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AMERICAN POVERTY CAUSE BELIEFS AND STRUCTURED INEQUALITY LEGITIMATION

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Poverty cause attribution research has sporadically explored social stratification beliefs for over three decades with mixed results. Explanations given for why there are poor people in America may reveal much about underlying structured inequality legitimating mechanisms. Using multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, and frequency distribution analyses, I uncover a conservative-liberal continuum underlying American poverty cause attributions. Past explanations for the mostly mixed nature of American attributions toward poverty are questioned. I suggest a more simple and straightforward explanation: mixed attribution styles, situated on a conservative-liberal continuum, may arise from American's distinguishing between at least two groups of poor people—"deserving" and "undeserving"—suggesting policy and future research agendas.

What do the explanations Americans give for poverty causes tell us about the belief system legitimating the existing socioeconomic order? Researchers posing this question over three decades have gotten mixed results. While many assert the influence of a dominant ideology aligned with individualistic beliefs upon American attributions, they have repeatedly had to accommodate evidence that many Americans

hold a somewhat balanced mix of attributions—incredibly few harbor exclusively individualistic poverty cause beliefs. Here, I try to understand this circumstance and craft a fitting narrative about American poverty cause attributions—connecting them to a conservative-liberal continuum and data supporting the conclusion that Americans attribute differently towards different kinds of poor people.

First, I review American explorations of these beliefs and associated institutional logics (legitimating ideologies), posit a poverty cause attribution continuum, and build a simplified index to reflect this continuum. I then model the relationship between socioeconomic group memberships and poverty cause beliefs using 1990 General Social Survey data (Davis et al. 2001) to discern the probable nature of the continuum lying beneath these attributions. Following that, I use data collected from volunteers at two metropolitan area ecumenical nonprofit organizations in 2003–2004 to investigate this continuum's nature from a different angle. Next, I revisit the distribution of attributions on this individualistic-structuralistic continuum at national and local levels and comment on how it relates to the dominance of one institutional logic (ideology) over others. Then, I discuss how the distribution of attributions on a conservative-liberal continuum connects with basic conceptions of the poor and related institutional logics (ideologies). I conclude with the implications my findings have for policy decision making and future research.

BACKGROUND

Poverty Cause Attributions

Sociological social psychologists have been self-critical of past failures of sociological social psychology to adequately address issues of social inequality or encourage integration with sociological concerns about stratification (Hollander and Howard 2000). Until very recently, social psychology has generally ignored issues of social inequality. The social cognition tradition within social psychology has performed better in this area than other traditions, but it still frequently slights the social side of social psychology in favor of the psychological side (Morgan and Schwalbe 1990; Howard 1994; Hollander and Howard 2000). Within the social cognition tradition, work in the field of attribution theory that has dealt with collective cognitions, particularly that on attributing causes for poverty, contains a significant amount of research that has been and may be useful in understanding social inequalities within their social context (Howard 1995).

Initially attempting to understand reluctance to support the War on Poverty in the 1960s, researchers have explored American poverty cause explanations and possible reasons behind them for over three decades.[1] Feagin (1972, 1975) established the basic framework for research on poverty cause attributions. He categorized them as *individualistic, structural*, or *fatalistic.* Individualistic beliefs blame the poor, personally, for their own poverty. Structural ones point to social and economic factors outside the control of the poor. Fatalistic attributions "cite such factors as bad luck, illness, and the like" (Feagin 1975, p. 95). He found that individualistic attributions dominated structural and fatalistic ones for a national sample of Americans queried in 1969. Ninety-three percent of the respondents gave individualistic explanations, 89 percent provided fatalistic ones, and 82 percent spoke of structural causes. When comparing these three types of attributions at the level of high importance 53 percent of the respondents listed individualistic ones as very important, while only 22 percent rated structural beliefs and 18 percent rated fatalistic beliefs at the same level (Feagin 1972, p. 104). In a local study focused on Muskegon, Michigan, Huber and Form (1973) found a similar attribution hierarchy during the same timeframe. They categorized responses to an open-ended question about "why are poor people poor" as personal (roughly similar to Feagin's individualistic category), structural, or both. Their "both" category indicated responses containing both personal and structural elements. Their local respondents held predominantly, but not exclusively, personal (individualistic) beliefs about poverty causation.

