

Explanations about Poverty Origin According to Professional Training Area

Explicaciones sobre el origen de la pobreza según área de formación profesional

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Summary

The way in which individuals and groups explain poverty shapes how they relate to it. This paper inquires the beliefs of university students about the causes of poverty and analyses the relation of these beliefs with their professional training area. An assessment instrument that considers three type of attributions -individualist, socio-structural and fatalistic-, was administered to a sample of 448 advanced university students belonging to nine social sciences programs, aged between 19 and 42 years ($M = 22.92$; $SD = 3.12$). The results obtained indicate important variations in the explanations about poverty according to the professional training area. Students of economic sciences emphasized the importance of individual factors, psychology and law students tended to mixed explanations and sociology students showed a wide preference for socio-structural causes over individual and fatalistic causes. The implications of attributional process in the behavior of these future professionals towards economically disadvantaged populations are discussed.

Keywords: Attributional Process; University Students; Academic Training; Poverty.

Resumen

La manera en que las personas y grupos explican la pobreza condiciona cómo se relacionan con ella. El presente trabajo indaga las explicaciones sobre el origen de la pobreza de estudiantes universitarios y analiza la relación de este posicionamiento con su área de formación profesional. Se administró un instrumento de evaluación que considera tres tipos de atribuciones -individualista, socioestructural y fatalista- a una muestra de 448 estudiantes universitarios avanzados de nueve carreras de ciencias sociales, con edades entre 19 y 42 años ($M = 22.92$; $DT = 3.12$). Los resultados obtenidos indican importantes variaciones en las explicaciones de la pobreza según área de formación profesional. Estudiantes de ciencias económicas enfatizaron la importancia de los factores individuales, estudiantes de psicología y abogacía tendieron a explicaciones mixtas y estudiantes de sociología mostraron una amplia preferencia por las causas socioestructurales. Se discuten las implicancias de los procesos atribucionales en las actuaciones de estos futuros profesionales hacia poblaciones en desventaja económica.

Palabras clave: Procesos atribucionales; Estudiantes universitarios; Formación académica; Pobreza.

Introduction

In general, people tend to explain their own success as a consequence of their individual virtues or attributes, such as intelligence, will or perseverance, whereas when it comes to failures, they tend to find the causes in external factors, such as circumstances, other people or bad luck (Carr, 1996; Jones & Nisbett, 1972). According to the attribution theory, the first group of factors is known as "dispositional factors" and the second group as "situational factors" (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). This theory starts with the contributions of social psychologist Fritz Heider (1958) who sought to understand how people explain behavior, both their own and others, and life events. In this regard, Ross (1977) described that there is a general tendency to overestimate the importance of personal or dispositional factors and underestimate environmental influences; this tendency is known as fundamental attribution error or correspondence bias.

When it comes to causal attributions of poverty, reference is made to the predominant judgments established by an individual or group as the reason for poverty and the characteristics of its principal actors (Dakduk, González & Malavé, 2010). Feagin (1972, 1975) used Heider's (1958) theory of attributional processes to understand how individuals and groups explain poverty. This author, in his well-known study, asked 1017 U.S. citizens to qualify a list of possible causes of poverty, and then categorized their responses into individual, structural, or fatalistic factors. The first group of factors refers to the characteristics of the person and his personality, such as lack of motivation, skill, or effort. The second group attributes poverty to situational

factors, such as an unfair or unequal system of government, low wages, poor access to quality education and health. Finally, fatalistic-type attributions refer to variables that surpass us as individuals and society, such as fate, bad luck, or God's will (Feagin, 1972). From such a study and for the following two decades, similar studies with large samples were carried out in countries of different continents, such as Australia (Feather, 1974), India (Pandey, Prakash, Sinha & Triparthi, 1982) and the United Kingdom (Furnham, 1982).

