Poverty and Discourse
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> One would like on the part of the psychologist a reversal of allegiance so that he [sic] endeavors to bring about a change in people who control the material resources of the world … Mehryar (1984, p. 166)

The Poverty of Psychology

Over 30 years ago Arthur Pearl wrote an article entitled "The poverty of psychology." In this, work, he commented that "psychologists as a group, along with other social scientists, have been guilty of refusing to accept the challenges that poverty presents to a society of unparalleled affluence" (Pearl, 1970, p. 348). Has the discipline learned? I will argue that it has not. In an earlier article, I argued that one of the reasons that the field had not contributed well to the fight against poverty was because of its overreliance on attribution theory, which was not adequate to the task (Harper, 1996). In that article I suggested that a discursive approach might avoid some of these problems. Whilst still arguing that research into poverty explanations needs to draw on a broader range of theoretical frameworks, I want to suggest now that research has also been (1) methodologically inadequate, by using questionnaire measures and correlation designs, and (2) politically unaware, by focusing mainly on students or the general public (see also, Aus-Thai Project Team, this volume). From (1) and (2), I will develop a critique of the attribution paradigm. Next, I will sketch out research questions suggested by one alternative, that of *critical discursive psychology*. One implication of such an approach is that research needs to focus on different target groups.

Methodological Inadequacy

Individualism (Instead of Collectivism). A pervasive individualism characterises much of the poverty-explanation literature. There are different varieties of individualism, but in this literature it is the "individual as explainer" who is the unit of analysis. This means that organisational explanations are not examined. As a result a whole area of potential research materials such as government press releases, ministerial statements, political manifestos, multinational corporation strategies, and annual reports, are ignored. Thus, political and ethical ideologies implicit, for example, in the belief-in-a-just-world literature (Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Equity) are reduced to individualistic concepts of attribution style (Furnham & Procter, 1989). In one sense however, this individualism is a false one since

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most of the studies compare statistical "group" means rather than individual scores in an attempt to define abstract factors.

Rigidity (Instead of Flexibility). Another problem with attribution accounts is that they assume the existence of underlying attribution structures that remain stable over time and across situations. Even research studies like those in Heaven (1994) and in Muncer and Gillen (1995), which attempt to examine the complexity of explanations, still rest on an essentially stable abstract causal network. Yet even slight changes in the wording and context of paper-and-pencil questions can lead to great differences in participant responses (Schuman & Presser, 1981). Adrian Furnham (this volume) is a major contributor to the literature on this topic. He has noted that explanations for poverty may be used variably according to which poor "target group" is specified (Furnham, 1982; Furnham & Procter, 1989).

Mono-causal (Instead of Pluralistic). People not only use different explanations for different target groups; they also use different explanations in different contexts. A factor analysis conducted by Harper et al. (1990) found that many of the items of the CTWPQ (Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire), for example those relating to "natural" causes like climate, loaded on a number of factors. From Table 1, whilst this might suggest merely that these items lack discrimination, another possibility is that "natural" explanations for poverty have the flexibility to be used together with victim-blaming and other types of explanations. Indeed a number of studies have found that participants draw on both individualistic and structural explanations for poverty, even though they are orthogonal factors (Hunt, 1996). Verkuyten (1998) noted how single-cause explanations that are typically studied in attribution research were used by only 7% of participants.

One reason for the focus on these structures is psychologists' attachment to questionnaire measures. The archetypal "explanations of poverty" study utilizes Feagin's classic (1972) scale (described in Furnham, this volume), plus a selection of measures of social psychological constructs, usually the Just World Scale, and measures of socio-demographic variables. Because of criticisms 1.1.1 to 1.1.3. above, these studies have become self-perpetuating, with researchers seeking to replicate studies in different countries, in different groups of people, producing a morass of unsurprising, and occasionally un interpretable, findings.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Political Naïveté

A final major problem with attribution poverty research is a startling lack of curiosity about what social function these kinds of explanations might have. Most studies find relationships between individual explanations and social psychological variables or demographic factors, but there is often little attempt to explain further. Lerner's (1980) account is motivational and largely individualistic, having recourse to a restricted range of relatively straightforward

rational and non-rational motivational strategies. As some writers have noted, what is lacking in such accounts is a clear understanding of the role of ideology in structuring our views of the world. Explanations have ideological effects! Thus Finchilescu (1991) has argued that the biasing of attributions and explanations constitutes a discriminatory practice. As Billig comments:

