but not configured by them. Ideology, in this sense, is an acting totality without a subject, as individuals act within ideology to the extent that they are acted upon. Althusser argues that "men live their actions commonly referred to by classical tradition as freedom and 'conscience' in ideology through and by ideology" (p. 193). This perspective highlights that ideology is not an external or additional element to action; rather, it is intrinsic to human action, as it constitutes the reference to a reality that is imbued with meaning through certain social interests.

Althusser's (1973) approach is significant because it conceives ideology as an essential element of human action, one that is constituted by reference to a reality shaped by social interests. Ideology, therefore, can be understood both as a product of the totality of social interests that generate it and as something that gives meaning to personal action, functioning as cognitive and evaluative schemes for individuals (Porras Velásquez, 2024a).

In this framework, Althusser (1973) posits that every social formation can be analytically divided into three levels: the economic, political, and ideological. Each level operates as a structure with concrete materiality, independent of the subjectivity of the individuals participating in it and their historical configurations. These levels are not "real" in an ontological sense, but rather theoretical constructions that conceptualize the different types of relationships that individuals establish in all historical societies. At the economic level, individuals are part of a structure that places them in relations of production; at the political level, they participate in a structure that places them in class relations (Porras Velásquez & Parra D'aleman, 2018, 2018b). At the ideological level, however, individuals establish a symbolic relationship as they participate, either voluntarily or involuntarily, in a set of representations about the world, nature, and social order. This ideological level establishes a hermeneutic relationship between individuals, wherein the representations they adhere to serve to give meaning to their economic, political, and social practices.

What characterizes ideologies, considering their practical function, is that they are structures unconsciously assimilated by individuals and constantly reproduced in daily praxis. As such, ideologies do not have a cognitive function similar to science, but rather a practical-social function, making them irreplaceable. An ideological

apparatus functions independently of the "consciousness" of the individuals linked to it and has the power to configure their subjectivity (Porras Velásquez, 2020, 2022a, 2023c).

This detailed exploration of ideology, particularly through the lenses of Van Dijk, Franzoi, Martín-Baró, and Althusser, provides a robust framework for analyzing the role of ideology in social psychology and psychoanalysis. It also emphasizes the critical need to understand how these theoretical perspectives can be applied to real-world social phenomena, offering new insights into how ideology shapes both individual and collective behavior.

### Psychoanalysis and ideology

The intersection between psychoanalysis and ideology, particularly through the Lacanian lens and the insights of Slavoj Žižek, provides a rich theoretical framework for understanding how ideologies are deeply embedded within the structure of human subjectivity. Lacan's concept of fantasy plays a crucial role in this analysis, serving as a bridge between individual desires and the social structures that shape and constrain them.

Lacan (1977) posits that fantasy is not merely a subjective creation but is intricately linked to the symbolic order—the set of rules and norms that govern social life. In this framework, fantasy functions as a necessary support for the subject's relation to the symbolic order, providing a space where unconscious desires are articulated. Žižek (1989) extends this idea by arguing that ideology operates precisely at the level of fantasy, sustaining the symbolic order by concealing its inherent inconsistencies and contradictions. This relationship between fantasy and ideology is critical for understanding how individuals are interpellated—how they come to recognize themselves as subjects within the ideological structures that shape society.

The concept of interpellation, originally developed by Althusser (1971), is further enriched by Lacanian psychoanalysis, which emphasizes the role of the unconscious in this process. When an individual identifies with an ideological position, they do so not only consciously but also at an unconscious level, where fantasy mediates their relationship with the symbolic order. This unconscious identification is crucial for the reproduction of ideology, as it binds individuals to the social norms and values that sustain the existing power structures.

In this context, the Lacanian concept of the "Big Other" is particularly relevant. The Big Other represents the symbolic authority or the set of norms and laws that govern social interaction. Ideology, in Žižek's (2008) view, functions by positing the Big Other as an unquestionable authority, a guarantor of meaning and order. However, the Big Other is also a site of profound anxiety, as it embodies the gap between the symbolic order and the Real—the traumatic kernel of experience that resists symbolization. Fantasy, therefore, plays a dual role: it masks the inconsistencies of the symbolic order while simultaneously providing a framework for individuals to navigate the anxieties provoked by the Real.

