Integrating the structural approach into research designs applied to different thematic topics and cross-disciplinary domains

Andrei Holman

- The heuristic value of the structural approach
- 4 illustrations:
  - Driving styles
  - Beauty and aesthetic surgery
  - Environmental risks and national identity
  - Organ donation – moral concerns

1. Traffic psychology: From central core to driving styles

- 85% of the traffic crashes can be attributed to human error (Rothengatter & Huguenin, 2004)
- two main causes: driving sills and driving styles
- Our research topic: driving styles

- Taubman-Ben-Ari et al. (2004): four broad facets of driving styles:

(a) *reckless and careless* - seeking sensation and thrill while driving

(b) *anxious* - alertness, tension and ineffective engagement in relaxing activities during driving

(c) *angry and hostile* - feelings of irritability and hostility while driving and aggressive behaviors in traffic

(d) *patient and careful* driving style - attention, patience, politeness, and calmness while driving

- 8 driving styles in the Multidimensional Driving Style Inventory – MDSI

1. risky – e.g. Enjoy the excitement of dangerous driving

2. high-velocity – e.g. In a traffic jam, I think about ways to get through the traffic faster

3. patient – e.g. Always ready to react to unexpected maneuvers by other drivers

4. careful – e.g. When a traffic light turns green and the car in front of me doesn't get going, I just wait for a while until it moves

5. Distress-reduction – e.g. While driving, I try to relax myself

6. Dissociative driving – e.g. Plan my route badly, so that I hit traffic that I could have avoided / Attempt to drive away from traffic lights in third gear

7. Angry – e.g. Blow my horn or "flash" the car in front as a way of expressing frustrations

8. Anxious – e.g. Feel nervous while driving

- Since traffic rules have the purpose to foster traffic safety, deliberate infringements of these rules increase the risk of road accidents

- only three of the 44 items of the instrument explicitly address rule violation

- there are also significant within-subjects variations of violation behavior, as traffic rules have various degrees of social acceptance (Åberg, 1998)

- Drivers often act according to their own judgments regarding the appropriate behavior in the respective situation

- the 30 km/h speed limit on urban residential streets was found to be exceeded by the majority of drivers (Dinh & Kubota, 2013)

- An important reason: the perceived lack of credibility of the rule in the immediate situation
- the extent to which the rules that they should obey in the respective situation are "realistic"
- perverse rules: their main function appears to be not that of motivating their respect but, but their infringement (Fernández-Dols & Oceja, 1994; Lucas & Pérez, 2003)
- They fail to regulate behavior, instead they only create opportunities for sanction
- the only deterrent of drivers' tendency to break the law is authority pressure (Havârneanu & Havârneanu, 2012)

- the Romanian socio-cultural context could be prone to the emergence of a distinct driving style: the violation of the traffic norms perceived as irrational in the immediate driving context

- the most important reason for obeying traffic rules is fear of punishment

- but the severity of sanctions administered for traffic offenses in Romania has progressively increased in the last decade, yet the deviance rate and traffic casualties have not significantly decreased

- this failure suggests a high frequency of situations in which the rules appear inadequate to Romanian drivers

- Underlying reason: the SR of traffic accident
- Holman, Havârneanu, & Tepordei, (2010): central core of this SR: "death"
- Dany & Apostolidis 2007: the central core elements are decisive criteria, defining the object
  - Mostly the road events that provoke death are those represented as accidents
  - Focus on the serious / blatant rule violations, which lead to casualties
  - Maybe motivating high prudence in driving, but also minimizing the less blatant rule violations

- certain driving behaviors are represented as objectively safe, but sanctioned by the police in order to create opportunities for fines or bribe
- This dichotomy between the two types of dangers is essential for the SR of road accidents
  - Hence the hypothesis of a culturally specific driving style

- Analogous line of reasoning: Apostolidis (2012) – the SR of cannabis
  - High frequency among the young French (normalized in the youth culture), but sanctioned by the law
  - Normative tension between two systems of rule (peers / formal authority)
  - Its basis: scientific incertitude concerning the dangers of cannabis
    - Similar to the dangerousness of traffic rule violations

- The organizing dimension of the SR of cannabis: its definition as a drug / non-drug
- An opposition that structures the consequent SR of that individual
  - The other elements in the SR and the risks of cannabis consumption
  - It influences the age of first consumption

- The definition of the SR as a non-drug is a strategy to neutralize the risks of cannabis consumption

- Consequences on social perception: 2 evaluation criteria

  - Frequency of consumption

  - Way of consumption (alone / social)

  - cultural norm that defines drug addicts as those who smoke *alone* and "*too much*"

  - In the other cases, the person is not a drug addict, and cannabis is not a drug