A renewed interest in the attributional processes was driven mainly by Bernard Weiner's studies, who, together with his team, explained how the causal attributions affect our emotions and behaviors. A series of experiments showed that there is a greater tendency to help and feel positive emotions toward a person when his problem is attributed to external causes, rather than if it is related to internal characteristics of the individual (Weiner, 1980; Zucker & Weiner, 1993). Although the research studies on this line of work were initially carried out on obesity, disability and alcohol abuse problems (DeJong, 1980; Weiner, 1980), later research studies were aimed at understanding behavior and feelings based on explanations about poverty (Zucker & Weiner, 1993).

Emphasis has been placed on the social and collective nature of these attributions, taking into account how social thought conditions the social relations between individuals and groups of individuals, as well as the relations they establish with reality (Hewstone & Agoustinos, 1998). From this place, the way how society is represented to poverty conditions how it relates to it (Bayon, 2015). The predominance of the individualistic attribution in certain societies can lead to stigmatizing and blaming the poor, since they are responsible for their own reality; neither the State nor the society, in general, should take charge of their situation (Bayon, 2015; Campbell, Carr, & MacLachlan, 2001; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson & Tagler, 2001). According to Goffman (1970), this stigma implies the identification and labeling of the group as a group of lesser value, discredits it from social acceptability, and judges it as incapable; this makes them targets of discrimination and social exclusion. Likewise, the perception of poverty plays a key role in maintaining inequality, for example, in the delimitation of the frontiers of State intervention (Lepianka, Gelissen & van Oorschot, 2010). That is, the support for social assistance plans or programs or certain social policies may be conditioned by the perception of the target social groups of these policies (Bullock, Williams & Limbert, 2003; van Oorschot & Halman, 2000).

Likewise, studies indicate that when structural or external attributions predominate, it is possible to recognize the position of the poor as unfavorable in the social structure (van Oorschot & Halman, 2000; Paugam, 2007; Reidpath, Chan, Gifford & Allotey, 2005). This reason implies the duty of the State to respond to inequality in order to achieve social justice (Bayon, 2015). From this perspective, it is possible to deal with the stigmatization and discrimination of the poor by proposing the inclusion and valorization of this disadvantaged social group. Vázquez and Panadero (2009) consider the role of the causal attributions of poverty to be of the utmost importance in the formation of the attitudes of the individuals and the response strategies they use to deal with the problems. They influence the expectations, emotions, and behaviors people have toward these social groups, and that impact the policies and relations with them (Smith & Stone, 1989).

In addition to the causal attributions of poverty, it is worth mentioning other variables, considered psychosocial or ideological, that have been studied by political psychology in its function of maintaining current inequalities (see Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Among them are identified, for example, the orientation to social dominance (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994), the authoritarianism of the right wing (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996, 1998) and the belief in a fair world (Lerner, 1965, 1980). Research studies report that the higher the levels of the variables mentioned above, the greater the tendency to privilege the individual causal attributions over the socio-structural ones (e.g., Bullock et al., 2001; Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Furnham, 1982, 2003; Gatica, Martini, Dreizik & Imhoff, 2017).

It is strongly documented that the patterns of explanation about the origin of poverty differ according to different socio-demographic variables, such as age, sex, religion, educational level, social class, ethnic group, region of residence, among others. However, scarce bibliography is found on the variation in the explanations according to the type of formal education received for future professional practice. Among the background found, there are several studies in different countries on the causal attributions of poverty with university students of the same program (e.g., Nasser & Abouchedid, 2001; Reyna and Reparaz, 2014; Vázquez and Panadero, 2009). Some studies compare the perspectives of the students of the same program in different stages of their education (Guimond et al., 1989; Schwartz and Robinson, 1991), and others follow up the same group of students throughout their formal undergraduate education (Gasker & Vafeas, 2003; Guimond & Palmer, 1990; Weaver and Yun, 2011). However, it is observed that few studies analyze the differences according to the professional education area of the students (Guimond, Begin & Palmer, 1989; Ljubotina & Ljubotina, 2007; Sun, 2001; Weiss, 2006), and when this analysis is the subject matter of the study, it is carried out almost exclusively on students of the social work program, without taking into account other programs. Therefore, the originality of this study lies in comparing the profiles of the advanced university students from nine majors in social sciences, and discussing the consequences and scope of these findings.