> To probe the ideological significance of these attributions one needs to go further than documenting their existence. One needs to discover how the explanation of one sort of social event fits into a wider pattern of explaining social events. (1988, p. 201)

Ironically, by ignoring such issues, traditional attribution research on poverty explanations has itself been politically and ideologically conservative in its theory and methodology. It has failed to deliver findings that might be of use in acting politically and socially, against poverty. One might ask of this research, what is the use of focusing 30 years of research on the explanations of individual members of the public, who have no control over world economic resources, as opposed to governments and transnational corporations, that *do*? In this respect, attribution research has made an ironic "fundamental attribution error" (Ross, 1977). It has focused on the explanations of individuals rather than systemic factors, and on those with little power to bring about actual change (Prilleltensky, this volume). Whilst most psychologists and other social scientists no longer engage in "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1971), in the overt ways which Pearl (1970) documents, they continue to do so indirectly. They do this either by conducting research on "the poor," which then gives credence to victim-blaming explanations (Wright, 1993), or by neglecting to do research on "the rich" (Furnham, this volume).

Toward Politically Useful Research into Explanations of Poverty: Alternative Theoretical Resources

An alternative approach to attribution theory draws from work in critical discursive psychology (Parker, 1997). Discourse theory can be useful, as it attends to how explanations are used, and what effects these explanations serve. Critical uses of discursive psychology, which attempt to avoid moral and political relativism, can attend to the inherently *contradictory* way in which explanations are used. According to Parker, explanations are "*constituted* within patterns of discourse that we cannot control" (1997, p. 290, emphasis in original). This means that in constructing explanations, cultural resources are drawn on. Discourse, and discursive positions, exist in a web of power relations (Prilleltensky, this volume). Thus, explanations do not just exist in a vacuum; they have political effects and functions (although they are not necessarily used intentionally).

Murray Edelman (1977, 1998) has written extensively about the meaning and functions of political language, especially as they occur in discussions about social problems like poverty. Edelman has suggested that there are three ways of explaining poverty. These are similar to Feagin's (1972) typology, outlined in Furnham (this volume). As well however, the existence of these different explanations, or "myths" as Edelman terms them, means that society *can live with its ambivalence*. For Edelman, these contradictions are a result of social relations:

"Governmental rhetoric and action comprise an elaborate dialectical structure, reflecting the beliefs, tensions and ambivalences that flow from social inequality and conflicting interests" (1998, p. 134). According to Edelman, these myths work together in a mutually reinforcing way, and can have a wide range of effects because often one explanation implies other explanations and concomitant actions:

> To believe that the poor are basically responsible for their poverty is also to exonerate economic and political institutions from that responsibility and to legitimize the efforts of authorities to change the poor person's attitudes and behavior. (1998, p. 132)

What New Questions Might be Thrown Up by the Use of Alternative Theoretical Resources Like Critical Discursive Psychology?

Moving Away from an Assumption of Individual Explainers Giving Internally Consistent and Exclusive Explanations. Discourse analysts do not assume that individual explainers produce internally consistent accounts. Rather, there is an assumption of discursive variability. It is expected that people will use different explanations at different times. Parker (1997) argues that this variation points to contradictions inherent in culture. Edelman (1977, 1998) and Billig and colleagues have argued that variation is common in talk about poverty (Billig, et al., 1988). Iyengar (1990) notes that Lane's (1962) studies demonstrated that "ordinary people express considerable uncertainty, and even stress, when describing their political views and they often offer what appear to be contradictory positions on related issues" (1990, p. 20).

One of the problems with paper and pencil survey designs is that they lack the ability to examine the *dynamics* of explanations, for example, to see if people give different explanations at different times in ordinary conversation. From Table 10.1, we can see that some items from Harper et al.'s (1990) CTWPQ, including popular "natural" explanations, do not load uniquely and significantly on orthogonal factors. This suggests that some of the explanations may be used flexibly in association with others. Moreover, research consistently shows that people agree with many explanations for poverty. They often give both individualistic and structural accounts. They have access to broad cultural resources. Billig et al. note that often "contrary values are asserted, as the same people believe that the state should aid the poor and also that state aid is liable to undermine the moral worth of the poor" (1988, p. 41).

