

Brazilian jeitinho: Understanding and explaining an indigenous psychological construct

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Abstract

Brazilian *jeitinho* is a social influence strategy that is widely regarded as a component of Brazilian culture. This study aims to systematize the way Brazilians conceptualize *jeitinho*, seeking to identify behaviors that are seen as exemplars. In study one, 17 participants were interviewed and content analyses pointed to seven themes: sympathy, harm to others, malandragem, disregard for social rules, innovative processes, power relation, and compensation. In study two, 28 participants were interviewed and the results corroborated study one themes. About 35 typical situations of *jeitinho* were described. In conclusion, *Jeitinho* is an innovative problem-solving strategy in which the individual uses social influence combined with cunning tricks to achieve goals, despite the fact that it breaks formal rules. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: Brazilian *jeitinho*, cross-cultural social psychology, ethnopsychology.

Jeitinho Brasileiro: Comprendiendo y explicando un concepto psicológico indígena

Resumé

El *jeitinho* Brasileiro es una estrategia de influencia social que es reconocida considerablemente como un componente de la cultura brasileña. Este estudio tiene como objetivo sistematizar la forma brasileños conceptualizar *jeitinho*, tratando de identificar los comportamientos que se consideran ejemplares. En el estudio uno, 17 participantes fueron entrevistados y se analiza el contenido señalado en siete temas: la simpatía, el daño a otros, malandragem, el desprecio por las normas sociales, procesos de innovación, relación de poder, y la indemnización. En el estudio dos, 28 participantes fueron entrevistados y los resultados corroboran un estudio de los temas. Alrededor de 35 situaciones típicas de *jeitinho* fueron descritos. En conclusión, *jeitinho* es una innovadora solución de problemas de estrategia en la que el individuo utiliza la influencia social combinada con astutos trucos para lograr los objetivos, a pesar de que rompe las reglas formales. Implicaciones se discuten.

Palabras clave: Brasil *jeitinho*, la psicología transcultural social, etnopsicología.

It is now commonly accepted that culture affects psychosocial processes (e.g., Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006). In particular, the movement of indigenous psychology has been influential in highlighting the importance of systematic studies to identify factors

affecting the formation of cultural identities (Diaz-Loving, 2005). This systematic description of cultural identities allows a better understanding of patterns of behavior that are typical to a particular cultural group.

According to Berry (1989), there are two main approaches in cross-cultural psychology research. The first is called 'etic' and is characterized by the process of description and comparison of psychological characteristics across different cultural groups. The other type is called 'emic' and is characterized by the process of

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describing cultural characteristics of a particular group. The ‘emic’ approach aims to describe the psychosocial aspects of a particular culture, allowing the understanding of normative standards of conduct that directly influence the behavior of individuals. The current manuscript follows this ‘emic’ approach to understand Brazilian identity and cultural practices. It is the first in a series of studies initiated by a research group dedicated to this topic (Conexão Brasil – Brazil Connection).

Specifically, our goal in this study was to investigate the Brazilian *jeitinho*, a social phenomenon described by social scientists as one of the main factors of Brazilian national identity (Barbosa, 1992; DaMatta, 1984). The objective was to systematize the way Brazilians understand and conceptualize *jeitinho*, seeking to identify behaviors and situations that are seen as exemplars of this phenomenon. Our study contributes to a better understanding of both (a) how national cultural characteristics influence psychosocial processes more generally, and (b) provides a more detailed and specific account of Brazilian psychology. We present two qualitative studies that map social behavior that is described as *jeitinho*.

Understanding Brazilian *jeitinho*

What characterizes the Brazilian *jeitinho* and how it has been defined in the literature? Duarte (2006) surveyed concepts of *jeitinho* and its multidimensionality as a social phenomenon. According to her findings, *jeitinho* is understood as: (a) a strategy to deal with the excessive formalism of Brazilian society, (b) as an escape valve to deal with social tensions, (c) as an instrument of institutional transition to overcome the excessive bureaucracy in some contexts, (d) as a Brazilian peculiarity derived from specific historical aspects, (e) as a source of weakening of bureaucratic systems, and (f) as a Brazilian strategy of social navigation to deal with impersonal rules.

Barbosa (1992) tried to define *jeitinho* in an objective and concise way by surveying 200 individuals from three Brazilian cities. He argues that “*jeitinho* is always a ‘special’ way to solve a problem or a difficult or prohibited situation; or a creative solution to an emergency, whether in the form of cheating some predetermined rule or norm, or in the form of conciliation, cleverness or ability. Thus, for a given situation to be considered a *jeito*, the presence of unforeseen circumstances that are adverse to individual’s goals is necessary” (p. 41).