Another general characteristic noted in the background is that the samples do not include citizens of Latin American countries. In this regard, a comprehensive review article confirms Harper's (2003) critique by showing that "the most significant research contributions in this field have been made in developed countries where poor people are minority groups of their populations" (Dakduk et al., 2010, p. 423). This study aims to make a contribution to this line of work by taking a sample in a developing country, in Latin America. Considered the most unequal region in the world and where 30.7% of the population lives below the poverty line (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016). Likewise, the sample chosen was composed of students of majors in social sciences, whose professional practice may contribute, directly or indirectly, to the reduction of poverty.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study used an intentional, non-probability sampling. It had the participation of 448 students, aged 19 - 42 ($M = 22.92$; $TD = 3.12$), of which 69.2% ($n = 310$) were females. In this group, 3.1% ($n = 14$) self-identified as pertaining to the lower class, 46% ($n = 206$) to the lower-middle class, 45.3% ($n = 203$) to the upper-middle class, 0.4% ($n = 2$) to the upper class, and 5.1% ($n = 23$) did not report their social class. In order for the participating students to have received an important formal education in their professional area, the third-, fourth- and fifth-year classes of the different undergraduate programs were included.

The students were studying majors in Social Sciences, 60.9% ($n = 273$) from a private university, and 39.1% ($n = 175$) from a public university in San Juan, Argentina. The programs of the public university include: Social Work ($n = 58$), Social Communication ($n = 38$), Sociology ($n = 20$), Political Sciences ($n = 20$), and Law ($n = 36$); and, of the private university: Business Administration ($n = 43$), Accounting ($n = 41$), Human Resources ($n = 56$), and Psychology ($n = 136$).

The participants were informed that the questionnaires they were going to fill in were part of a scientific-empirical study, and that anonymity would be respected at all times. The questionnaires were applied individually, within the classrooms, and without time limit. Care was taken to ensure that the participants did not share their answers or their opinions about the statements in the instrument. At least two researchers were present in the data collection. After collecting the data, the participants were provided a detailed explanation of the research objectives. The data gathered were processed using SPSS software version 20.

Instrument

This paper used an adaptation to Spanish and to the Argentinean context, made by Gatica et al. (2017), of the scale of Bullock et al. (2003). It has shown appropriate psychometric properties in its application to Cordovan university students, in its three subscales: individual ($\alpha = .92$), socio-structural ($\alpha = .84$), and fatalistic ($\alpha = .68$). It is a self-administered questionnaire with five-point Likert-type answers that presents the following triggering statement: "Think for a moment why you think people are poor. Here is a list of possible causes of poverty. Please mark the importance of each as a cause of poverty, being 1 ('nothing important') and 5 ('very important'). The list contains 32 causes organized in three dimensions and distributed randomly: 12 items of individual attributions (e.g., "lack of motivation and laziness"), 15 socio-structural items (e.g., "an economic system that promotes competition over cooperation"), and 7 fatalistic items (e.g., "just bad luck"). The items in each subscale are averaged to provide a total score where a higher score indicates that more attributions of this type are made. The instrument also included a section aimed at looking into other information, such as age, gender, self-perceived social class, university program, and year of study.

Results

A first descriptive analysis of the data reports the overall mean of each dimension for the total sample. The factors considered most important to explaining poverty by the social sciences students surveyed were the socio-structural factors ($M = 3.64$, $DT = 0.64$), followed by the individual factors ($M = 3.22$, $DT = 0.99$) and, finally, by the fatalistic factors ($M = 1.48$, $DT = 0.60$). However, the explanations about poverty vary according to the professional education area. The graphical representation of these results in Table 1 and Figure 1 shows an important variation in the scores with respect to the individual factors (range 1.65 to 4.00; diff: 2.35), while there are no significant differences in the socio-structural factors (range 3.31 to 4.19; diff: 0.88), and, even less, in the fatalistic factors (range 1.13 to 1.67; diff: 0.54). It should also be noted that in the nine programs being studied in this research work, the mean of the socio-structural causes exceeds the midpoint of the scale or theoretical mean ($TM = 3.0$). The above reflects the general agreement of all respondents on the strong influence of the socio-structural factors on poverty and the weak effect of the fatalistic factors, while there is a great disagreement with respect to the weight of the individual factors.