Many subsequent studies, generally using Feagin's format, reaffirmed that Americans espoused individualistic poverty cause beliefs more often than structural ones (Kluegel and Smith 1981, 1986; Smith 1985; Smith and Stone 1989; Griffin and Oheneba-Sakyi 1993; Cozzarelli et al. 2001). Kluegel and Smith (1986), studying a national sample of Americans in 1980, discovered that, although Americans tended to hold predominantly individualistic poverty cause attributions, few held purely individualistic or

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[1]Studies of poverty cause attributions have also been conducted outside of America; however, because this study focuses on American attributions, I acknowledge their importance, but do not discuss them in any depth. A chronological list, not necessarily exhaustive, of the more relevant works includes: Feather (1974); Pandy, Sinha, Prakash, and Tripathi (1982); Furnham (1982a; 1982b; 1982c); Morçöl (1997); Cheung (1999); Cheung and Chan (2000); Stephenson (2000); Abouchedid and Nasser (2001, 2002); Muzdybayev (2001); Shek (2002, 2003, 2004); Saunders (2003); Weiss (2003); Nasser and Abouchedid (2006); and Reutter, Veenstra, Stewart, Raphael, Love, Makwarimba, and McMurray (2006).

purely structural beliefs. Some viewed neither as being important, while the rest held both types at the same time. They interpreted this belief mixture as indicative of compromise explanations for poverty causes: "a view of the world that might be expressed as 'Structural barriers to achievement do exist, but individual efforts can often overcome them'" (Kluegel and Smith 1986, p. 87). The existence of a significant group of respondents having mixed attributions convinced them that "the individual and structural explanation measures are almost statistically independent of each other" (Kluegel and Smith 1986, pp. 87–88).

Although following Feagin's general format (1972, 1975), Hunt's (1996, 2004) 1993 and 2000 studies of Southern Californians yielded results broadly different from previous researchers. In particular, structural poverty cause beliefs predominated in Southern California—constituting four-fifths of his respondents top poverty cause attributions in both studies. In both studies, African Americans and Latinos were more likely than whites to espouse both individualistic and structural poverty cause explanations at the same time. To explain this situation he invoked the concept of dual consciousness among minority individuals.

Lee, Jones, and Lewis (1990) explored poverty cause beliefs about a specific subgroup of the poor (the homeless) and, like Hunt (1996), found an attribution structure dramatically different from that discerned by most previous researchers of general poverty cause beliefs. Their Nashville, Tennessee, respondents rated structural and nonindividualistic causes higher than individualistic ones and maintained multiple—sometimes contradictory—beliefs. Only 10 percent of their sample believed in just one causal type for homelessness. For them, like Kluegel and Smith (1986), the maintenance of these multiple, often contradictory, beliefs by a large portion of respondents signified that individualistic and structural beliefs may not be perceived as ideological alternatives, but may be combined to form "compromise" beliefs about poverty.

Wilson (1996) also discovered that attributions for poverty directed toward subpopulations of the poor (welfare dependents, the homeless, or migrant workers) diverge distinctly from those directed toward the generic "poor." The Baltimore, Maryland, residents he interviewed in 1992 directed individualistic causal attributions toward the welfare-dependent poor, but not toward the homeless or migrant workers. Sixty-two to 70 percent espoused individualistic beliefs toward welfare dependents, while only 39 to 43 percent evidenced structural beliefs about them. Fifty-two to 59 percent gave structural explanations for homelessness, while 44 to 49 percent responded with

individualistic attributions toward the homeless. Attributions toward migrant laborers tended to be more balanced with 45 to 48 percent citing individualistic reasons and 46 to 51 percent stating that structural reasons were important (Wilson 1996, p. 419).

Four general statements summarize what prior studies on poverty cause beliefs indicate about their distribution within American populations:

1. **Nationally, Americans consistently cast more individualistic than structural attributions towards the generic poor;**
2. **Although Americans attribute more individualisticly than structurally, they admit the possibility of structural causes for generic poverty—often holding a mixture of beliefs instead of purely individualistic or structural ones;**
3. **Regionally and locally, some populations may hold predominantly structural explanations for poverty, contrary to findings at the national level; and**
4. **Americans may hold different causal attributions for different subgroups of the poor.**