In this respect, some of the findings of traditional studies may be useful. It is likely for instance that the consistent finding of three broad explanations for poverty reflects a dominance of these explanations in national cultures. However, two broad problems have dogged much of the more traditional research: A search for orthogonal factors through the use of factor analysis; and the search for factors that lead to differential loadings on these orthogonal factors. Such a paradigm, and I write as someone who has contributed to that paradigm in the past, is likely to miss much of the complexity of how people account for poverty in an everyday context or, indeed, the meaning, effect, and function, of using a combination of explanations.

Building on Variability and Contradiction: Intervening to Produce Change. I have already noted that the attribution paradigm implicitly assumes the stability and consistency of explanations. If, instead, they are seen as dynamic and contextual, psychologists might be less pessimistic about the possibility of changing them. Given that there is evidence that negative images and perceptions of those in poverty begin in childhood, interventions to change people's explanations are very important (Chafel, 1997). Is change *possible*? Two factors suggest that it is. Firstly, there is evidence that, over time, the numbers of people agreeing with simplistic individualistic explanations for poverty have decreased. For example, a survey by the Commission of the European Communities (1977) reported that Britain had the largest number of respondents blaming poverty on "laziness and lack of willpower" (43% compared to an EEC average of 25%). According to this study, Britain was below average in ascribing poverty to injustice in society and to luck, and nearer the average in blaming poverty on 'progress in the modernworld.' By 1992, Gallup published a series of polls examining British explanations for domestic poverty, and found that a majority blamed environmental ("circumstances") rather than individualistic ("effort") factors (52% and 12%, respectively). As well, the percentage favoring individualistic explanations had decreased over recent years, although 34% agreed that poverty was due to both (Gallup/Social Surveys Ltd, 1992). Thus, fewer individualistic explanations were given at time one than at time two.

Changes from time one to time two are not invariably of course in a positive direction. A study two years after the above opinion poll survey by Gallup found that the ascription to individualist factors had risen by 3% to 15%, whilst the number ascribing poverty to "injustice in our society" had dropped by 10% to 42% (Gallup/Social Surveys Ltd, 1994). As with much of the poverty explanation literature, findings like this can be hard to interpret. One conclusion that can be drawn is that explanations are not impervious to attempts to change them. Of course, in such attempts, we must be vigilant that the change is not simply a move toward more subtle forms of victim blaming, but interventions can produce positive change. In one study for instance, Lopez, Gurin & Nagda (1998) investigated an educational intervention, for college students, on inter-group relations, that covered structural sources of racial or ethnic inequalities. They found that the course led to increases in structural (situational) thinking about racial or ethnic inequality, and that this generalized to other inequalities that had not been explicitly covered in the course, an effect enhanced by the use of active learning strategies.

A Shift in Focus from Individuals, to Organizations and Systems. Of course, all theoretical frameworks can, to a greater or lesser extent, be invigorated by a political analysis of the problems they are investigating, and I would not want to argue that this is only the preserve of critical discursive work. Ignacio Mart´ın-Bar´o (e.g., 1994)[1] for example, used opinion polling in a politically astute manner. But critical discursive psychology can also help to dissolve the artificial boundary between individuals-as-explainers and the institution-as-explainer. Individuals, governments and multi-nationals may use certain accounts in a similar way to warrant their conduct. An individual may not give to charity because, they

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[1] Ignacio Martín-Baró was a Latin American social psychologist and Jesuit priest. He was assassinated by El Salvadorean government troops from the US-trained Atlacatl battalion on November 16 1989.

say, the government should be giving money to that issue. Similarly a government may refuse foreign aid because, they argue, the national government is corrupt or inefficient.

In the next section I therefore draw on work conducted within a variety of theoretical traditions, including attribution research, to argue that psychologists would do well to shift their focus from individual members of the general public, to the complex system that reproduces explanations of poverty. In this way, traditional research can be refocused and revitalized to make a more positive contribution toward poverty reduction.

Toward Politically Useful Research into Explanations of Poverty: Researching Systems Involved in Explaining, Maintaining and Addressing Poverty

There is a large range of institutions, agencies and systems involved in then etwork of those in a position to actually change inequality, and I will select a number here. These include the media; charities; government and politicians. They also include trans-governmental organizations, like the WTO (World Trade Organization), the World Bank, the IMF International Monetary Fund), and the multinationals.