Table 1.
Causal attributions by type of professional education

| Program | <i>M (DT)</i> | | |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|
| | Individual | Socio-structural | Fatalistic |
| Business Management | 4.00 (0.56) | 3.31 (0.56) | 1.67 (0.62) |
| Accounting | 4.00 (0.62) | 3.35 (0.56) | 1.51 (0.49) |
| Human Resources | 3.54 (0.78) | 3.42 (0.62) | 1.70 (0.67) |
| Psychology | 3.37 (0.7) | 3.58 (0.55) | 1.52 (0.63) |
| Law | 3.30 (0.99) | 3.63 (0.66) | 1.27 (0.52) |
| Social Communication | 3.19 (1.08) | 3.88 (0.74) | 1.39 (0.72) |
| Political Science | 2.31 (0.75) | 3.86 (0.5) | 1.48 (0.48) |
| Social Work | 2.25 (0.79) | 4.02 (0.63) | 1.29 (0.44) |
| Sociology | 1.65 (0.43) | 4.19 (0.44) | 1.13 (0.28) |

The participating respondents, according to their major, seem to tend to explain poverty by taking any of the following three positions: i) Students who give greater relative importance to the individual factors than to the socio-structural factors (difference < 1); ii) Students who have

a slight preference toward the socio-structural factors over the individual factors (difference < 1); iii) Students who have a strong preference toward the socio-structural factors over the individual factors (difference > 1.5). With respect to the fatalistic factors, there are no significant variations according to the university program studied.

The students of the first group study majors in economic sciences, such as business administration, accounting, and human resources. Business management and accounting notably have the same score regarding the individual factors ($M = 4.00$), showing a slight difference in the socio-structural ($M = 3.31$ and $M = 3.35$, respectively) and fatalistic ($M = 1.67$ and $M = 1.51$, respectively) factors. The similarity of both profiles can be explained by sharing not only the same school, but also two years of basic education, studying the same subjects. It should be noted that for the students of both programs the influence of the individual factors on the poverty situation is greater than in any of the other groups ($M = 4.00$). On the other hand, although human resources students are included in this first group because they assess the individual factors ($M = 3.54$) over the socio-structural factors ($M = 3.42$), it is observed a smaller gap between both factors. Probably, the differences are due to the fact that the Human Resources program is offered in a School other than that of the Accounting and Business Management programs. In addition, the Human Resources program shares part of the faculty with the Psychology program, the profile to which it is most similar.

The second group is made up of the programs of psychology, law, and social communication, with the social communication students showing a wider difference in the weighting of the socio-structural factors ($M = 3.88$) over the individual factors ($M = 3.19$). Among the nine programs studied, those with a greater tendency to mixed explanations, by giving fairly equivalent importance to the individual and socio-structural factors, are Psychology ($M = 3.37$ and $M = 3.58$, respectively), and Law ($M = 3.30$ and $M = 3.63$, respectively) and, as previously mentioned, Human Resources ($M = 3.54$ and $M = 3.42$, respectively).

Finally, the students of the third group are of the programs of political science, social work, and sociology. Among these programs, Political Science and Social Work share very similar scores with a preference of roughly 1.5 points more for the socio-structural factors over the individual factors, while Sociology shows a difference of 2.54 in favor of the socio-structural factors. Likewise, Sociology is the program, among the nine considered, that obtained extreme scores in the three factors, with the maximum score in socio-structural causes ($M = 4.19$), and the minimum score in the individual ($M = 1.65$) and fatalistic causes ($M = 1.13$).