However, Barbosa also argues that *jeitinho* is not a sharply defined category because what is and what is not *jeitinho* can vary widely. The concept is very fluid and is context-specific. Examining the concept in economics, for example, it emerges as a direct result of institutional distortions in Brazil. In contrast, when the concept is examined in the field of social relations, it appears as a

healthy mechanism that promotes positive adjustment to life’s difficulties, which allows a humanization of bureaucratic rules, and promotes equality between people.

Considering the way the concept has been defined, does *jeitinho* overlap with other forms of relationships between people? In search of an empirical distinction, Almeida (2007) evaluated the differentiation between *jeitinho*, favor and corruption in a study with a representative probabilistic sample of all Brazilian regions. He developed and adapted nineteen social scenarios and asked people to rate whether they were *jeitinho*, favor or corruption. Based on response frequencies, he found that the following situations were more frequently interpreted as *jeitinho*: (a) a person who usually gives good tips in the restaurant so s/he does not need to wait in the queue to be seated next time, (b) a person who works in a bank and helps an acquaintance to get ahead in the queue, (c) a person who knows the hospital doctor and gets ahead in the queue, and (d) someone who can quickly get a government loan because it has a relative in the government. In contrast, a second set of scenarios were more frequently classified as corruption: (a) a person who has a student loan and a job at the same time, (b) someone who finds illegal ways to steal electricity from the grid, and (c) a person who has two jobs, but goes to work on just one. Finally, some scenarios were empirically classified as favor: (a) a person who saves a place in the queue for someone who needs to solve a problem, and (b) a person who lets someone with fewer purchases be attended first in the queue at the supermarket.

Although these findings seem to suggest a clear distinction between *jeitinho*, favor and corruption, Almeida (2007) also presents evidence showing that scenarios classified as *jeitinho* do not have such large differences in comparison to the other scenarios. The percentage of participants who classified scenarios as *jeitinho* were around 50%, while the percentage of participants who classified scenarios as corruption were much higher, around 70%. This indicates that what constitutes typical scenarios of *jeitinho* is debated and is located somewhere in between what is right and what is not.

These empirical findings indicate that *jeitinho* is a diffuse concept, despite being seen as a defining characteristic of Brazilian culture. Brazilians have different views and conceptions about what it actually is. In order to further understanding of this phenomenon, there is a need to develop robust theoretical conceptualization of *jeitinho*. By and large, the investigation of meanings of *jeitinho* has so far represented it as individuals’ strategy to solve problems using resources, sometimes illegal, in favor of their own benefit. We could therefore define *jeitinho* as a social influence problem-solving strategy that bypass rules, laws and social conventions to achieve something.

This view of *jeitinho* derives from a notion of formalism, in which this problem-solving strategy is used as a tool for creating 'flexibility' in norms, so that problems can be solved even when there is excessive formalism in the social institutions. The excess of formalism makes it difficult to get things done, and people have to create new behaviors in order to cope with the rules or break them. These new sets of behavior are accepted socially because formalistic rules do not allow achieving goals without breaking the very rules. However, this acceptance is associated with a recognition that these behaviors are morally wrong and help to preserve the formalistic rules that created the necessity for breaking them. This assumption guides the present work. Considering the link with the concept of social norms, it is argued that social psychology can make significant contribution to the conceptualization and understanding of *jeitinho* as a social influence strategy.

Jeitinho and social norms

Social norms are an important concept related to *jeitinho* because it is a social influence strategy to solve problems that often break norms and rules. Sheriff (1958) defines social norms as negotiated rules of social conduct that works as standards of conduct resulting from the interaction between individuals. Social norms have a central role for the coexistence of individuals within social groups. According to Cialdini and Trost (1998), social norms can be defined as rules that are understood and shared by members of a group that guide or constrain social behavior without the force of laws. The literature on *jeitinho* in sociology and anthropology reviewed above pointed out that this problem-solving strategy is consistently related to social norms, because it is in the halfway between what is legal/positive and what is illegal/negative.

