

# Fatima Regina Machado

Fatima Regina Machado is a Brazilian psychologist with a special interest in poltergeist phenomena and the psychological and psychosocial implications for experiencers of psychic phenomena.

## Career

Fatima Regina Machado gained a PhD in social psychology from the University of Sao Paulo (2004-2009) on the topic of anomalous experiences, and an earlier PhD in communication and semiotics (with a dissertation about a semiotic analysis of poltergeist cases) from the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo (1997-2003). The latter included four months as a research scholar at the Centre for Applied Semiotics at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Machado held a post-doctoral internship in the Religious Studies (CRE) Program at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, with a focus on the empirical studies of religion, including an understanding of post-graduate level (religious studies) attitudes to the science-religion relationship.

Machado is a collaborating professor in the graduate program in social psychology at the University of Sao Paulo's Institute of Psychology. She is currently a researcher at the Social Psychology of Religion Laboratory and a co-coordinator and scientific director of Inter Psi – Laboratory of Psychosocial Studies 'Belief, Subjectivity, Culture & Health', (formerly Laboratory of Anomalistic Psychology and Psychosocial Processes), an active research centre with over a dozen academics. She is an affiliate of the Parapsychology Foundation and served as a board member of the Parapsychological Association (2015-2016).

The focus of Machado's research has been trying to understand the cognitive aspects of psi experiences, especially in relation to the field of semiotics (which is the study of signs and how they signify or, in other words, highlight processes of signification). More recently, Machado has focused on the psychology of religion, promoting an interdisciplinary perspective motivated by the Brazilian understanding of psi and anomalous experiences as religious experiences. Recently, she has become interested in clinical aspects related to anomalous experiences: differential diagnosis, counselling and training of psychologists to deal with these experiences in clinical practice.

## Surveying Brazilian Parapsychology

In a special edition of the *Journal of Parapsychology*, Machado and Zangari survey past and present activities in Brazilian parapsychology and look towards its future. They point out that in Brazil the term 'parapsychology' is associated with traditional healers and spiritual teachers rather than science, which has encouraged antipathy towards the subject in Brazilian universities. However, parapsychology is becoming more receptive to the study of anomalistic psychology, which attempts to explain ostensibly paranormal phenomena in terms of psychological processes.

This enables researchers to study putative psychic experiences, while encouraging students to do experimental studies that can be related to the investigation of ontological aspects of anomalous phenomena.

Machado and Zangari predict widespread growth of anomalistic psychology throughout Brazil, with programs incorporating Western-style psi research as well, noting plans by current USP graduate students to continue in the field when they have obtained their qualifications.[1](#) [2](#)

## **Inter Psi - Laboratory of Psychosocial Studies 'Belief, Subjectivity, Culture & Health'**

[Inter Psi - Laboratory of Psychosocial Studies 'Belief, Subjectivity, Culture & Health'](#) at the University of Sao Paulo is an active research centre with participation by more than a dozen academics. Areas of research include

- psychology of belief, religiosity and spirituality
- psychology of beliefs, anomalistic psychology and basic psychosocial processes
- perspective of cognitive science of religion regarding belief
- hypnosis, altered states of consciousness, belief and culture
- epistemological, methodological and theoretical implications of the psychology of beliefs
- anomalous experiences for social psychology
- anomalous/religious experiences and health

Staff teach at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, giving an introduction to anomalistic psychology, hypnosis and altered states of consciousness, and the psychology of religion.

## **Transliminality**

Machado took part in a group investigation of the validity of a standard measurement of transliminality (the ease with which information enters consciousness from the internal and external environment) across different cultures. Machado and co-workers administered a Portuguese version of the revised transliminality scale (RTS) to an online sample of 341 university students, starting with those at the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo. The Brazilian measures correlated nearly perfectly with the estimates derived from earlier research. A few differences relating to age and sex did not impact the estimates of overall transliminality levels. The results were seen as supporting the robustness of current transliminality measurements, and serving as a guide to advance further cross-cultural research into understanding transliminality.[3](#)

## **Psychology and Religion**

Machado, Zangari and co-authors composed an accessible guide (in question and answer format) on the relationship between psychology and religion, including the historical aspects of religious experiences. Questions were based on responses

received from members of the general public who wanted to understand their anomalous experiences.