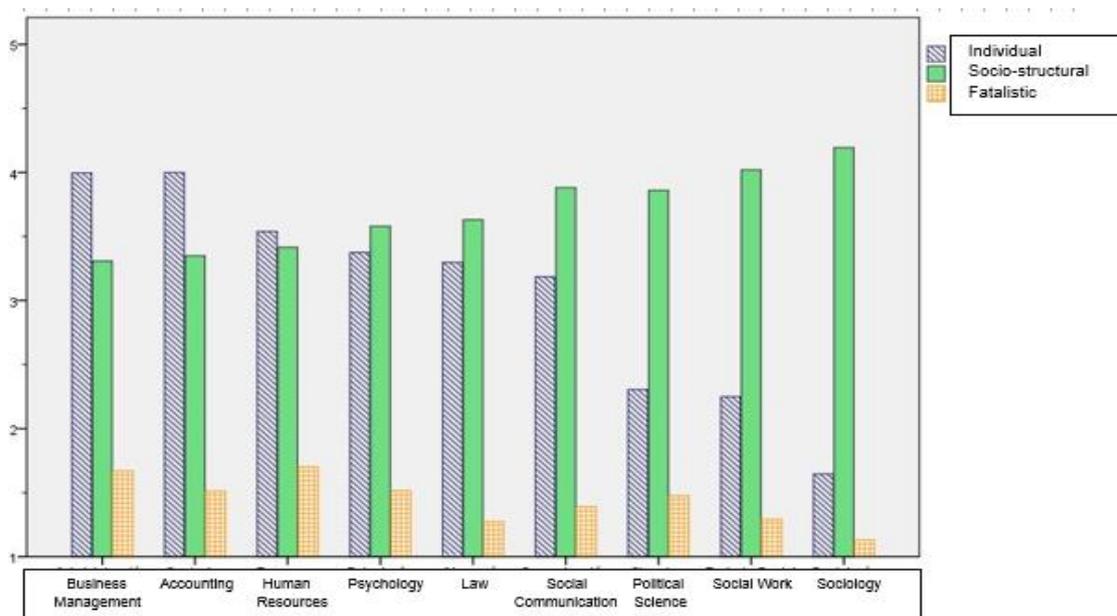


Figure 1. Causal attributions by type of professional education

Likewise, the attributional differences according to self-perceived social class were analyzed, as shown in Table 2. Due to the limited number of students who positioned themselves in the upper class ($n = 2$) and the lower class ($n = 14$), the four original social class categories were recoded and grouped into two values: upper and upper-middle class ($n = 208$), and lower and lower-middle class ($n = 217$). Both groups place the socio-structural factors above the others, although important differences are observed in the importance given to individual factors. That is, the upper and upper-middle class students value individual explanations ($M = 3.44$, $DT = 0.94$) more than the lower and lower-middle class students ($M = 2.97$, $DT = 1.00$), with statistically significant differences ($t = 4.94$, $g.l. = 414$, bilateral significance .000).

Table 2.
Attributions by social class

| Factors | Total ($n = 425$) | | Upper and Upper-Middle Class ($n = 208$) | | Lower and Lower-Middle Class ($n = 217$) | | T Value |
|------------------|---------------------|------|--|------|--|------|---------|
| | Mean | DT | Mean | DT | Mean | DT | |
| Individual | 3.22 | 0.99 | 3.44 | 0.94 | 2.97 | 1.00 | 4.94*** |
| Socio-structural | 3.64 | 0.64 | 3.59 | 0.63 | 3.71 | 0.64 | -1.82 |
| Fatalistic | 1.48 | 0.60 | 1.43 | 0.49 | 1.50 | 0.68 | -1.08 |

*. $p < .05$ **. $P < .01$ ***. $P < .001$

Regarding gender, *Student's T-test* for independent samples showed that, while both the female and male genders attach greater importance to the socio-structural factors than to the others, there is a higher mean in this first group with a statistically significant difference ($t = -1.98$, $g.l. = 429$, bilateral significance 0.04). In addition, as shown in table 3, males score higher in fatalistic factors than females, also with significant differences ($t = 2.60$, $g.l. = 429$, bilateral significance 0.009). However, in both groups, no significant differences were found in the importance of the individual factors ($t = 0.24$, $g.l. = 429$, bilateral significance 0.81), where the mean difference is very narrow (.03).