- In driving psychology: using the contextual information to define two types of rule violations:
  - Those worthy of punishment, creating "real dangers" – with casualties
  - objectively benign, but sanctioned by traffic authorities

- Pérez et al. (1998, 2002): two normative and moral reasoning systems that motivate compliance with Traffic Code

- heteronomous system: the mere obedience towards traffic norms

- autonomous system: norms would not be anchored in the police-driver transaction, but in the interaction between drivers

- traffic norms are directly linked to a real hazard that may occur

- perceived as coherent with reality as well as the individual's general system of values and beliefs

- Another factor: several important rules from the Romanian Traffic Code are perceived by the drivers as inadequate for real safety needs (Havârneanu & Golita, 2010)
  - during the last 12 years, the Romanian Traffic Code has become increasingly stricter (e.g. reducing the speed limit within rural areas from 60 to 50 km/h).
- perception of traffic rules as somewhat arbitrary, detached from the real safety needs

- Another factor: high proportion of driving situations in which keeping the rules would be quite expensive from the standpoint of travel time
- The Romanian traffic - severely underdeveloped and badly administered, unable to cover current traffic needs

- rules ask drivers to pay a high personal and immediate price for what might be seen as consequences of the unwillingness of the authorities to improve traffic conditions

- perceived as purposively inadequate to the real safety needs of the context - designed, in fact, to create opportunities for punishing drivers

- consequently: high prevalence of negative attitudes toward traffic authorities among Romanian drivers
- Apostolidis (2012): in the core of the SR of AIDS among the marginalized groups: high risk of contamination in the hospitals
  - wider configuration of social and symbolic relationships – mistrust in the health systems and its employees
  - Is our case: mistrust in the Road Police, breaking of social ties, split between the authorities and the drivers

- Due to all these factors, Romanian drivers have become more sensitive to the situational adequacy of traffic rules
- breaking traffic laws when they are perceived as inadequate to the real safety needs in that situation emerges as a distinct driving style

MDSI factor in Romania:Violation of rules contextually perceived as irrational

- Exceed the 50 km/h speed limit in villages on perfectly straight roads with no obstacles limiting my visibility

- I overtake slower vehicles by crossing the continuous white line when the visibility is very good and there are no other obstacles

- Leave the car parked for short periods of 10–15 min in unauthorized places where I think it wouldn't create any traffic danger

- the specificities of the Romanian driving context (infrastructure and regulations) offer *rationalizations* for violating traffic rules – although the deviant behaviors are still objectively dangerous

2. Environmental risks

- **Psycho-social predictors of the social perception of Rosia Montana mining project**
- Holman, Havarneanu & Boncu 2015
- **SRs and environmental injustice**
- Roșia Montană (latin: *Alburnus Maior*) is a commune of Alba county, in the Apuseni Moutains in western Transylvania

- Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC) – a Canadian company - plans to produce 225 tones of gold and 819 tones of silver over 17 years
  - by digging up a large area - four mining pits covering 205ha
- Up to 250 million tones of cyanide-laced tailings would be stored in a 363ha pond, behind a 185m-high dam.

- Polarized and "hot" topic in the Romanian society
- The campaign against mining at Roșia Montană was one of the largest campaigns over a non-political cause in the last 25 years in Romania
- Our aim: to investigate psychosocial underpinnings of the social positions towards this issue

- Complex topic, multiple layers:
- 1. Inter-temporal trade-off between the *environmental* potential damages and the *economic* and *social* potential benefits
- Perceived consequences of the Rosia Montana mining project:
  - Environmental:
    - biosphere - related
    - social
  - Economical consequences

- 2. Perceived environmental (in)justice towards the residents of the aria

- here: potential *nationalistic* connotations

- Breakwell, 2001: intuitive mental model of hazard
- Members of a group share common core elements, selected (accepted) due to the significance they have for their identity
- *Identity Process Theory* (Breakwell 1986): the extent to which any communication about the risk will be received and incorporated into belief systems is affected by the ways in which this may threaten principles of identity

- Individuals are motivated to achieve certain characteristics in their identity structure: continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy, and self-esteem
    - e.g. individuals reject SRs of their local environment as being polluted if attachment to that place features as an important aspect of their personal sense of distinctiveness (Bonaiuto et al., 1996)
- SRs of environmental hazards: polemical
- The SR adopted by an individual will be highly influenced by identity requirements

- Pilot study: the SR of the Rosia Montana mining project

- Central core: "foreigners"

- Study 2: 378 participants

- Presumed factors of these social positions – three layers of psychological factors:

1. Environment-related

- General environmental worldviews - *New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale* – anthropocentric vs. ecocentric

- T*rust in technology* (to solve all environmental problems)

- *Personal norm to protect the environment*

- *Awareness of environmental consequences*

- *Type of concern about environmental problems – egoistic, altruistic, biospheric*