Frequently, anomalous experiences are interpreted as religious. The intention was to produce material that would lead to a reduction in the existing gap regarding the training of psychologists in aspects of religiosity and spirituality, where spirituality refers to what gives meaning to life (not to the spiritual world) and is not necessarily related to religious motivations. The authors express the hope that an understanding of how these themes are interwoven will lead to an enhanced professional practice in psychology.[4](#)

## **Religious Attitudes About Science**

Machado and co-authors probed scientific sentiments among followers of Brazilian religious groups and the factors that influenced them, such as family and school education. The researchers ran a quantitative cross-sectional study using the Belief in Science Scale, also an original questionnaire investigating the perspectives of religious people towards science, distilled from responses from 309 individuals from different religious affiliations. Results displayed a greater propensity for disbelief in science than the general population, despite a recognition of the importance of science for society, and a general consensus that there is no irreconcilable conflict between science and religion. More exhaustive analyses revealed significant differences between religious affiliations in their levels of affinity towards science.[5](#)

## **Further Doctoral Work on Anomalous Experiences**

Machado's second PhD focused on verifying the prevalence and psychosocial relevance of anomalous experiences. Her aim was to understand underlying demographics, practices, beliefs, religiosity and levels of subjective well-being among those who experienced anomalous experiences and those who did not. She solicited questionnaire responses from 306 university students aged between 18 and 66 years. Overall, 83% of respondents experienced at least one psi experience, a clear majority indicating that such experiences influenced their attitudes, beliefs and decision making. No significant difference was seen between experiencers and non-experiencers as regards gender, income, marital status, religious adherence, religiosity and mental health status, but experiencers were more open to psi experiences than non-experiencers. Machado concludes that these trends need to be considered by psychologists in their professional practice and investigated in future studies.[6](#)

## **Healing Intention**

Machado and Zangari collaborated with American parapsychologist Dean Radin on two double-blind experiments that explored the effects of healing intention directed towards a distant person. Physiological measurements included the distant person's respiration, heart rate, fingertip blood volume, and spontaneous electrodermal activity. Experimental sessions were divided into 20 randomly counterbalanced one minute 'treatment' and control trials. In the first experiment,

the influence of a group's distant mental influence was directed towards isolated participants 200 meters away. The second experiment investigated the ability of Umbanda mediums to direct their healing intentions from Sao Paulo, Brazil towards volunteers who had been monitored two months earlier in Las Vegas. So this was a retroactive healing study probing time displacement healing effects rather than in real time. Overall results indicated marginally significant effects of influence ( $p = 0.053$ ) in the first experiment and significant effects of retroactive mental influence in the second ( $p = 0.013$ ).<sup>7</sup>

## Women in Parapsychology

In 2022, Machado published an article in a [special issue](#) of the *Journal of Anomalistics*, in which she describes her experiences as a female academic working in Brazilian paranormal research. Despite an absence of gender-based salary disparities, she is aware of gender bias, particularly when collaborating with her husband [Wellington Zangari](#). She advocates for partnerships between male and female researchers in academia and underscores the importance of gender equality and visibility, both in language and presentations.<sup>8</sup>

Michael Duggan

## Literature

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#) Zangari & Machado (2012).
- [2.](#) Machado & Zangari (2001).
- [3.](#) Lange et al. (2018).
- [4.](#) Zangari & Machado (2018).
- [5.](#) Machado et al .(2019).
- [6.](#) Machado (2010).
- [7.](#) Radin et al. (2002).
- [8.](#) Machado (2022).

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