The Media

In a fascinating study, Iyengar (1990), has built on the work of others like Schuman & Presser (1981), to show that how a question is framed has a significant impact on participants' responses. Iyengar studied TV news broadcasts between 1981–86 about domestic poverty in the USA, and delineated two major categories. One of them described poverty primarily as a social or collective outcome (a thematic frame); the other described poverty in terms of particular victims (an episodic frame). Generally, episodic frame news stories outnumbered thematic frame stories by two to one. In an initial experimental study, the participants' perceived responsibility for poverty was significantly influenced by the way the media framed the story. Thematic frame stories evoked more structural (situational) attributions, and episodic frame stories evoked more individualistic ones. Iyengar showed a selection of news stories illustrating thematic and episodic frames. The results reinforced the original finding, that beliefs about causal responsibility depended on *how poverty was framed*. In the episodic frame, Iyengar's sample of White-middle-class American participants made different causal attributions about both causal responsibility and treatment responsibility (what should be done to prevent recurrence), depending on the characteristics of the poor person:

> When the poor person was White, causal and treatment responsibility for poverty were predominantly societal; when the poor person was Black, causal and treatment responsibility were more individual … The particular combination of race, gender, age and marital status (e.g., Black adult single mothers) was particularly evocative of individual responsibility … In this sense, the most 'realistic' individual-victim frame

has the most inhibiting effect on societal conceptions of responsibility. (Iyengar, 1990, p. 35)

From this, Iyengar suggests that the finding of rates of individualistic explanations of poverty may be due not only to dominant cultural values (individualism) but also to "news coverage of poverty in which images of poor people predominate" (1990, p. 29). Such research applies equally to coverage of poverty in the socalled "developing world," which I shall refer to as the South. The news media are the major source of information on poverty for the general public. A recent report by the Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project noted that 82% of Britons relied on television as their main source of information on the South (Christian Aid News, 1995; see also Department for International Development, 2000, and Voluntary Service Overseas, 2002). They are also groups where the use of images and explanations are used to great effect, and they are, I will argue, greatly influenced by a variety of commercial and other interests.

With some notable exceptions, most coverage of poverty in the South, by the press and broadcasters, tends to focus less on any links between the North's wealth and the South's poverty. Instead, they concentrate on poor individuals, the climate, or corruption, and inefficiency in national governments, of the South. When political issues are focused on (as in the case of the Ethiopian war), no questions are asked about who the financial backers or arms-suppliers might be, nor what the history of the conflict is. If questions about these issues are raised, it is often only in terms of local politics (episodic), and not links with "FirstWorld" agencies or governments (thematic). The effect of such coverage is that famine becomes seen as something that "just happens," often immediately (episodic, individualistic), and is not connected to political processes.

What then are the interests involved in media discourse? One obvious interest is the need for media managements to avoid "political" topics, in order to maintain stable revenue (e.g., from advertisers). However, this cannot be a full explanation, since there is also evidence that "news-worthiness" and dramatic entertainment value are powerful influences on what gets broadcast and what does not (Golding & Middleton, 1982). One report indicates that 90% of all television news and current affairs reports, on issues in the countries of the South, focus on conflict and disaster (Christian Aid News, 1995). Sorenson (1991) has argued that there are a number of political interests and ideological influences on the way the mass media portray Southern poverty. In his analysis of media discourse on famine, in the Horn of Africa, he has shown how a number of entertainment, media, and political interests, were served by particular ways of explaining and portraying the famine. For example, a slow onset to the Ethiopian famine was depicted as sudden and related only to food and famine itself. Reports did not discuss the conflict, nor offer a political analysis of it. Sorenson describes such an account as one of naturalization:[2]

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[2] I would agree with Twose (1984) who argues that, for example, Britain's winter is as bad as "Third World" climactic extremes with the difference that Britain is economically able to meet the demands of the winter whilst countries of the South often cannot. Solomon Inquai has commented that "hunger is about politics, not the weather" (Oxfam, 1985).

Naturalization ignores conditions of poverty, repression and conflict that allowed drought to be translated into famine. Reports explaining famine as natural disaster are reductionist, and overlook growing bodies of work that recognises multiple causation of famine. (Sorenson, 1991, p. 226)

Sorenson also described some of the tactics used by the news media, noting the use of "inoculation" where reports admitted either the extent of the famine or some level of external causation, before going on to blame famine mainly on internal factors (i.e., the actions of Ethiopians themselves). This helped conceal continuing structural inequities, and illustrates how contrasting accounts can be combined to serve particular rhetorical purposes. Responsibility was placed on African governments, whilst Western benefactors were positioned as benevolent. Sorenson links such discourses on poverty with wider discourses on Africa, with racist discourses, and with victim-blaming of Africans who are often implicitly positioned in the media as "ignorant" and "primitive." The use of racist and colonialist views of Africans as "inferior," and "other"; as "primitive," "noble savages"; and as needing "to be converted"; has a long history (Mudimbe, 1988; Parker, 1992; Brookes, 1995).