- *Style of Coping With Global Environmental Problems*

2. The nationalistic layer: *National Identity Scale*

3. The inter-temporal trade-off layer (immediate economic and social gains / long-term environmental effects): time orientation - *Consideration of Future Consequences Scale*

- Social positions towards the RM project:

1. Perceived consequences: *environmental and economic*

2. Perceived environmental (in)justice

Results

- Significant interaction Egoistic concern & nationalism

- In the "high nationalism" group, egoistic concern is significantly related to perceived environmental injustice

- Those high in egoistic concern perceive a higher degree of environmental injustice (than those low in egoism)
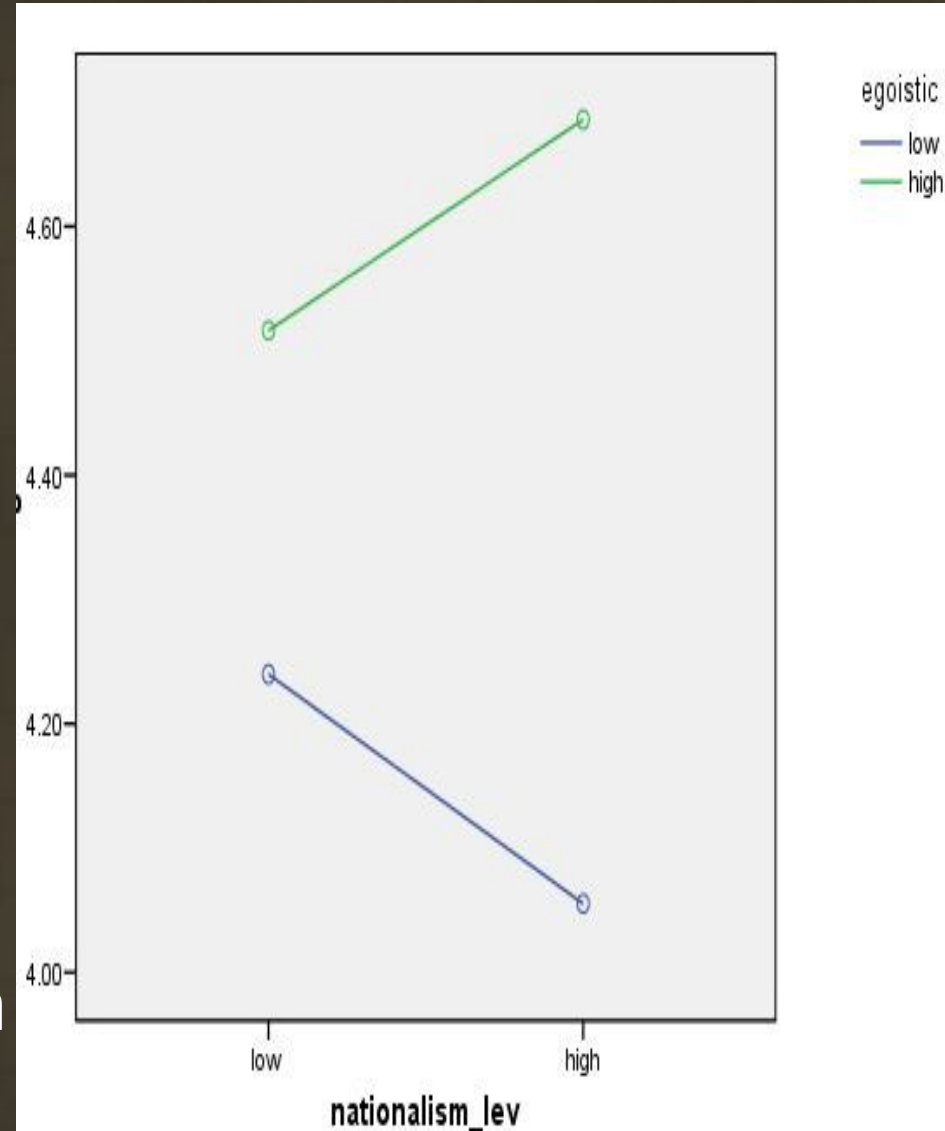
- Psycho-social factors beyond those environment-specific can moderate the impact of these factors
- the influence of egoistic concern is amplified (rendered significant) by Nationalism
- Nationalism makes the egoists perceive the RM project as environmentally unjust

- The influence of the distance from the object: Ernest-Vintina et al., 2008: the SRs of collective risk in the general population (objectively distant from the respective hazard) are normative / evaluative

3. Beauty and aesthetic surgery

- Benefit of the structural approach: the identification of the specific predominant filters through which the object is represented in the respective population

1. these filters can be highlighted through more targeted instruments, and their results can be understood in more depth

2. allows the schematic articulation between related SRs belonging to the same representational field (feminine & masculine beauty – aesthetic surgery) – „nested" SRs