Group Memberships and Poverty Cause Attributions

Poverty cause attribution studies usually relate socioeconomic categories and group memberships with differing attribution styles in an independent to dependent variable relationship. These explorations present mounting and consistent evidence that poverty cause beliefs vary between cultures (Abouchedid and Nasser 2001, 2002; Feather 1974; Furnham 1982a; Morçöl 1997; Muzdybayev 2001; Nasser and Abouchedid 2006) and are affected by gender, race, political leaning, religion, location, income or class affiliation, and a variety of other factors (Bullock 1999; Bullock and Limbert 2003; Bullock and Waugh 2005; Cheung 1999; Cheung and Chan 2000; Cozzarelli et al. 2001; Duffy et al. 2006; Feagin 1972, 1975; Furnham 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1996; Griffin and Oheneba-Saky 1993; Huber and Form 1973; Hughes and Tuch 2000; Hunt 1996, 2002; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Kluegel 1987; Lee et al. 2004; Pellegrini et al. 1997; Smith 1985; Smith and Stone 1989; Zucker and Weiner 1993). Table 1 contains a summary of primary socioeconomic categories and group memberships (independent variables) that past researchers studying American samples found significant.

Table 1. Group membership variables from prior poverty cause research

Researcher(s) in America	Age	Education	Gender	Family income	Party affiliation	Political views	Prestige	Race	Region	Religion	Work status
Feagin (1972, 1975)	X	X		X				X	X	{X}	
Huber and Form (1973)	X			X				X			
Smith (1985)		X	X	X							
Kluegel and Smith (1986)	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	
Kluegel (1987)	X	X	X				X	X			X
Smith and Stone (1989)								X			
Lee et al. (1990)		X				X		X			
Lee et al. (1992)	X		X					X			
Griffin and Oheneba-Sakyi (1993)				(X)		X					
Zucker and Weiner (1993)						X					
Hunt (1996)	X	X	X	X				X			
Wilson (1996)	X	X	X		X		X	X			
Pellegrini et al. (1997)			X		X						
Cozzarelli et al. (2001)	X				X						
Hunt (2002)	X		X	[X]				X		X	
Bullock and Limbert (2003)				(X)							
Hunt (2004)	X	X	X	(X)		X		X			
Lee et al. (2004)	X	X	X			X		X		|X|	X
Duffy et al. (2006)								X			X

(X) = Social Class, [X] = Socioeconomic Status, {X} = Socioreligious Group, |X| = Religious Relevance.

Legitimizing Inequality: Ideologies and Institutional Logics

Many poverty cause attribution researchers (Feagin 1972, 1975; Huber and Form 1973; Kluegel and Smith 1981, 1986; Smith 1985; Smith and Stone 1989; Guimond et al. 1989) tied what they sensed to be predominant individualistic attributions to a belief system long associated with being American. For them, this system legitimizes and assists in the continued maintenance of structures of social inequality. In so doing, it perpetuates and is perpetuated by individualistic poverty cause explanations.

The ideology of individualism described by Feagin (1972, 1975), the logic of opportunity syllogism built by Huber and Form (1973) and elaborated by Kluegel and Smith (1986), Smith and Stone's (1989) metatheory of individualism, and the individualistic ideology encountered by Guimond and colleagues (1989) all describe an institutional logic—"a set of material practices and symbolic constructions" that constitute "organizing principles" (Friedland and Alford 1991, p. 248)—existent in American society. According to this group of analysts this institutional logic accounts for—it is used to justify—the inequalities evident in American society (Kerbo 2006, pp. 57, 420–424). This institutional logic has even been associated with American responses to "the meaning of the poverty . . . revealed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina" (Belle 2006, p. 143).

By combining Feagin's ideology of individualism and Huber and Form's logic of opportunity syllogism, this institutional logic of "Unbridled Individualism" can be described in a six statement sequence:

1. **Hard work in competition with others is valued.**
2. **Success through hard work in competition with others should be rewarded materially and nonmaterially (lack of success, on the other hand, should be denied such rewards).**
3. **Opportunities for success are available to all.**
4. **Because opportunities for success are available to all, the ability to be successful or to fail at being successful rests entirely upon the individual—personal effort, character traits, abilities, etc.**
5. **The existing social stratification system is a result of people being rewarded differentially for their efforts based upon their personal ability to succeed within an environment of unbridled opportunity.**
6. **Because the existing social stratification system results from individual effort, traits, abilities, etc., an individual's position within that stratification system is her or his responsibility;**

> therefore, he or she is the only person who can effect a change
> in their position within the existing social stratification system.