Although written media texts might provide researchers with useful materials, the media's use of images is also potentially useful. Interpretations similar to Sorenson's on media text could, no doubt, be applied to media images. A BritishTV documentary "Hard Times," broadcast over ten years ago (Channel 4 Television, 1991), explored how domestic poverty was portrayed in documentaries, dramas, and news items in the media. Hard Times reported that often very simple images of poor people were used, and that the media orchestrated artificial and stereotyped situations for the cameras, so that portrayals of poverty fitted public and media expectations and perceptions:

> What you do is find the worst possible example you can think of somebody who's poor rather than that you find examples that exemplify ordinary, typical, everyday poverty. (Beatrix Campbell, journalist)

Research like Sorenson's reveals how *the media are explainers too*. Can anything be *done* about such coverage? Certainly one option is to intervene to put pressure for accountability on the news and entertainment media, to adopt and adhere to ethical Codes of Conduct. An interesting intervention in the field of learning disability is reported by Jones & Eayrs (1996). They monitored coverage of learning disability in two British local newspapers, noting: The total number of articles published on learning disability; the use of quotations by people with learning disabilities; the percentage of articles including photographs portraying people with learning disabilities as active participants; and the percentage of articles about fundraising for charities associated with learning disability. At the end of a six-month monitoring project, they made a different intervention to each newspaper. One was sent a letter summarising the findings of the monitoring exercise, enclosing a copy of guidelines on the portrayal of disability produced by a disability campaigning group. The other newspaper was sent these but was also visited by a person with learning disability, who explained the

findings of the monitoring exercise and made a number of recommendations for future coverage.

The results in the six months after the intervention were very interesting. The first newspaper, whose coverage of learning disability had been small, had a much-reduced coverage of learning disability. The second newspaper too had a slightly reduced coverage, but had also included accompanying photographs, that portrayed people with learning disabilities as active. Although such findings were focused on local rather than national newspapers, and so need to be tested further, they do suggest that some change is possible. Jones and Eayrs comment that their study suggests that media presentation can be changed, and that 'the best advocates for change are the individual stakeholders involved' (1996, p. 78).

A study by Voluntary Service Overseas (2002) found that members of the public were bewildered when presented with information which ran counter to dominant media images and angry at the press and broadcasters for not conveying this complexity. It was argued that the public needed both context for, and an emotional connection with, those portrayed in reports about the South.

Charities

Another major network where explanations of poverty circulate is in material produced by poverty charities. Here, I will focus on those charitable nongovernmental organisations providing aid for the South. Carr, Mc Auliffe & MacLachlan (1998) have addressed general issues about the psychology of aid, but I want to examine the promotional and campaigning material used by such charities. Some research suggests that, like the media, charities are guided by similar interests (to both raise money and consciousness, often in dramatic ways) and by some different ones (challenging the economic status quo), whilst being limited and constrained by other discourses (legal and political). How are these competing interests managed in charity discourse?

Most of the non-structural explanations for poverty in the South, used in the Harper et al. (1990) study, have been disputed (Haru, 1984; Mehryar, 1984; Oxfam, 1991b; Twose, 1984). Instead, Oxfam (1991b) describes the major causes of poverty as: conflict; the debt crisis; declining prices of commodities like tea; inadequate aid; consumption of resources by the North; environmental damage; and lack of accountable government. One might also add unfair trading policies to this list. An attribution theorist, adopting a na¨ıvely realist point of view, might try to compare individuals' attributions with the "real" causes of poverty, and speculate why there was a difference – education or political preference perhaps. Another line of inquiry, however, is to examine the interests and the constraints on charity discourse.