Solving a problem through *jeitinho* produces conflicts between what is ought to be done and what is done by those who uses *jeitinho*. Despite the fact that this problem-solving strategy leads to a social norm violation, most Brazilians recognize *jeitinho* as a valid way to solve problems. This is based on an acknowledgement that *jeitinho* gets things done and therefore becomes (reluctantly) accepted as an effective social mechanism. This broad acceptance leads to a high frequency of *jeitinho* as a way to solve problems within Brazilian society. With this conceptual perspective, *jeitinho* can be understood as a social influence process of problem solving that leads to some norm breaking. When engaging in *jeitinho*, people strategically avoid some of the negative reactions of norm violation by using social influence strategies that 'heal', smooth and re-establish interrupted social relations. Hence, one of the main defining characteristics of this process is the use of sympathy during

the social interaction as a way to avoid conflict that may result from the norm-breaking situation.

A further issue is the lack of uniformity regarding what constitute *jeitinho*. This may arise due to the paradoxical situation where individuals cannot distinguish between descriptive norms (perceptions of behaviors that are typically approved/disapproved) and injunctive norms (moral approval/disapproval associated with a particular behaviour) (Cialdini, Reno & Källgren, 1990). People know that they should not break rules (injunctive norm), but then everyone does it anyway (descriptive norm). This explicit recognition of complexities in the social processes involved in *jeitinho* can help to shed some light on this phenomenon. We argue that a social norm perspective offers an interesting direction to follow.

Brazil and *jeitinho*

In the following, we will contextualize these social mechanisms within the social dynamics that exist within Brazilian culture. As already discussed, *jeitinho* is seen as a way to survive the chronic Brazilian bureaucracy. Barbosa (1992) argues that *jeitinho* is the construction of an individual/informal space within an impersonal/formal space. While bureaucracy is theoretically rational, impersonal and anonymous, making use of intellectual categories, *jeitinho* (as its solution) makes use of emotional categories. According to Duarte (2004), *jeitinho* is used as a solution for bureaucracy and has the following characteristics: it is a conscious act of breaking social rules, it is usually selfish, is used to achieve immediate outcomes, and requires the conscious use of a certain charm (a smile, a wink, a soft tone of voice). Barbosa (1992) adds that to achieve something with *jeitinho* it is more important to 'be nice' (and 'be thought of as nice') than to be powerful. Thus, according to Barbosa, the way *jeitinho* is requested is a key element. The person requesting *jeitinho* must be friendly, cordial, or even humble, but never arrogant and authoritarian.

This dimension of sympathy thus seems to be central in the conceptualization of *jeitinho* and is in line with cross-cultural studies that describe this as a characteristic of Latin cultures. Triandis, Marin, Lisansky and Betancourt (1984) define sympathy as a cultural script of Latinos, which influences how they interpret social behaviors and how they interact socially. For these authors, the script of sympathy is related to the desire to keep harmony and to preserve self-image, so avoiding conflict and maintaining harmony in interpersonal relationships. It is interesting to see that aspects of sympathy are also present in the characteristics of *jeitinho* proposed by Brazilian social scientists (Barbosa, 1992; Duarte, 2004). Sympathy as an underlying component of *jeitinho* leads to an important point: the use of *jeitinho*

does not occur through the use of financial or social superiority, but through affective relations for the sake of camaraderie.

Furthermore, Barbosa (1992) and Duarte (2004) appear to agree about the importance of a symbolic key character that typifies this phenomenon: the malandro, or someone who has a bohemian lifestyle and tends to use mischief to maintain this lifestyle. The caricature of the malandro is based on bohemian characters typically from the late 19th century. For example, Duarte (2006) identifies the malandro as that person who, in hostile environments, uses *jeitinho* as a survival strategy. According to DaMatta (1984), the malandro uses ambiguous survival strategies: sometimes dishonest and corrupt, but also with social approval.

Barbosa (1992) adds that legal/honest and illegal/dishonest are end-points of a continuum that goes from a positive pole in one side to a negative pole in the other side, with an ambiguous area in the center. *Jeitinho* seems to fall in this ambiguous area where legal/honest and illegal/dishonest behaviours are indistinguishable. This ambiguous view helps to explain why empirical data typically show difficulty among Brazilians to identify typical scenarios depicting *jeitinho* (e.g., Almeida, 2007). This also helps to situate the ambiguous nature of the concept between descriptive or injunctive norms proposed above.

As a contribution to the systematization of *jeitinho* and its relationship with peculiar cultural characteristics of Brazil, two studies were conducted to: 1) examine the concepts assigned to *jeitinho* by the general population, and 2) describe typical behaviors that characterize *jeitinho*. This is the first psychological study that tries to empirically map the behavioral domain of this important social influence strategy. Using qualitative approaches, we will investigate the underlying socio-psychological processes as reported by participants.