- Beauty and aesthetic surgery: cross-cultural patterns of social representation and practice
- 3 countries: Italy, Spain, Romania, with variable degree of diffusion of the social practice of aesthetic surgery
- "Family of representations": SR of masculine and feminine beauty and of aesthetic surgery

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- Study 1: the SRs of aesthetic surgery, masculine and feminine beauty

  - 495 participants

SR of feminine beauty – specific central core elements

ITALY	SPAIN	ROMANIA
charm	cute	natural
face	attractive	success

SR of masculine beauty – specific central core elements

ITALY	SPAIN	ROMANIA
charm	man	clothing
	force	tall
	eyes	

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SR of aesthetic surgery – specific central core elements

ITALY	SPAIN	ROMANIA
insecurity	breasts	artificial
dissatisfaction	doctor	repugnant
useless happiness		stupid

STUDY 2. the "Body Map of aesthetic surgery"
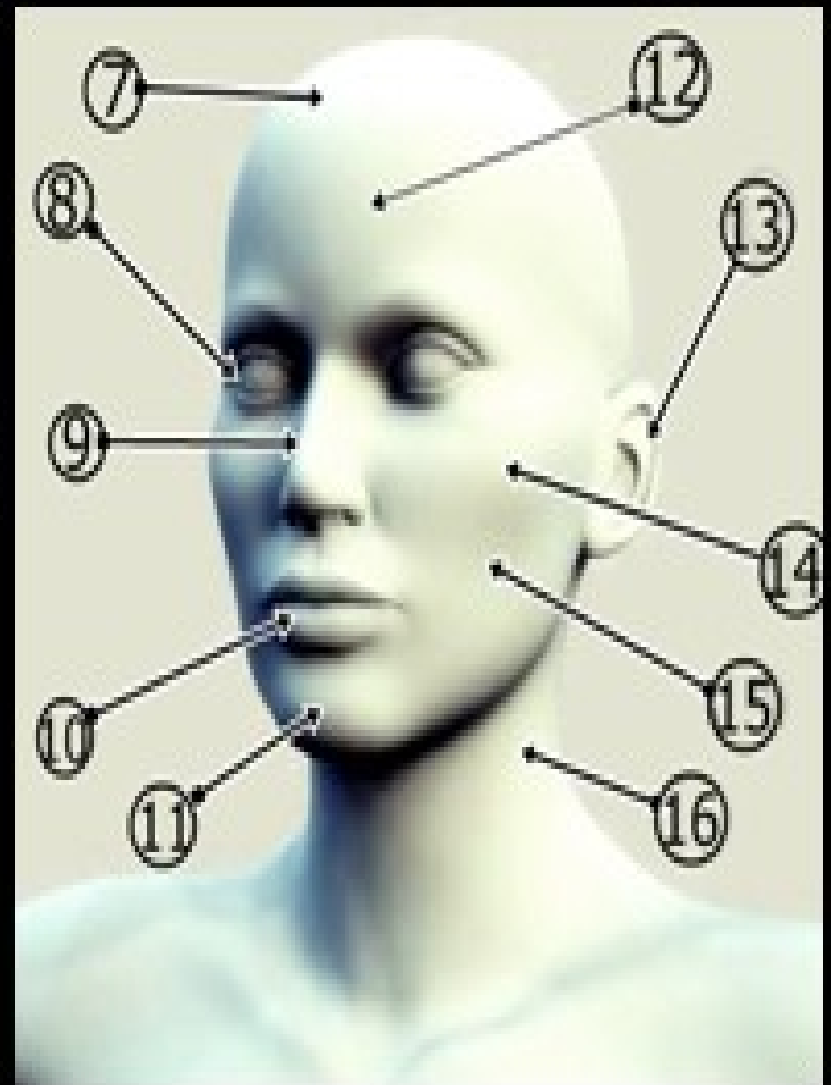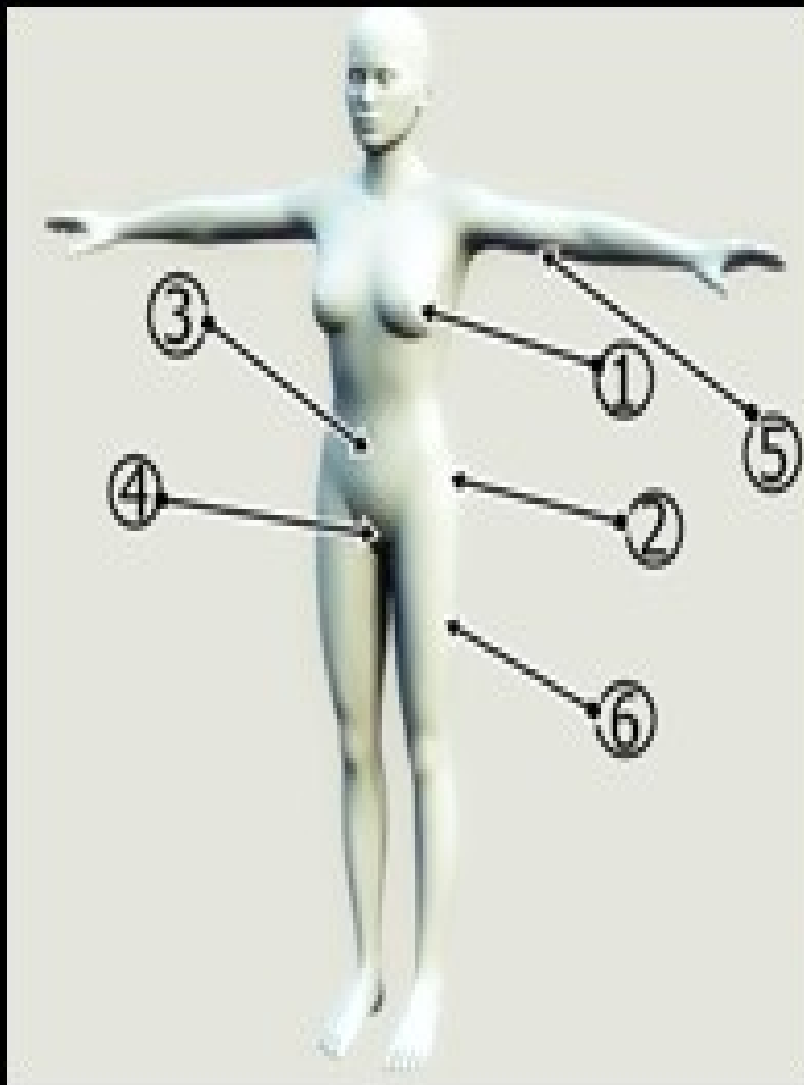
- multidimensional scaling – INDSCAL
- factorial space
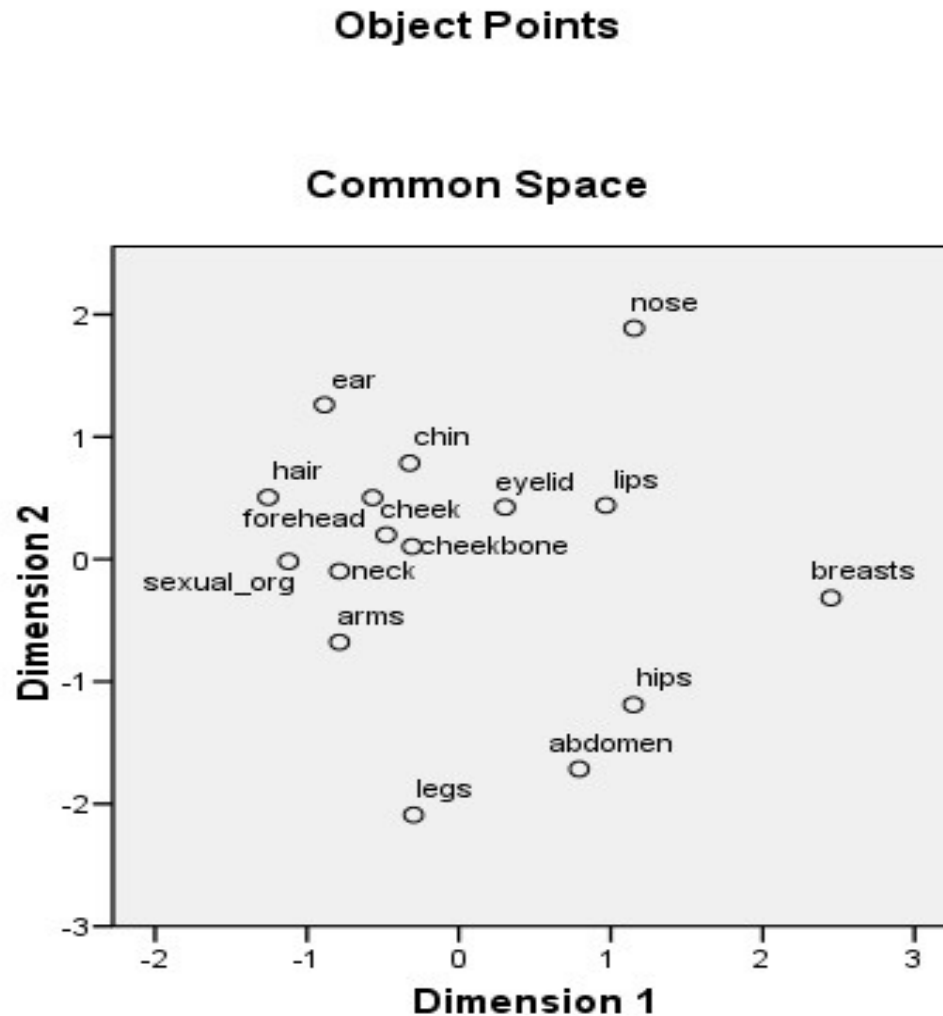
- Factor 1 (horizontal): *Most extreme body parts*