In an article examining challenges facing Oxfam, Brazier (1992) noted that the charity existed in a difficult political atmosphere. He recalled an instance when Oxfam had been reported to the Charity Commissioner in the United Kingdom.This complaint had been lodged through a Conservative Minister of Parliament (or MP). The MP felt that an Oxfam campaign about poverty, in Southern Africa, had been politically biased. The campaign

material had drawn links between the continuing poverty of that region and South Africa's pre-1994 policy of apartheid. The effect of the investigation, by the Charity Commissioners, was that Oxfam had to withdraw its campaigning material. Oxfam also had to undertake not to be 'politically biased' in future. This demonstrated as well that explanations of poverty, and the information on which they rest, exist in an ideological and political context. Charities are not 'free' to choose what explanations of poverty they promote in their materials. They are instead constrained by legal and political discourses and this, in turn, constrains the cultural availability of certain explanations.

One effect of charities attempting to offer certain explanations for poverty is to be accused of being *overtly* politically motivated. As the Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara has commented, "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist." Aconstraint on charity discourse then is the need for accounts to appear to be, overtly, politically disinterested. An effect of this is that such explanations do not challenge the dominant discourses available, in culture, for explaining poverty. The choice between particular explanations, at particular moments, is not just an individual one based on age, gender, political preference, and so on. Rather, it is crucially social, taking place in an arena of competing political and ideological interests.

Another influence on the kinds of explanations for poverty, given by charities, is whether they are aiming to (a) raise money or (b) raise awareness about the causes of poverty. This kind of dilemma is common to many charities, and has provedto be an interesting area for research (Eayrs & Ellis, 1990; Stockdale & Farr, 1987; Barnett & Hammond, 1999). Aid agencies have increasingly realised that the kind of images that raise funds often devalue the people portrayed, and fail to address crucial issues (van der Gaag, 1992). However, as one advertising executive involved in charity work has noted, "If my brief is to make people put their hands in their pocket and come up with some money, then one has to – it's quite right to use fairly dramatic techniques in doing that" (Simon Sherwood of advertising company Lowe, Howard-Spink in Channel 4 Television, 1991). Feagin (1972) links this concern to social and government policy. If respondents saw poverty as being due to the poor, they were antagonistic to welfare payments. Thus, agencies may feel that, in order to raise funds, they need to portray the poor as helpless and powerless (Billig et al., 1988).

There are particular dynamics involved in giving to charity (Radley & Kennedy, 1992). Burman (1994a, 1994b, 1994c) has argued that charity appeals for children in the South draw on a number of elements. These include a restricted range of ways of relating rich and poor peoples (in the form of funding or sponsorship to helpless recipients); little scope for reflection on causes of these circumstances, or whether they are portrayed accurately; and the use of dominant models of child development. Such discursive strategies have particular effects, and can be seen as serving certain interests. These can be purely pragmatic for charities "raising money," but they can also be ideological, as in "policing" the relationship between rich and poor, so that the poor are eternally positioned beneath the rich in a hierarchy of social dominance (Lemieux & Pratto, this volume).

As with the South Africa campaign, Aid agencies' campaigns using such strategies have had the effect of attracting criticism about their use of images. This has generated a call both for more positive images of Southern peoples, and an emphasis on education rather than fund-

raising (Lyne, 1990). As a result of these pressures, Oxfam has published both a statement of policy about the use of images (Oxfam, 1991a) and a training and educational package, examining the effects of images (Oxfam, 1992). However, such changes in advertising policy are taking place in a more difficult economic context for overseas aid charities. They are often being overtaken in revenue terms by 'conservation' and other charities 'closer to home,' and with dilemmas about to what extent to link with anti-globalisation protests and Drop the Debt, Jubilee 2000, and Fair Trade campaigns.

As the Oxfam report suggests, an educational discourse has become increasingly prominent in aid agency literature (Gill, 1988). But what might the effects of such a change of discourse be? Eayrs and Ellis (1990) are equivocal in their investigation of the effects of charity advertising. Although their study focused on the portrayal of people with learning disabilities, implications can be drawn about charity advertising for other marginalized groups. They argued that more normalising approaches have a cost. They may encourage people to feel there are no difficulties to be faced. So agencies should aim at encouraging people to have direct contact with people with learning disabilities, in order to overcome prejudice. Eayrs and Ellis also suggested a more pragmatic strategy, involving the use of positive images in promotional campaigns, which some evidence suggests may elicit donations anyway; even if they are not directly requested (Barnett & Hammond, 1999; Stockdale & Farr, 1987). However, work by Barnett & Hammond (1999) suggests that definitions about what constitutes a "positive" image may be contested by both disabled and by non-disabled people.