Study 1

In this initial exploratory study, the goal was to assess lay people's conceptualizations of *jeitinho*. Study 1 was conducted in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. Given its political status, the number of politicians and lobbying groups settled there, the city is stereotypically seen as an easy place for experiencing *jeitinho*. We thus believed that this should be an ideal location to interview Brazilians about this phenomenon.

Method

Participants

A total of 17 participants took part in the study, including nine women and eight men, with mean age of 26.9 years (SD = 10.9). The majority had completed high school (47%), 29% had completed a university degree,

18% had completed primary school, and 6% had completed a postgraduate degree.

Interview Schedule

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for the description of typical behaviors that characterize *jeitinho*. The interview had two groups of questions relevant to the present study. The first group of questions required participants to think about problem-solving situations. The second group of questions asked them to define *jeitinho*, exploring specific dimensions discussed in the literature such as the use of sympathy and norm-breaking behaviours. Before concluding the interview, the participants were asked if the situations described in the first group of questions could be categorized as *jeitinho*.

Procedure and Data Analyses

Participants were approached in public places in different areas of the city and invited to partake in the study. Participation was voluntary and confidential, and interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in a later stage. Interviews took an average of 15 minutes. The data was content analyzed (Bardin, 1977) in three steps: a first reading was conducted to identify the main themes, the data was then classified independently by three judges, and an interrater agreement assessment was conducted which resulted in an 80% agreement rate. Seven themes were identified and are discussed in the results section.

Data extracts were grouped within these seven themes and the frequency of extracts for each theme calculated. This calculation took into account the frequency within each category, even if similar or identical extracts were present. Considering the small number of participants, not every participant reported extracts that could be classified into one of the major themes. Nonparametric analyses (Kendall's tau rank correlation coefficient and Kruskal-Wallis test) were performed to examine the associations between frequencies and socio-demographic variables.

Results

Themes and frequencies

Table 1 presents the frequency of extracts by theme and participants. The themes were created based on the answers for the second group of questions which asked participants to define *jeitinho*. The first theme, "sympathy", was defined as the behavior of interacting socially in a friendly, pleasant and affable way, showing interest, affinity and attraction towards other people when using *jeitinho*. Among the 17 participants, 70.6% thought that the "sympathy" is an essential feature of *jeitinho*. Examples of extracts characterizing this theme included: "(...) Brazilians are famous for being a nice

bunch of people, a smart bunch of people that, like a malandro, is always smiling to everybody, who always says 'hi' to everybody, greets everyone"; "Perhaps not charm, but it has to have sympathy".

The second category was “harm to others”, and included strategies that may cause (directly or indirectly) loss, negative and/or harmful consequences to others by

using *jeitinho*. Extracts for this theme could be obtained from all participants interviewed (100% of frequency). Examples of extracts characterizing this theme included: “(...) go over and above everything, without thinking about the consequences, in order to succeed and get what one wants; do your *jeito* and don't care about others”; “(...) But from the moment you do a *jeitinho* and you will hurt someone, it will be harmful (...)”.

Table 1
Frequency of extracts by themes and participants (Study 1)

Participants	Themes						
	Sympathy	Harm to other	Malandragem	Disregard for social rules	Innovative processes	Power relation	Compensation
1	0	1	2	4	6	3	1
2	0	4	2	4	1	1	0
3	1	3	6	3	1	1	0
4	0	1	0	0	2	0	1
5	0	6	10	5	5	1	4
6	1	3	2	1	2	1	0
7	7	6	8	3	0	0	0
8	3	5	1	2	0	1	0
9	1	2	1	4	2	2	1
10	0	9	1	3	0	0	2
11	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
12	1	2	1	3	1	1	0
13	3	1	3	2	2	1	2
14	4	3	1	5	2	1	2
15	1	3	2	2	0	2	1
16	2	7	3	2	0	1	1
17	2	1	1	2	2	0	2
TOTAL (Frequency)	27	58	45	45	26	16	18

“*Malandragem*” was the third theme and expressed strategies that make use of personal skills combined with cunning and deceptive devices in order to achieve a goal. This category also included a Brazilian regionalism that associates cariocas [native of Rio de Janeiro] with a bohemian lifestyle and their peculiar ways of dressing, moving and talking. A key analytical strategy for this theme was that we only coded extracts if the participant explicitly used the words *malandro* or *malandragem*. A total of 45 extracts were observed from 94.1% of the participants. Examples are: “(...) I think of a person like... in a carioca style, who behaves like a malandro who will do something”. “I think this is the *jeitinho*: swindling, *malandragem*”.