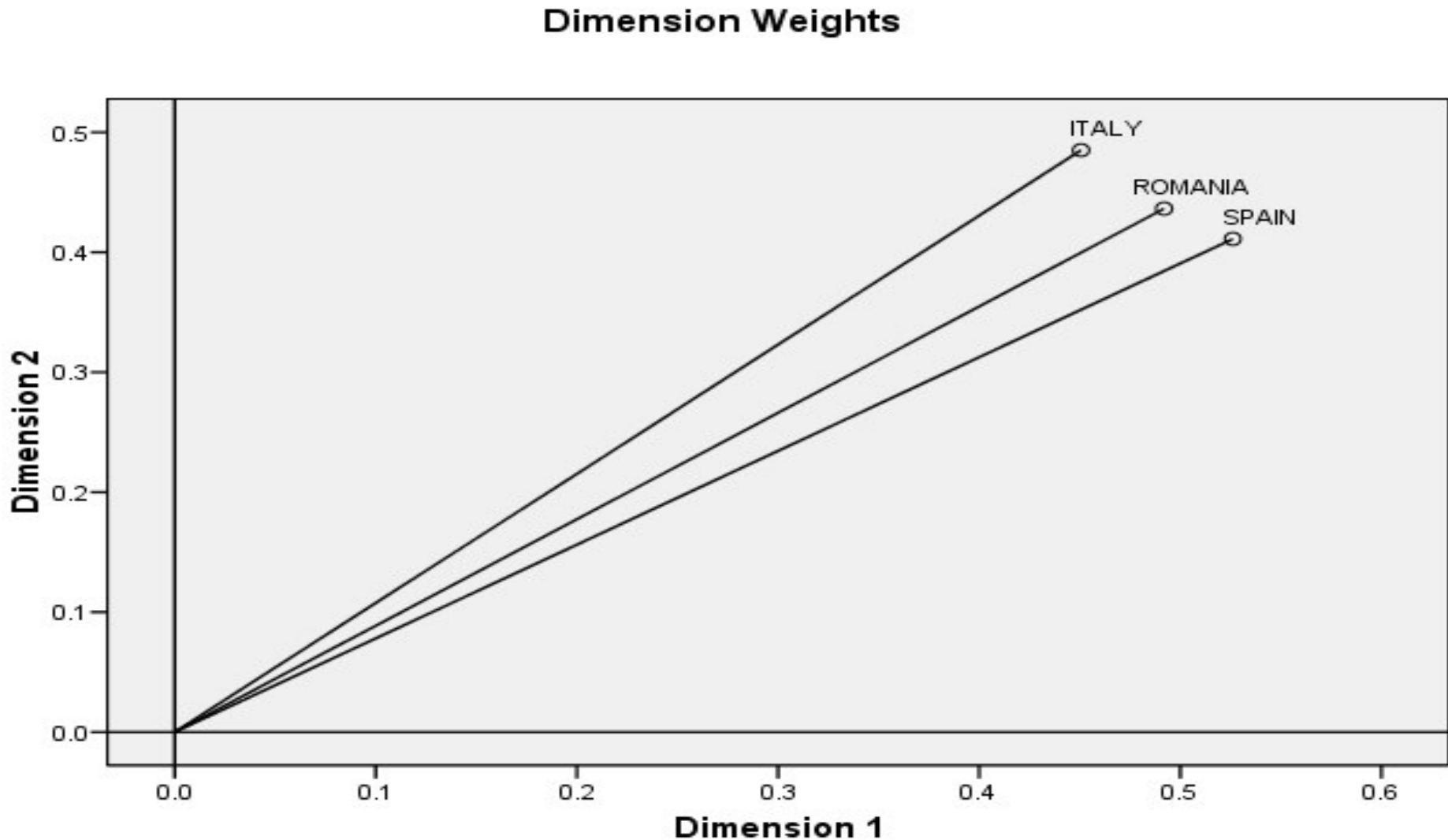| *Negative semi-axis*	*Positive semi-axis*
Hair Forehead Ear Sexual organs	Breasts Nose Lips Hips Abdomen

"*popularity of cosmetic interventions*"

- Factor 2 (vertical):

Negative semi-axis	Positive semi-axis
Legs Abdomen Hips	Nose Ear Chin

"*body position*"