None of these poverty cause attribution researchers assert a mono-
lithic institutional logic pertaining to poverty causes, but numerous
institutional logics. Most argue for competing institutional logics.
At the national level Unbridled Individualism is, and has been for a
very long time, the one that dominates the others. As a set of shared
typifications, individualistic attributions for poverty causes are ele-
ments and key indicators of this dominant Unbridled Individualism
institutional logic. Structural attributions, a contrary and opposing
set of shared typifications, constitute elements and key indicators of
a competing and contradictory institutional logic(s). Both Unbridled
Individualism and competing structural institutional logics culturally
prescribe beliefs about how poverty occurs and the comparative par-
ticipation of the poor and larger social structures in its genesis.
Unbridled Individualism and contrary structural institutional logic(s)
act as anchors for individualistic and structural typifications of the
poor upon a continuum. When an individual or group adheres more
to the institutional logic of Unbridled Individualism, then his, her,
or their combined attributions lean in an individualistic direction.
Embracement of a structural institutional logic, contrary to Unbridled
Individualism, bends his, her, or their combined attributions in a struc-
tural direction. Many past researchers have seen this anchoring as a
"linkage between ideology and attributions" (Zucker and Weiner
1993, p. 939) with individualistic attributions strongly connected to
contemporary conservatism and structural ones strongly connected
to contemporary liberalism (Cozzarelli et al. 2001; Furnham 1982b;
Griffin and Oheneba-Saky 1993; Pellegrini et al. 1997).

QUESTIONS

Many intriguing questions surface from this exploration of previous
works. Here, I address the following set in three studies and subse-
quent discussion:

1. **Do poverty cause attributions line up on a continuum related to
   some background ideology (institutional logic) with very strong
   individualism at one end, very strong structuralism at the other,
   and a balanced mix of both in the middle—possibly a conserva-
   tive-liberal continuum?**

2. How is location on this continuum related to the various group memberships identified by past researchers?
3. What is the distribution of these attributions on this individua-listic-structuralistic continuum for Americans nationally?
4. How does this distribution relate to dominance of one ideology (institutional logic) over others?
5. Is there something more basic underpinning this distribution of attributions? If so, how does this relate to the ideologies (institutional logics) held by Americans?

STUDY 1

Capturing Attributions

Past researchers used three principal ways to measure poverty cause attributions:

1. Individual item approaches (Smith and Stone 1989);
2. Separate indices approaches (Feagin 1972, 1975; Kluegel 1987; Kluegel and Smith 1986); and
3. Combined index approaches (Smith 1985; Lee et al. 1990).

Fatalistic attributions have been the least explored of the attribution types. They contain the fewest policy implications—there is not much action possible for such things as "bad luck" or "God's will" from a policy standpoint. So, research on mechanisms legitimating struc-tured inequality may be most fruitful on how strongly people hold *individualistic* or *structural* attributions.

An individualistic-structuralistic continuum may exist reflecting Americans' poverty cause attribution-style leanings. Many past researchers have avoided the concept of continuum (following Kluegel and Smith [1986]) because most Americans hold both individualistic and structural explanations in some type of mixed attribution style— usually resulting in low direct correlations between structuralistic and individualistic indices. I contend that it is precisely because of this phe-nomenon of mixed attribution styles that a continuum with strong structuralism at one end and strong individualism at the other with mixed attributions of various kinds in-between makes very good sense.

The combined index approach may best capture such a continuum, if it exists. Recently, Brezina and Winder (2003) used the same data from the 1990 General Social Survey as I do here, but chose to build

separate indices for poverty cause attributions because of factor analytic results. These items may tap separate factors, but this does not prohibit creating a useful combined index. These factor analytic results may be misleading and mask the presence of any underlying continuum because of the overwhelmingly mixed nature of these attributions. Additionally, just because items load on separate factors does not necessarily preclude their inclusion on a combined index. Smith (1985) used the presence of distinguishable individualistic and structural factors resulting from factor analysis of the fifteen items on his "Stratification Ideology Scale" to validate their inclusion on a combined index. His combined index, with eight poverty cause attribution items and seven wealth cause attribution items, contained the four attribution items used here. Getting beyond speculation, at a surface level at least, on whether the separate or combined index approach leads to generally different conclusions regarding a continuum underlying American poverty cause attributions, I construct both and compare results using the same analysis and data set with each below.

The 1990 General Social Survey (Davis et al. 2001) contains the most recent national data set with questions from Feagin's original study and all the variables past researchers associated with poverty cause attributions. This data set has only two structural and two individualistic items, so I built indices using those four items in my analyses of both national and local data. This parsimony should not be exceedingly disadvantageous because nothing in past research indicates that indices with few items lead to results dissimilar to indices with many. These responses were solicited in the following sequence: "Now I will give a list of reasons some people give to explain why there are poor people in this country. Please tell me whether you feel each of these is very important, somewhat important, or not important in explaining why there are poor people in this country." (1) "Failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans," (2) "Loose morals and drunkenness," (3) "Failure of industry to provide enough jobs," and (4) " Lack of effort by the poor themselves." Items 1 and 3 are structural and items 2 and 4 are individualistic (Davis et al. 2001).