The fourth category, “disregard for social rules”, was defined as the use of strategies that despise and do not take into account the rules of social conduct expected in a given context. In this category, which also had a high frequency of occurrence, 88.2% of the participants

associated *jeitinho* with some type of transgression of social norms. Examples are: “(...) Brazilians would never behave in the more respectful, more correct way; I think they always try to do a *jeitinho*, circumventing the rules”; “You're going around the rule, but not necessarily breaking the rule”.

The fifth category was called “innovative processes” and refers to the use of innovative strategies to solve problems. This theme exemplified problem-solving strategies using ingenuity and creativity to generate solutions. A total of 64.7% of the participants mentioned examples consistent with this theme (a total of 26 extracts). Examples are: “(...) is a way, like, to save a bit, or even to try and to do a little differently, you know... to not have things so standardized, that everyone does exactly the same”; “(...) the question of speed, agility, quick thinking and creativity to have several ideas, to have multiple solutions for the same problem”.

The sixth category was named “power relation” and

addressed the presence of hierarchical differences between the person who uses *jeitinho* and the person who accepts it. A total of 70.6% of the participants believe there is some level of hierarchical or power difference between those involved in a *jeitinho* situation. However, only 16 extracts were observed for this theme, which indicates that the association between *jeitinho* and power relations was weak in participants' verbalizations. Examples of the extracts are: "*Yeah, but I didn't have the status I now have, I had to earn this status to achieve what I wanted (...)*"; "*(...) to gain something with the person who has more power*".

The last theme was named "compensation", and refers to perceptions of disadvantage in a given situation and the idea that the problem-solving strategies of social navigation do exist to establish parity between those involved in the situation. A total of 64.7% of the participants perceive the existence of disequilibrium among those who are involved in the situation, and that *jeitinho* serves as an attempt to (re)establish the equilibrium. Similar to "power relation", there was also a low number of total extracts (18 occurrences), suggesting that the association between *jeitinho* and compensation is not too salient. Examples of extracts are: "*I think that even when you are from higher classes, you would still do a jeitinho, but only in different proportions and in different situations*"; "*I think I have already said, just remember the balance. Look our reality! The needs trigger the skills*".

Other themes and views of *jeitinho* as positive or negative

Although the seven themes discussed above represent the core themes that emerged from the data, other peripheral themes were also related to *jeitinho*. For example, about 41% of the participants associated *jeitinho* with a favor asked or done for someone else. Moreover, it was observed that 76.5% of the participants agreed that all Brazilians use *jeitinho* as a problem-solving strategy. Participants were also asked whether it was necessary to know the person involved in a situation of *jeitinho*. Six participants believed that it was essential to know the person involved in the situation. Four participants said it would depend of the situation: in some situation it would be essential to know the person previously, and in other situation this may not be necessary.

Finally, the extracts were also coded according to their valence to assess whether *jeitinho* is seen as positive or negative by the participants. Negative extracts about *jeitinho* were observed in 76.5% of the participants, while positive extracts were observed in almost all the participants (94.1%). These results indicate that participants may see *jeitinho* as both positive and negative, depending of its various aspects.

Jeitinho and socio-demographic variables

Finally, statistical analyses were carried out to examine associations between the frequencies in each of the seven themes and socio-demographic variables. The analysis indicated that younger people tend to associate *jeitinho* more as "malandragem" ($\tau = -0.41$, $p = 0.03$) and "power relation" ($\tau = -0.44$, $p = 0.03$) compare to older participants. Younger participants also tended to express more the view that it is not essential to know the person involved in the situation of *jeitinho* ($\tau = -0.55$, $p = 0.007$). However, in comparison with participants with higher education, participants with only primary school expressed that it is essential to know the person involved previously ($\chi^2 = 8.92$, $p = 0.03$).

Discussion

The goal of Study 1 was to assess common conceptualizations of *jeitinho*. Seven core themes emerged from the interviews: sympathy, harm to others, malandragem, disregard for social rules, innovative processes, power relation, and compensation. Overall, *jeitinho* is seen as a problem-solving strategy used by most Brazilians that: (1) requires skills (sympathy, malandragem, innovation/creativity), (2) has an impact on others and the social order (harm to others, disregard for social rules), (3) works as a tool to challenge hierarchical relations and social hardship (power relation, compensation), and (4) is seen as both positive and negative. This conceptualization of *jeitinho* is in line with previous studies (Almeida, 2007; Barbosa, 1992; Duarte, 2006), and the view of *jeitinho* as a Brazilian problem-solving strategy that rely on creative and improvised solutions is also often referred to by international researchers (e.g., Güss, & Wiley, 2007). Given our overall goal to establish an operational conceptualization of *jeitinho* and to identify behaviors and situations that are seen as exemplars of this phenomenon, we conducted another study to address these specific issues.