The relationship between fantasy and ideology can be further illustrated through concrete examples, such as the reproduction of gender ideologies. Gender, as a social construct, is sustained through a series of fantasies that dictate appropriate behaviors and roles for different genders. These fantasies are not simply personal imaginings but are deeply embedded within the symbolic order, reinforced through cultural narratives, media representations, and social practices. For instance, the fantasy of the "ideal"

woman or man perpetuates gender norms by offering a model for individuals to emulate, thereby reinforcing the existing gender hierarchy (Butler, 1990). In this way, fantasy serves as a mechanism through which ideology maintains its hold over individuals, shaping their identities and behaviors in ways that align with dominant social structures.

Moreover, the psychoanalytic concept of *jouissance* (enjoyment) provides another layer of understanding how ideology functions. Žižek (1991) argues that ideologies are not merely systems of beliefs but are also sustained by the enjoyment that individuals derive from their adherence to these ideologies. This enjoyment is often irrational and rooted in the unconscious, making it a powerful force that binds individuals to ideological positions even in the face of evidence that contradicts those beliefs. For example, the enjoyment derived from feelings of national pride can sustain nationalist ideologies, even when such ideologies lead to harmful or exclusionary practices.

In conclusion, the integration of psychoanalysis and ideology, particularly through Lacanian theory, offers a profound insight into how ideologies are internalized and reproduced through the unconscious processes of fantasy and identification. By linking these theoretical concepts to real-world examples, such as gender ideologies, this analysis not only deepens our understanding of the mechanisms of ideology but also highlights the importance of psychoanalysis as a tool for critiquing and challenging the social structures that govern our lives.

### CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis presented in this paper, several significant conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of ideology in social psychology and psychoanalysis.

First, it is evident that social psychology often overlooks the ideological dimensions of human actions, particularly in specific socio-historical contexts. The current analysis underscores the need for social psychologists to recognize the ideological functions that shape human behavior. By doing so, it becomes possible to situate psychological processes within the broader totality of social processes, moving beyond a limited focus on partial mechanisms that dominate contemporary social psychology. This approach aligns with the critical perspectives advocated by Martín-Baró (1987) and Moscovici (1994), which emphasize the importance of understanding how social representations and ideological structures influence individual and collective behavior.

Second, while one of the key tasks of social psychologists is to de-ideologize certain discourses and social practices, it is essential to acknowledge that ideologies function as necessary illusions for the survival of human groups. This idea is supported by the work of Žižek (1989, 2008), who argues that ideologies operate at the level of fantasy, concealing the contradictions of the symbolic order while providing individuals with frameworks for navigating social realities. This recognition necessitates a reflective approach within the discipline, where psychologists critically examine how their own discourses and practices may contribute to the reproduction of the very ideologies they seek to critique.

Third, the integration of psychoanalytic concepts, particularly those derived from Lacanian theory, offers a profound insight into the unconscious processes that sustain ideologies. By examining how fantasy mediates the relationship between individuals and the symbolic order,

this paper highlights the significance of unconscious identification in the reproduction of ideology. For instance, the concept of the "Big Other," as discussed by Lacan and further developed by Žižek, illustrates how ideologies function as symbolic authorities that govern social interaction, often without the conscious awareness of individuals. This understanding not only enriches theoretical discussions but also provides a critical framework for analyzing real-world phenomena, such as the persistence of gender ideologies and their impact on social behavior.

Finally, this paper contributes to the existing literature by offering a new perspective on how ideology operates within social psychology, particularly through the lens of psychoanalysis. The integration of Lacanian theory with the analysis of ideological structures opens new avenues for understanding subjectivity in social contexts. This approach not only broadens our comprehension of how ideologies shape individual and collective identities but also underscores the importance of addressing the unconscious dimensions of ideological adherence.

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