I scored each item on a three-point Likert scale (Very Important = 2, Somewhat Important = 1, and Not Important = 0). Structuralistic items received positive weights and individualistic items received negative weights. Structural items were summed to create a Structuralism Index; individualistic items were summed to create an Individualism Index. The higher the absolute value on either separate index, the more an individual espouses that type of explanation. All four items were summed to produce the IvS Index Score. Positive IvS

Index scores indicate greater endorsement of structural attributions, negative scores indicate greater endorsement of individualistic ones, and a zero score indicates a balanced mix of individualistic and structural attributions. IvS Index scores range, therefore, from a -4, when both individualistic items are ranked very important and both structural items ranked not important, to a $+4$, when both structural items are ranked very important and both individualistic items ranked not important.

Data

For Study 1, I used 1990 General Social Survey data (Davis et al. 2001). The 1990 General Social Survey was a full probability sampling of noninstitutionalized English-speakers 18 years and older living in the United States. Respondents were personally interviewed during February, March, and April of 1990. The total sample had a 73 percent response rate with 1,372 respondents. Of this total sample 1,069 (78%) responded to all the items in the current analysis.

Methods

I conducted multiple regression analyses to see if poverty cause attributions line up on a continuum relating to various group memberships identified by past researchers. Significant independent variables associated with poverty cause attributions in past studies on American samples appear in Table 1. These include[2] age, education, family income, party affiliation, political views, occupational prestige, race, region, religion, and work status. Because many of these independent variables are categorical (all except age, education, and occupational prestige) and some of the categorical variables

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[2]For operational information on the independent variables in the current study see explanations contained in the Code Book accompanying the General Social Survey (GSS; Davis et al. 2001). The GSS Code Book variable names corresponding to the variable names used in the current study are: AGE (Age), EDUC (Education), INCOME (Family Income), PARTYID (Party Affiliation), POLVIEWS (Political Views), PRESTIGE (Prestige), RACE (Race), REGION (Region), RELIG16 and DENOM16 (Religious Upbringing), SEX (Gender), WRKSTAT (Work Status). In categorizing and clustering denominations and faith traditions I was guided by the Hartford Seminary study of religions in the United States (Dudley and Roozen 2001), which distinguishes between six faith traditions: Liberal Protestant, Moderate Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Historically Black Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, and other World Religions (which include Mormons, Jews, Muslims, and Bahai's). In the current study, Latter Day Saints and Jews are treated as separate faith traditions from other World Religions.

contain a large number of categories, I used a coding scheme called criterion scaling.[3] Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor scores were checked for all independent variables and no significant multi-colinearity exists.

Coefficients for the multiple regression models I created using the separate indices and the combined IvS Index score as dependent variables appear in Table 2. For all three analyses I simultaneously regressed respondents' relevant index scores (the dependent variable) on all eleven independent variables (three continuous and eight criterion scaled categorical variables).

Results

The multiple regression model (Table 2) using the combined IvS Index score as the dependent variable produced a statistically significant squared multiple correlation coefficient ($F_{(43,1025)} = 4.63$; $p < 0.0001$) and accounted for over 16 percent of the variability in IvS Index scores.[4] Results of the F-tests (adjusted for the criterion scaled categorical variables) for the independent variables indicate six of the eleven predictors contributed significantly to the prediction of IvS Index scores ($\alpha = .05$): Education, Occupational Prestige, Party Affiliation, Political Views, Race, and Religious Upbringing. The multiple regression models using the separate Individualism and Structuralism Index scores as the dependent variable (Table 2) also produced statistically significant squared multiple correlation coefficients—both considerably smaller than the combined IvS Index. The coefficients resulting from the analysis for the Individualism Index ($F_{(43,1025)} = 3.20$; $p < 0.0001$) and the Structuralism Index ($F_{(43,1025)} = 3.19$; $p < 0.0001$) each accounted for about 12 percent of variability in their respective separate indices. Compared to the six statistically significant independent variables in the analysis using

[3]"...A categorical variable is said to be criterion scaled when it is transformed into a single vector in which each individual's score is equal to the criterion mean of the group to which he or she belongs. In other words, a criterion-scaled variable is one consisting of the predicted scores of the individuals under consideration" (Pedhazur 1997, p. 501). Criterion scaling has been shown to be useful when the significance tests are adjusted to account for the inclusion of categorical variables that have been so scaled (Gibbons 1990; Gocka 1973; Pedhazur 1997, pp. 501–505). I have made these adjustments in the current analysis.