Study 2

The goals of this study were threefold: (1) to try and replicate the themes found in Study 1 with a sample from another region in Brazil, (2) to assess the overall view of *jeitinho* as something good or bad, and (3) to identify typical situations in which *jeitinho* has been used successfully and unsuccessfully. Rio de Janeiro was chosen because of the stereotypical view of cariocas and their use of *jeitinho*. For example, in her guide on How to be a Carioca, Goslin (2004) states that "The carioca will always try to find some way around a problem. This attitude is second nature to a carioca and is referred to as the *jeitinho* (the Brazilian knack of getting around anything)." (p. 19).

Method

Results

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 28 residents of Rio de Janeiro, including fifteen females and eleven males with ages ranging from 20 to 62 years (M = 33; SD = 13.50) (two participants did not report gender and four participants did not report age).

Instrument and Procedure

A semi-structured interview protocol was used, including: (1) What comes to mind when you hear the term “Brazilian *jeitinho*”? (2) What is *jeitinho* to you?, (3) Tell us a situation where you used *jeitinho* and were successful in doing so, (4) Tell us a situation where you used “*jeitinho*” and were unsuccessful in doing so, (5) Tell us about some situation you know in which someone used “*jeitinho*” and was successful in doing so, (6) Tell us about some situation you know in which someone used “*jeitinho*” and was unsuccessful in doing so, and (7) Do you think “*jeitinho*” is something good or bad? As for Study 1, participants were approached in public places in different areas of the city and invited to partake in the study. Participation was voluntary and confidential. Interviews took an average of 20 minutes.

Data Analyses

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcribed answers for the first question were content analyzed in two steps: a first reading was conducted to identify the main extracts describing *jeitinho*, and a second reading of the identified extracts was conducted to categorize them within the seven themes identified in Study 1. Answers to the other questions were also analyzed to examine the view of *jeitinho* as bad or good, and to identify successful and unsuccessful situations of *jeitinho*.

Themes and frequencies

The first analyses focused on what comes to mind when participants think about *jeitinho*. A total of 60 main extracts emerged from the answers, comprising words or phrases. These extracts were then categorized within the seven themes found in Study 1. All extracts (except three: worry, everybody uses *jeitinho*, and carioca) could be easily categorized into the themes from Study 1. Table 2 present examples of the extracts and their frequencies by themes. As can be seen, “harm to others”, “disregard for social rules” and “innovative processes” comprised the majority (64.9%) of the extracts categorized. “Malandragem” also had a high frequency with 15.8% of the extracts. These four themes had also the highest frequencies in Study 1, demonstrating that these are the core themes people relate to *jeitinho*. The main difference between studies was related to the theme “sympathy”, which had a high frequency in Study 1 but had only 1 extract in the present study.

Jeitinho as good/bad and successful/unsuccessful situations

The next set of analyses focused on the view of *jeitinho* as good or bad. Only four participants said *jeitinho* is something good. The majority (n=15) said it is something bad, while the other participants (n=9) said it depends: *jeitinho* can be something good or bad, depending on the situation. Those participants who thought it is either good or that it depends (43.5%) indicated that as long as the situation does not harm anyone or does not create a major problem to others, *jeitinho* is something good and positive.

The final analyses focused on the recall of successful and unsuccessful situations of *jeitinho* by the participants. A total of 35 successful and unsuccessful situations of *jeitinho* were identified based on the interviews. Of these, 19 depicted a successful situation and 16 an unsuccessful situation. It appears somewhat easier for participants to provide examples of successful situations of *jeitinho* than unsuccessful ones. Table 3 shows examples of each.