Table 3.
Causal attributions by gender

| Factors | Total ($n = 448$) | | Male ($n = 133$) | | Female ($n = 304$) | | T Value |
|------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------|------|----------------------|------|---------|
| | Mean | DT | Mean | DT | Mean | DT | |
| Individual | 3.22 | 0.99 | 3.23 | 1.02 | 3.20 | 0.98 | 0.24 |
| Socio-structural | 3.64 | 0.64 | 3.55 | 0.7 | 3.68 | 0.61 | -1.98* |
| Fatalistic | 1.48 | 0.6 | 1.58 | 0.66 | 1.42 | 0.56 | 2.6** |

*. $p < .05$ **. $P < .01$ ***. $P < .001$

Finally, the internal consistency of the causal attributions of poverty scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated an acceptable index for the total scale ($\alpha = .76$). In turn, in each of the three subscales, the coefficient was excellent for individual attributions ($\alpha = .92$), good for socio-structural attributions ($\alpha = .83$), and less consistent internally for fatalistic attributions ($\alpha = .61$).

Discussion

Studies have shown that public opinion has a major impact on a nation's political agenda (Yeboah & Ernest, 2012). In developing countries, such as Argentina, overcoming poverty is one of the main concerns of governments, who generally have the support of the general public to tackle the problem before and after being elected. However, there is often disagreement about the design of public policies and resistance to their implementation. In this sense, knowing how society understands and explains poverty is important to design and implement strategies to fight against it. It is hoped that these studies will shed light on understanding the public opinion about the origin of poverty, helping political actors to achieve consensual state policies.

The results of this research show broad agreement in the explanation about poverty according to socio-structural causes, in the comparison both between professional profiles and between social classes. The opposite happens with the individual causes, where there is great disagreement, or with the fatalistic causes, which importance is very low. This suggests that those public policies that address and overcome socio-structural obstacles to equality could gain greater support than those aimed at overcoming a personal obstacle. Similarly, seeking social consensus in the communications about poverty, in official speeches, and in the media, could be favored by focusing on the socio-cultural factors rather than opening discussions about the role of the individual differences.

Furthermore, education can play a key role in raising awareness of the young members of the society about poverty (Denegri, Cabezas, Páez, Vargas & Sepúlveda, 2009). It is to be expected that during formal education, personal qualities necessary for being competent for the future professional practice will be acquired. In this sense, the study on the causal attributions of poverty in university students acquires special relevance since such variable influences the expectations, emotions, behaviors, and decisions toward economically disadvantaged populations. Even more so when it comes to social sciences students since, in the practice of most of these professions, making contact with people in poverty is part of everyday life. In this regard, Denegri et al. (2009) emphasize that making a critical judgment by university students regarding their own performance, both personal and professional, promotes the development of a social thought that is the basis of citizen participation. Progress made in this type of studies can be used to undertake actions in the professional education of young people that are focused on attitudes rather than on aptitudes to achieve greater professional efficiency against social vulnerability.

Finally, in agreement with Álvarez-Castillo, Corpas-Reina, and Corpas-Reina (2016), it is considered that these studies can make contributions to staff selection and promotion. Beyond the specific technical knowledge required for a position, the evaluation of behavioral and attitudinal aspects may reveal that the incorporation of certain professional profiles, or the assignment of greater responsibility through a new position may not be adequate for the task to be performed. That is, for example: May the psychologist's interventions in poverty contexts be more appropriate if they are focused on the individual and on abilities and competences the individual could develop to change his vulnerable situation? Or do these professionals seem to be better prepared attitudinally to intervene at State levels and in public policies? In this sense, these studies shed light on adequacy, and even interest (Weiss, 2006), to carry out micro or macro interventions, aimed at changing or modifying the individual or the system.