[4]Although the R^2 values resulting from the current analyses may appear low, they are comparable to values from similar previous studies. For example, the national study conducted by Kluegel and Smith (1986) with $N = 1,438$ achieved an $R^2 = .14$ when a structural poverty cause index was used as the dependent variable and an $R^2 = .07$ for the model using an individual poverty explanation index.

Table 2. A comparison of unstandardized regression coefficients (N = 1,069)[a]

Independent variables	Dependent variables		
	Structuralism Index score	Individualism Index score	IvS index score
Age	−.003 (.002)	−.002 (.002)	−.005 (.003)
Education	−.007 (.015)	.049*** (.014)	.043* (.019)
Gender	.721* (.298)	.617 (1.570)	.757 (.461)
Income	.255 (.435)	−.877 (1.036)	1.024 (.944)
Party Affiliation	.571* (.154)	.753 (.309)	.594** (.139)
Political Views	.718* (.175)	.640* (.153)	.691*** (.112)
Prestige	−.008** (.003)	.001 (.003)	−.008* (.004)
Race	.609*** (.152)	1.071 (.672)	.666*** (.168)
Region	.762 (.249)	.849*** (.158)	.750 (.221)
Religious Upbringing	.640 (.238)	.732* (.173)	.726** (.148)
Work Status	.658 (.437)	.586 (.294)	.586 (.330)
Intercept	−8.255	7.947	1.377
R^2	.118***	.118***	.163***

[a]Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

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

the combined IvS Index, each separate index had fewer statistically significant predictors ($\alpha = .05$). Five independent variables were statistically significant in the Structuralism Index analysis (Gender, Party Affiliation, Political Views, Occupational Prestige, and Race). Of these, four matched those in the IvS Index analysis (Party Affiliation, Political Views, Occupational Prestige, and Race). Only four independent variables were statistically significant in the Individualism Index analysis (Education, Political Views, Region, and Religious Upbringing). Three of them matched those from the IvS Index analysis (Education, Political Views, and Religious Upbringing). The only statistically significant independent variable found in all three analyses was Political Views.

Tukey's HSD tests were used to identify significant group differences on the four influential categorical variables in the IvS Index Model (see Table 3). This analysis indicates that Americans holding politically liberal views; identifying as strong Democrats; brought up in either the Jewish faith, Historically Black Protestant faiths or with no religious upbringing; and that are black or belong to another nonwhite racial group are most likely to have structural rather than individualistic poverty cause attributions. Americans with extremely conservative political views; identifying as strong Republicans; raised

Table 3. Rankings of variable categories by mean IvS Index score

Variable (Continuum location)	Tukey group[a]		Mean IvS Index score	Number in group	Group name
Political Views					
Structural		A	.7241	116	Liberal
	B	A	.5172	29	Extremely Liberal
	B	C	−.0596	151	Slightly Liberal
	D	C	−.4229	376	Moderate
	D	C	−.5415	205	Slightly Conservative
	D	C	−.6800	150	Conservative
Individualistic	D		−.7619	42	Extremely Conservative
Party Affiliation					
Structural		A	.4328	134	Strong Democrat
		B	−.1215	247	Not Very Strong Democrat
		B	−.1250	104	Independent, Close to Demo.
	C	B	−.4252	127	Independent, Close to Repub.
	C	B	−.5192	104	Independent
	C	B	−.5354	226	Not Very Strong Republican
Individualistic	C		−.7874	127	Strong Republican
Religious Upbringing					
Structural		A	.8261	23	Jewish
		A	.7059	17	Historic Black Protestant
	B	A	.1277	47	None
	B	A	−.0794	63	Liberal Protestant
	B	A	−.1558	276	Roman Catholic
	B	A	−.2441	254	Unclassified Protestant
	B		−.4706	17	Other World Religion
	B		−.5200	25	Latter Day Saint
	B		−.6145	166	Moderate Protestant
Individualistic	B		−.6519	181	Evangelical Protestant
Race					
Structural		A	.4486	107	Black
		A	.3158	38	Other
Individualistic	B		−.4048	924	White

Note: [a]Groups with the same letter are not significantly different at the .05 level. Those with different letters are significantly different at the .05 level.

in Evangelical Protestant, Moderate Protestant, Latter Day Saint, or Other World Religious traditions; and that are white are most likely to hold individualistic rather than structural attributions. As respondent education increases, poverty cause attributions generally become more structural and less individualistic. As respondent occupational

prestige increases, these attributions generally become more individualistic and less structural.