Table 2
Example of extracts and their frequency by themes (Study 2)

	Themes						
	Sympathy	Harm to other	Malandragem	Disregard for social rules	Innovative processes	Power relation	Compensation
EXAMPLES	“act of care”	“take advantages of people”, “lie”, “lack of responsibility”	“malandragem”, “a malandro”*	“corruption”, “something against the law”, “achieve something illegally”	“make your way around a difficult situation”, “find a way out for anything”, “get out a problem”	“bureaucracy”, “know someone and jump the queue”, “rely on a friend to do a <i>jeitinho</i> ”	“easy life”, “make things easier”, “it’s beneficial”
TOTAL (Frequency)	1	14	9	14	10	3	6

*Note: As for Study 1, only extracts in which participant used the words *malandro* or *malandragem* were included in this theme

Table 3
Scenarios depicting Brazilian jeitinho in Rio de Janeiro (Study 2)

Successful situations	Unsuccessful situations
1. Jane is feeling sick and goes to a hospital. Arriving there she sees lots of people waiting in the queue. She then calls a relative who works in the hospital, who helps to see the doctor first.	1. Lucy goes to visit a relative who is sick. She is late and arrives at the hospital after visiting hours. She then attempts to enter, past the guard without being seen, but is discovered and barred by him.
2. Richard is a photographer of a famous magazine. Upon arriving at the theater to see a successful play, he introduces himself to the cashier staff, and gets in for free.	2. Marina needs to go quickly to the market. She parks the car over the sidewalk and turn on the emergency lights to disguise. In her return, however, she notes that she got a fine.
3. Caroline goes to the bank to pay a bill and notices a long queue. She meets a friend in the queue by chance, giving her the money and the bill, and thus does not have to wait in the queue.	3. Peter intentionally misses an university exam because he hasn't studied enough, but he tells the teacher that he missed it because he had to have a small surgery. The teacher, however, politely asks to see the scars and notes that Peter was lying.
4. Paula goes to a store to make a financed purchase and is asked for a proof of residence. As she has no such proof, she forges a document and sends it by FAX, obtaining thus the finance required.	4. Joseph took a cab during a business trip. He asks the taxi driver to give him a receipt with a higher value than he paid and presents the receipt for refund. The accountant, however, suspects the amount to be paid and question Joseph, who is forced to say he made a mistake.
5. Ms Dulce catches a busy bus and can't find an available place to sit. She then pretends that her bag is very heavy and keeps pushing the bag into someone seated, until the person offers her the sit.	5. Paul crashed his car and had no insurance, but he managed to sign an insurance with a date before the accident. The insurance company, however, discovers the fact and prosecutes him.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the seven themes identified in the first study. When thinking about *jeitinho*, lay people tend to conceptualize this problem-solving strategy around four core themes: harm to others, *malandragem*, disregard for social rules and innovative processes, with lesser importance given to sympathy, power relations, and compensations. This study also investigated the evaluation of *jeitinho*. Despite the fact that the majority of participants rate *jeitinho* as something bad, almost half think it is either positive or that it can be positive or negative depending on the situation. This also replicates findings from Study 1. Regarding the successful/unsuccessful distinction, participants listed more situations where *jeitinho* was successful than unsuccessful.

Discussion

This paper investigated lay conceptualization of *jeitinho* in two qualitative studies. In line with other studies in the area (Almeida, 2007; Barbosa, 1992; Duarte, 2006), results from both studies indicate that *jeitinho* is seen as

a problem-solving strategy associated with both positive/good and negative/bad aspects. Seven core themes involving personal characteristics and skills emerged of the person who uses *jeitinho*. The general feeling reported by participants is that *jeitinho* has a negative impact on others and the social order; but its importance as a social navigation tool to challenge the hierarchical structures and hardship faced by individuals in the Brazilian society is also acknowledged. *Jeitinho* may thus be understood as an innovative problem-solving strategy in which the individual uses social influence skills combined with cunning tricks to achieve his/her goals, despite the fact that it breaks formal rules and may eventually harm others. Results from Study 2 also showed that it was easier for the participants to recall successful situations of *jeitinho* than unsuccessful ones. The perception of its success may explain the prevalence of this phenomenon in Brazil.

The four themes cover antecedents, consequences and the social processes involved in *jeitinho*. Power relations and compensation cover some of the incentives and antecedents for using it, harm to others and compensation are some of the outcomes. Sympathy, *malandragem*, dis-

regard for social rules and innovative processes are the core processes involved in given a jeito. We will discuss some of these core processes now in a bit more detail.

A core aspect of *jeitinho* is the disregard for social rules. An example is the common use of *jeitinho* in queues. Queue-jumping was commonly remembered by participants in Study 2 as a successful situation where this strategy was used, and queue-jumping was present in most of the situations interpreted as *jeitinho* by participants in Almeida's (2007) study. Queue-jumping in Brazil thus seems to be a typical exemplar of *jeitinho*. Brazilian social psychologists have identified four research areas in social psychology that could be used to analyse queuing (Iglesias & Günther, 2007): (1) social norms and social influence, (2) distributive, procedural and interactional justice, (3) causal attribution, and (4) relations of power and status. Two of these areas (social norms and power relations) are directly linked to *jeitinho* because it involves violation of social norms and power relation. Our results therefore open possibilities for further theoretical inquiries into this salient cultural phenomenon.