Government and Politicians

It is a little disappointing that, in a recent literature search of research examining explanations of poverty, of all the groups studied, I could find only one study whose sample involved a group with real access to power. Beck, Whitley andWolk (1999) investigated the perceptions of poverty of members of the Georgia General Assembly, in the USA. This research was conducted at a time when there was debate about legislative change in US welfare policy, with the ending of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and a shift to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). TANF was a program emphasizing personal responsibility for, and more individualistic solutions to, poverty. Building on Feagin's (1972) finding linking causal explanations of poverty with views of welfare, Beck et al. asked the legislators to rate ten causes of poverty. The top three explanations were individualistic. There were no differences in agreement with individualistic explanations as a result of political party, ethnicity, or gender. However, significant differences were found in relation to structural explanations: "Democrats, People of color, and women viewed discrimination and low wages as more important causes of poverty than their counterparts" (Beck et al., 1999, p. 96). Interestingly these explanations mapped onto views about welfare reform. Those preferring structural explanations favored AFDC, and those preferring individualistic explanations favored TANF. Beck et al. then developed a useful analysis of these data, suggesting that legislative change was, in part, driven by frustration with AFDC rather than by wholehearted support for TANF.

Campaigns should therefore seek to place individualistic explanations in a structural context, for example by explaining "lack of thrift" with reference to the day-to-day costs of living in poverty, for example the cost of housing as a percentage of income. As well, anti-poverty researchers and campaigners should gather detailed relevant information to rebut common myths, for example comparing the number of "help wanted" job offer signs with the numbers of those unemployed. Beck et al. argue that campaigners need to take into account what issues legislators are likely to see as most salient, for example, data from their constituencies. There is a need for much more research like this on legislators. Yet they too are only one system in the network, and it is to the wider world economic context that I will turn to next.

Networks of Financial Power: The WTO, The World Bank, The IMF, and The Multinationals

Both Mehryar (1984) and Haru (1984) have argued that an accurate perception of the origins and perpetuation of poverty leads anyone to focus at the macro level, rather than at the micro level to which psychologists are more accustomed. Thismacro level constitutes the world economic system, where national governments, that tie aid to trade agreements and manage some of the debt of the South, are increasingly being superseded by trans-national organizations: The IMF; theWorld Bank; and multinational corporations. These organizations also include banks that, with the World Bank, hold most of the debt of the South.

Does this lead inevitably to the conclusion that psychology has no part to play? Mehryar (1984), for example, has suggested that psychology may simply be irrelevant: "To claim that psychology and other social sciences, singly or in combination, can solve these problems will amount to no more than wishful thinking" (Mehryar, 1984, p. 165). A turn to examining the world economic system can sometimes descend into conspiratorial thinking but, as Eco (1986) observes, there is no need for a conspiracy theory account when one considers that international capital is moved between these networks in accordance with the interests of the different organizations embedded within them. The link between the explanations of events, and the interests served by those explanations, can be seen very clearly when oil companies protest against explanations of global warming. Change can come from ensuring that anti-social actions currently in their interest do not always remain so.[3]

It would indeed be absurd to suggest that political problems can be solved through the social sciences alone. However, this is not to say that psychology has no part to play (Harper, 1991). It can be useful to examine some of language and processes involved in policy formation and decision making. For example, the journalist John Pilger has noted that,

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[3] For example, one proposal to address the problems associated with currency speculation (the destabilizing of national economies and the triggering of currency devaluations and economic crises which deepen poverty, boost national debt and increase unemployment and hunger) is to introduce a "Tobin Tax" of 0.25% on it which could earn $250 billion a year which could be used to introduce basic health care, nutrition, education, clean water and sanitation for the poor across the world. For more information go to: www.tobintax.org

The new order is beset by euphemisms, which can often mean the opposite of the New jargon term. Liberalization – more commonly known as the 'free trade' agenda – sounds reasonable in itself. Much of the language used to describe it suggests that it is a positive trend: the removal of "restrictions," "barriers" and "obstacles" to what should be "free" trade. These throw up a smoke screen. The important question: "Free" for whom? (Carlton Television (2001, p. 3)

Psychologists can also offer useful analyses of the organizational processes responsible for the creation of poverty. Although there is little psychological research on such institutional influences, there is an organizational psychology literature. Limitations of space do not permit a review of this area. However, a glimpse of the usefulness of an organizational psychology perspective can be gained from an appraisal of a discrete area of research on the decision-making processes involved in British nuclear weapons during the Cold War.