A closer look at these mean rankings (Table 3), reveals strong evidence that not only does this analysis fit those of previous American studies, but that the IvS Index reasonably captures poverty cause attributions as they occur along a continuum with strong individualistic beliefs on one end and equally strong structural beliefs on the other, using a minimum amount of data. Although not perfectly aligned, political view groups rank generally from most liberal to most conservative with political liberals leaning towards structuralism, conservatives towards individualism and moderates in between. Party affiliation groups line up from Strong Democrats on the structuralistic side of the IvS Index continuum to Strong Republicans on the individualistic side with Independents in between the two parties. The lineup of religious groups also indicates an underlying continuum—people raised in the Jewish Faith and in Historic Black Protestant congregations scoring the most structuralisticly and Evangelical Protestants being the most individualistic. Race establishes a simple ranking: whites evidence the most individualistic attributions, blacks the most structural ones, and other nonwhites fit in between on the structuralistic side. Taking into consideration the way these various groups align on the IvS Index, the underlying continuum captured by the IvS Index is best described as conservative-liberal. This continuum reflects the existence of oppositional institutional logics with Unbridled Individualism on one side (the conservative ideology) and its structural contrary(ies) (the liberal ideology), however defined, on the other.

Tukey's HSD tests were used to identify significant group differences on the remaining influential categorical variables for both of the separate indices (see Table 4 for Individualism Index and Table 5 for Structuralism Index). The rankings on both the separate indices fit with those of the combined IvS Index and support the notion of a conservative-liberal continuum with individualism on one side and structuralism on the other.

Comparing the combined index approach to the separate indices approach with this national sample leads to several conclusions:

1. **Although items on each separate index appear to be distinct factors from a factor analytic point of view, they may also contribute meaningfully to a combined index. They exist separately, but combine meaningfully—something like hydrogen and oxygen in producing water.**

Table 4. Rankings of variable categories by mean Individualism Index score

Variable (continuum location)	Tukey group[a]			Mean Individualism score	Number in group	Group name
Political Views						
Less Individualistic		A		−2.0086	116	Liberal
	B	A		−2.0690	29	Extremely Liberal
	B	A	C	−2.4106	151	Slightly Liberal
	B	D	C	−2.5805	205	Slightly Conservative
		D	C	−2.6011	376	Moderate
		D	C	−2.7600	150	Conservative
More Individualistic		D		−2.9524	42	Extremely Conservative
Region						
Less Individualistic		A		−2.0526	57	New England
	B	A		−2.3103	145	Pacific
	B	A	C	−2.4121	199	East North Central.
	B	A	C	−2.4369	103	West North Central
	B	A	C	−2.4783	69	Mountain.
	B		C	−2.5511	176	South Atlantic
	B		C	−2.7447	94	West South Central
	B		C	−2.7922	77	East South Central
More Individualistic			C	−2.8591	149	Middle Atlantic
Religious Upbringing						
Less Individualistic		A		−2.0000	23	Jewish
		A		−2.0213	47	None
		A		−2.1765	17	Historic Black Protestant
		A		−2.3492	63	Liberal Protestant
		A		−2.4312	276	Roman Catholic
		A		−2.5394	254	Unclassified Protestant
		A		−2.6800	25	Latter Day Saint
		A		−2.6807	166	Moderate Protestant
		A		−2.7647	17	Other World Religion
More Individualistic		A		−2.7680	181	Evangelical Protestant

Note: [a]Groups with the same letter are not significantly different at the .05 level. Those with different letters are significantly different at the .05 level.

2. The combined IvS Index is influenced by most of the same factors as each of the two separate indices, but combines the information from each to produce a more coherent result.
3. Political Views sit on a conservative-liberal continuum and all three indices are influenced by them at a statistically significant level—further evidence that poverty cause attributions occur along a continuum with strong individualistic beliefs on one end and equally strong structural beliefs on the other.