How does *jeitinho* work? By and large, *jeitinho* is seen as a strategy that uses cunning and deceptive devices in order to achieve a goal, using innovation/creativity, malandragem and sympathy. These characteristics are important because *jeitinho* situations involve interpersonal relationships, in which the other person can be known or unknown. To be able to use deceptive devices in interpersonal relationships and still have a successful interaction with others, sympathy is used as a mean to keep harmony with others. The use of sympathy as a behavioral tool that avoids conflict, but that also helps to achieve a goal, is in line with cross-cultural research on sympathy (Ramírez-Esparza, Gosling & Pennebaker, 2008; Smith, 2008; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). Sympathy can thus be seen as a procedural aspect of *jeitinho* because this problem-solving strategy is only successful if the other person involved in the situation accepts its use. The lesser frequency of sympathy in Study 2 may either reflect the different questions being asked or may be due to the different setting (in which sympathy may be less salient due to the less bureaucratic environment in Rio de Janeiro compared to Brasilia).

Results from both studies also showed that this problem-solving strategy is commonly used by Brazilians, but is seen in both a positive/good and negative/bad light. It is positive/good because helps individuals to achieve a goal, but it is negative/bad because it disrespects social rules and may harm others. Indeed, this mix view of *jeitinho* as the middle point between what is *legal/positive* and what is *illegal/negative* has also been discussed by other scholars (Almeida, 2007; Barbosa, 1992; Duarte, 2004, 2006). *Jeitinho* is the middle

ground between two extremes of moral situations: favor as something intrinsically positive, and corruption as something intrinsically negative.

Jeitinho is also linked to a conflict between injunctive and descriptive norms (cf. Cialdini, Reno & Källgren, 1990). It is related to descriptive norms because Brazilians would expect other Brazilians to use this problem-solving strategy in social situations, and is thus understood and accepted. However, it is also related to injunctive norms because it involves a norm-breaking situation (and hence morally disapproved). This paradox of social justification and acceptance while breaking social norms therefore creates an ambiguous social norm. This may explain why people have difficulties in explicitly and unambiguously characterizing social norm breaking situations as *jeitinho*.

Mapping Jeitinho

The discussion above yield two core characteristics of *jeitinho*: (a) a procedural characteristic that defines the way to behave when using this problem-solving strategy (i.e., sympathy and creativity), and (b) another characteristic that is associated with the flexibility of its interpretation as something positive and/or negative. An example of this latter characteristic comes from a article recent published by The Daily Telegraph discussing the law changes in Rio de Janeiro during the recent carnival in Brazil (Allen, 2010), in which a interviewed Brazilian said: "The law exists but you're in Brazil. You just have to walk along here to see all the rules being ignored."

These two characteristics are important for understanding Brazilian culture more broadly. Considering that culture gives meaning to social behaviours and is shared by the members that make up a particular cultural group (Smith & Bond, 2003; Smith, Bond, & Kagitcibasi, 2006), *jeitinho* is only one example of what is typical in Brazilian culture (cf. DaMatta, 1984; Ribeiro, 1995): the flexible way Brazilians interpret social norms, the creativity in finding justifications to explain why laws and rules can (and should) be broken, and how they create new rules that are in line with their own interests and how they create exceptions to the new rules created. *Jeitinho* is thus only one (but an important) reflection of Brazilian culture. Indeed, Almeida (2007) states that the excessive bureaucracy and conflicting laws in Brazil makes it feasible to use this problem-solving strategy as a way to try and obtain the basic needs that otherwise would never be achieved by the majority of the population, which thus makes *jeitinho* socially justifiable.

This study has shown that *jeitinho* is an important characteristic of the Brazilian culture and that it has several dimensions. The core characteristics of *jeitinho* are related to the process of giving a jeito and its quarrel-

some relationship with social norms and rules. With the development of a broad sample of typical *jeitinho* situations that covers the main construct dimensions it will be possible to continue the research in this area investigating, for example, the relationship between *jeitinho* dimensions and other social psychosocial constructs and processes. This line of investigation seems to be a fruitful way to comprehend the Brazilian ethopsychology and link it to broader social influence strategies.

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