Dimension weights of the two MDS factors in each of the three national samples

Dimension Weights

- *Italian sample: second factor -* the importance of the interpersonal dimension in the social representation of beauty
  - Split of the body in two major areas: the face and the rest
  - the face as the locus of interpersonal attraction
- *Spanish and Romanian samples: first factor*
  - internalization of the "order of priorities" in the media, social modeling of aesthetic surgery

- The structural approach allows the schematic articulation between related SRs belonging to the same representational field (feminine & masculine beauty – aesthetic surgery) – „nested" SRs

- *STUDY 3. Communication and Social Representations in the aesthetic surgery internet forums contents*

- ***Aims*** extraction of several frames in which aesthetic surgery is conceived

- to explore the relationships between the Social Representations of beauty and that of aesthetic surgery in each such frame

- the communication dynamics involving the various positions on the topic

- number of web sites:
- health or beauty issues, from 2008 to 2010
- Italy: 7 web sites - 117 replies given by 78 participants;
- Spain: 6 web sites - 129 replies given by 85 participants'
- Romania: 7 web sites - 146 replies given by 110 participants
- Data analysis: T-Lab software - "Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts" - hierarchical cluster analysis

Results

- 3 clusters
- The percentage distributions of cluster loads in each national sample

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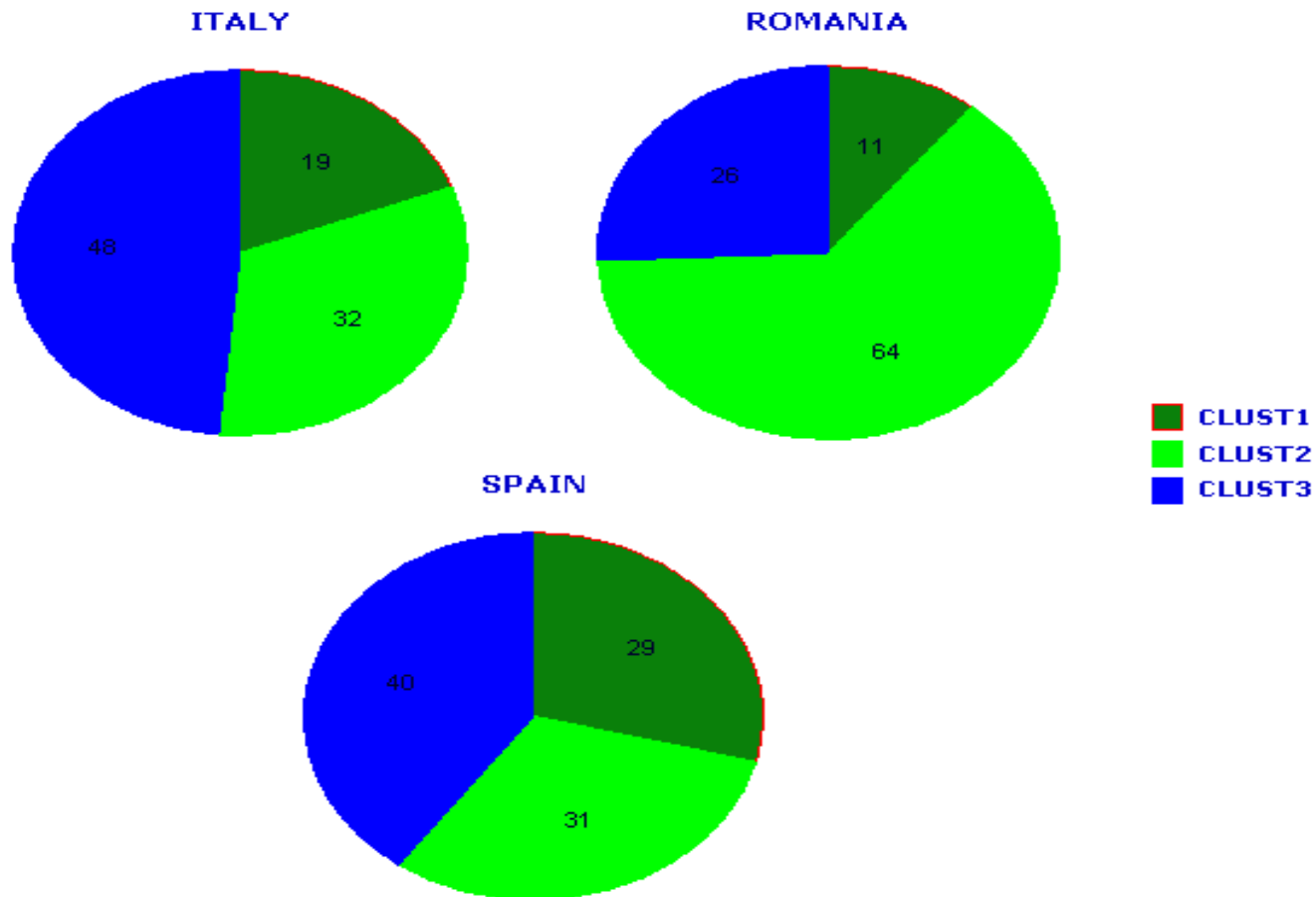
- Cluster 1: *man, people, understand, criticize, talk, question, appreciate*, *wrong* , *stupid*