Since the first studies on causal attributions of poverty, social work-program students have often been the sample of these research studies. In general, the results have shown that these students tend to favor external factors rather than explanations based on characteristics of poor people (Cryns, 1977; Ljubotina & Ljubotina, 2007; Merdinger, 1982; Roff, Adams, and Klemmack, 1984; Sharwell, 1974; Schwartz and Robinson, 1991; Weaver & Yun, 2011; Sun 2001). In this respect, the results of this study are consistent, where the social work-program students show a clear preference for the socio-structural factors over the individual factors, with statistically significant differences. Likewise, the explanations about poverty according to

fatalistic factors are scarcely recurrent, as it happens in previously cited studies. A similar professional profile is observed in students of political sciences and sociology programs, although in the latter group, the gap between socio-structural and individual factors is even greater. With respect to the latter, no studies have been found that consider these students as samples to make comparisons with the findings presented in this article. The same limitations for the discussion of the results are presented with students of law and social communication programs.

Unlike social workers, research studies on psychology students do not present an unambiguous profile about the preference for any set of factors. Some background indicates a higher score on individual factors (Cozzarelli et al., 2001), while others on structural factors (Bobbio, Canova & Manganelli, 2010; Nasser, Singhal & Abouchedid, 2005). In the case of Argentina, it should be mentioned that historically, undergraduate education in psychology has been preponderantly oriented to private clinical practice of psychology, from an individual approach (Fierro and Di Doménico, 2017; Fierro, Di Doménico and Klappenbach, 2016). Based on this, it was hypothesized that psychologists would have explanations about poverty that would place both the problem and the solution in the individual, as usually happens in the clinical sphere, rather than having a contextual approach to the problem. However, the results showed that this group gives greater relative importance to the socio-structural factors over the individual factors, although with little difference. The question arises, for future studies, as to if there are differences in the profile of the psychologist in the aspect studied as an effect of the recent curricular modifications in the framework of the accreditation processes carried out in Argentina and in which the program in question participates since 2013. In the psychologist, openness to diverse areas or fields of professional practice, as well as interdiscipline, could encourage mixed explanations. That is that the same person conceives different causes, for example, giving similar importance to the individual and socio-structural factors. In view of this, it is worth asking whether resorting to mixed explanations can favor flexibility in the approaches to the contextual and individual differences.

With respect to students of economic sciences, accounting, and business management programs, there is a clear preference for the individual factors over others, with statistically significant differences. These findings are consistent with Yeboah and Ernest's (2012) study on marketing students who weighted the individual factors, and are different from the conclusions of Guimond et al. (1989) on management students who showed a preference for the socio-structural factors. However, it should be clarified that the longitudinal study of Guimond et al. (1989) is conducted on students preparing to enter university and in their first and second year in the program, while the sample of this research includes advanced year students, in their third, fourth and fifth year. In addition, Guimond et al. (1989) shows that, although preference for the socio-structural factors is always maintained, as students advance in the economic program, they increase the blame to the poor and the unemployed for their situation, while decreasing the blame to the system. This suggests that the formal education may have influenced the attitudes of the advanced year students surveyed.

With respect to the differences in the attribution process according to gender and social class, the results obtained agree with the conclusions of previous studies (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998; Cozzarelli et al., 2001; Hunt, 1996; Schwartz and Robinson, 1991; Sun, 2001). Women attach greater importance to structural causes, while they resort less to fatalistic factors than men. Furthermore, the results agree with some previous studies (e.g., Bullock, 1999; Hunt, 1996; Palomar & Cienfuegos, 2006) in that they point out that the favored social classes tend to show greater support for the individual factors than the disadvantaged classes. This could be associated with increased self-esteem, psychological well-being, among other psychological variables, when considering the economic situation as the result of one's own effort and/or some personal virtues.

The limitations of the study and proposals for future research are presented below. Although this study considered advanced year students in order to know the profile of these undergraduate students with respect to the attitudes toward the poor, it was not inquired to what

extent this profile is a consequence of formal education, or else, it is associated with a pre-existing perspective that is later reinforced by the university. Therefore, it is proposed to investigate the variable being studied, considering as a sample university applicants and students of different years of the university program, or experimental studies with a pre- and post-test design, to analyze a causal relationship between formal education and student attitudes. Moreover, it should be clarified that comparing the students by university is not part of the objectives of this study. However, it is recommended that future research studies consider this aspect when comparing groups of students of both universities, of the same program, to analyze the consequences of the type of education according to the type of public or private management.

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