McLean (1986), in her paper on nuclear decision making, gives an example of what an organizational analysis might entail: The uncovering of lines of decision making; the position of key individuals in that process; the collection of biographical and other information on those individuals. She draws a number of conclusions that are relevant to this discussion:

1. That there is a process of "decision shaping" carried out by administrators in committees rather than by politicians. Thus discussions take place out of the public eye, but under the influence of powerful groups.

2. That the options presented to those in senior positions (in this case politicians) are limited. Thus, no one person in a system is solely responsible for decisions. Decisions are difficult to change, and are resistant to influences external to the system. In addition, those who wish to influence decisions are confused about where to aim their intervention.

3. That decision shapers do not want to feel personally responsible. This point is brought out more fully in Hamwee's (1986) research on dialogue between peace groups and decision makers. Hamwee notes that the latter deny responsibility for their decisions, and goes on to state:

> [The decision maker] takes daily and detailed responsibility for one minuscule part of a giant worldwide process … He [sic] concentrates, as he [sic] has to, on the technical task, and can only talk about it in technical language. To talk in the (peace) groups' language would be to abandon all the assumptions behind all that he [sic] knows and does. (Hamwee, 1986, p. 6).

Similarly, Hamwee et al's (1990) study details the assumptions implicit in Cold War bureaucracies whilst the contributors to McLean's (1986b) volume provide an analysis of the organizational and assumptive structures in nuclear weapons decision-making around the world. It is likely that decision makers in economic and governmental institutions, responsible for the maintenance of poverty, exist in organizational structures which could be analysed in similar ways and any attempt to influence these decision-making systems needs to take account of these kinds of processes and contexts. Moreover, those institutions, whilst largely unaccountable, can be influenced by external pressure. Such

interventions need to be well targeted – witness the recent liberalization by international drug companies of AIDS medicines after concerted international pressure. Targeted interventions like this expose the differences between political rhetoric and actual practice, as campaigns surrounding the debt crisis are now seeking to do.

Future Directions

There is a need for future psychological research, into poverty explanations, to draw on a wider range of theoretical frameworks. This chapter has suggested the critical discursive approach as one model to use. I have also suggested that research should focus on those who are in positions to effect change more than on ordinary members of the public, who are not. This might provide a more adequate understanding of political explanations, and also extend research beyond merely individualistic accounts, to include the texts and images both produced by individuals and organisations, and in which those individuals and organisations are themselves located. It is to be hoped that future research, by de-mystifying explanations of poverty and exploring their ideological foundations in social context, will be more useful, practically and politically. In this way, psychology may become better positioned to contribute toward concientización in the fight against poverty (Martín-Baró, 1994).

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Table 1. The overall means and standard deviations for items of the Causes of Third World Poverty Questionnaire (from Harper et al., 1990)

	Mean	(SD)
There is poverty in Third World countries because[a]:		
1. The people of such countries keep having too many children[1]	3.20	(1.25)
2. Of fate[1]	2.32	(1.01)
3. Their governments are corrupt[2]	3.64	(0.94)
4. Of the regional climate	3.76	(0.92)
5. Their governments are inefficient[2]	3.82	(0.82)
6. Of laziness and a lack of effort in the population of such countries[1]	2.18	(1.02)
7. Their land is not suitable for agriculture[3]	3.42	(1.02)
8. Other countries exploit the Third World[4]	3.81	(1.16)
9. Of disease in Third World countries	3.56	(0.96)
10. Their governments spend too much money on arms[2]	3.64	(1.04)
11. Of war	3.60	(0.96)
12. Of the world economy and banking systems being loaded against the poor[4]	3.57	(1.11)
13. Pests and insects destroy crops	3.64	(0.78)
14. The population of such countries make no attempt at self-improvement[1]	2.55	(1.09)
15. Of a lack of intelligence among the people there[1]	2.85	(1.26)
16. Of a lack of thrift and proper management of resources by the people there[1]	3.09	(1.15)
17. The people there are not willing to change old ways and customs[1]	3.24	(1.00)

| 18. | Of a lack of ability among the people of such countries[1] | 2.41 | (1.13) |

a Strongly agree=5, strongly disagree=1

1 Items loading uniquely and significantly on 'Blame Poor' factor

2 Items loading uniquely and significantly on 'Blame Third World Governments' factor

3 Item loading uniquely and significantly on 'Blame Nature' factor

4 Items loading uniquely and significantly on 'Blame Exploitation' factor