- the social referents of the decisions to undergo aesthetic interventions, or to withhold from them

- debate on the defensibility and appropriateness of such interventions

Illustrations

- "I operated my breasts, it was something I did for myself and *not because I wanted to please men"*

- "your wife does what she feels that it's right for her in order to feel better. *There is nothing wrong with that!!!"*

- "I believe that people want to live their life the best way possible... and if one is *unsatisfied with her body*, she can change it/improve it to feel better about herself … *each of us has that right …"*

Suspicion - false social identity

- "Each age has its own beauty, some at 40 are *envious on younger women and they want to look like them*"

- "After just two years since her facial surgery, a lady who was once beautiful is sorry about it... she is now crying because her fiancé left her tired of pretending that he loved her … *it was her fault because she pretended to be a young lady although she was almost sixty …*"

Cluster 2

- major split between the two frames: descriptive and judgmental

- descriptive and neutral discourse on aesthetic surgery, both in the medical array (*breast, small, implant, doctor, inject, lip, operation, enlargement, large, silicone*), as well as financial (*price*).

- Other two components (*God* and *nature*) invoke fundamental criteria of *judging* the decisions to have aesthetic surgery

Illustrations

Descriptive frame

- "*I have a smaller nose and its better fitted with my face.*"

- "I have small breasts, *and I can't wear many blouses, because they are too large on my breasts*. I wish to increase my breasts by a number. Will I be able to breastfeed when I will want to have a baby? What is the recovery period?"

Judgmental frame

- "I'm strongly against aesthetic surgery because if somebody does it, it means that she is not deserving of all the good things that nature gave her, that for her it's *only the exterior that matters, the appearances*."

- "*Ordinary women don't have the money or the time for something like this.*"

- "For God's sake, it is not normal anymore to accept so much rubber and Botox and VIPs *becoming monsters*"

Naturalness of beauty

- "between a natural beautiful breast and a beautifully operated breast *I prefer the natural one*, there is no comparison... ".

Cluster 3

- personal cost/benefits analysis, in terms of personal sources of the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery (*flaw, wrinkle, mirror, eliminate*), its potential individual consequences (*pain, scar*), as well as positive references to it, also in a personal frame (*love, great, enjoy*).

Personal frame

- "It's more a problem that I have with *myself*; I don't see *myself* beautiful even if I have a boyfriend who loves me. it's a problem with *myself*, although that are more important problems in life, anyway, it is difficult to live every day not liking what you see *in the mirror*."

- "our body is *similar to our home*, when you need a plumber you hire one"

- "there are also people who need a helping hand *in order to feel good about them* and why not take advantage of that."

Costs in personal identity

- "I would never have the guts to operate myself, *my breasts are flat but they are mine*"

- `"I think even flaws make us *unique* as they talk about " our life story "

4. Organ donation – moral underpinnings

- high public awareness can coexist with low intentions to donate (Morgan & Miller, 2002)

- several studies reveal very low or even null effects of attitudes on donation intentions (e.g. Feeley & Servoss, 2005)

- positive attitudes toward organ donation are already prevailing, in spite of low organ donation rates

- This paradox can not be accommodated within the dominant theoretical framework – reasoned action theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)
- The SR approach allows the extraction of opposing frameworks of meaning and the understanding of the nature of such dialecticism

- Organ donation – **moral contradictions**
- Saving lives, helping other, manifesting social solidarity
- Harming the donor, violating religious norms and the purity / wholeness of the body (the body as a collection of separate parts), negative emotions stemming from the confrontation with mortality

- First aim: to study the ways in which organ donation is represented (its central core) by people differing in their Moral Foundations

- Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Joseph 2004) – 5 psycho-moral foundations (care/harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, purity)

- Psychological preparedness to notice and to approve or disapprove of particular aspects of situations or issues

- Second, organ donation tends to be publically portrayed in positive term

- *The normative* positive response to organ donation is positive: noble idea, worthwhile altruistic act – defined in terms of values and societal outcomes

- Those refusing donation should find ways to rationalize their decision in order to avoid the costs in social identity

- *Moral disengagement* - Bandura, 1991
- 8 strategies in which a negative act can be rationalized (in which the individual morally disengages from his act)

- Empathy – contradictory results in what regards its influence
  - O.d. generates multiple emotions