Table 5. Rankings of variable categories by mean Structuralism Index score

Variable (Continuum location)	Tukey group[a]			Mean Structuralism score	Number in group	Group name
Political Views						
More Structural		A		2.7328	116	Liberal
	B	A		2.5862	29	Extremely Liberal
	B	A	C	2.3510	151	Slightly Liberal
	B		C	2.1905	42	Extremely Conservative
	B		C	2.1782	376	Moderate
	B		C	2.0800	150	Conservative
Less Structural			C	2.0390	205	Slightly Conservative
Party Affiliation						
More Structural		A		2.7388	134	Strong Democrat
	B	A		2.3401	247	Not Very Strong Democrat
	B	A		2.3365	104	Independent, Close to Demo.
	B		C	2.2019	104	Independent
	B		C	2.1417	127	Independent, Close to Repub.
	B		C	2.0487	226	Not Very Strong Republican
Less Structural			C	1.8583	127	Strong Republican
Gender						
More Structural		A		2.3449	577	Female
Less Structural	B			2.1037	492	Male
Race						
More Structural		A		2.9159	107	Black
		A		2.6053	38	Other
Less Structural	B			2.1396	924	White

[a]Groups with the same letter are not significantly different at the .05 level. Those with different letters are significantly different at the .05 level.

STUDY 2

Data

Studying the influence volunteering for a poverty alleviation organization has on volunteer poverty cause beliefs, I interviewed 39 volunteers for a local Habitat for Humanity affiliate and 39 randomly selected supporters of another ecumenical organization within the same West South Central region of the United States[5] in September and October, 2003 (sampling techniques are described

[5]This region includes Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas.

in Robinson 2004). In December, 2003, and January, 2004, I reinterviewed both groups by telephone. The instruments used in all these interviews contained items identical to the IvS Index and the Political Views scale described in Study 1. Thirty-seven of 39 original Habitat members and 35 of 39 original members of the other ecumenical organization responded to the second interview. One case from the Habitat group and two cases from the other group contained missing values during the first series of interviews. By deleting second interview nonresponse cases and missing value cases from the first interviews and using the responses from both groups of respondents, I created a 75-observation data set from the September-October Interviews and a 72-observation data set from the December-January Interviews.

Method

In Study 1 I found evidence pointing to a conservative-liberal continuum associated with the IvS Index. To determine if this relationship held for the local samples in Study 2, I conducted one-way ANOVAs and Tukey HSD tests between Political Views and IvS Index scores for the two sets of observations described above.

Results

Results of the one-Way ANOVAs between Political Views and IvS Index scores and post hoc Tukey HSD tests for each of the two data sets appear in Table 6. These analyses indicate that IvS Index scores vary by Political View category at a statistically significant level for both data sets (for the September-October set $F_{(6,68)} = 6.92$, $p \leq .0001$ and for the December-January set $F_{(6,65)} = 7.56$, $p < 0.0001$). Coefficients of determination show that knowing a respondent's Political Views explains 37.92 percent of the variation in IvS Index scores for the September-October sample and 41.09 percent for the December-January sample. Tukey HSD tests and associated rankings of Political View categories by their mean IvS Index score for both data sets show Political View category means aligning from most conservative to most liberal on the IvS continuum. These analyses may be more suggestive than conclusive, allowing generalization only to the organizations sampled and not the entire American population, but they do lend additional support to the notion that a conservative-liberal ideological continuum lies underneath the IvS Index and that this index reliably captures the nature of this continuum.

Table 6. Rankings of local group political views by mean IvS scores[a]

Political view	Continuum location	Tukey group[b]			Mean IvS Index score	n
September-October 2003 Interviews						
Extremely Liberal	Structural			A	4.0000	1
Liberal		B		A	2.0000	9
Slightly Liberal		B	C	A	1.2222	9
Moderate		B	C		.3571	14
Slightly Conservative		B	C		−.1667	18
Conservative		B	C		−.6667	21
Extremely Conservative	Individualistic		C		−1.3333	3
N = 75 r² = .3792 F = 6.92 df = (6,68) p < .0001						
December 2003–January 2004 Interviews						
Extremely Liberal	Structural		A		2.6667	3
Liberal		B	A		1.5455	11
Slightly Liberal		B	A		.8333	6
Moderate		B			.3077	13
Conservative		B			−.1667	18
Slightly Conservative		B			−.3158	19
Extremely Conservative	Individualistic		C		−3.5000	2
N = 72 r² = .4109 F = 7.56 df = (6,65) p < .0001						

[a]One Way ANOVAs were conducted on the relationship between Political Views and IvS Index Scores. Resulting F scores and significance levels are given.

[b]Groups with the same letter are not significantly different at the 0.05 level. Those with different letters are significantly different at the 0.05 level.

STUDY 3

Data and Method

Most Americans have mixed conceptions about poverty causes. The IvS Index deals with these mixed conceptions by indicating how individuals lean either in a structural or individualistic direction. It places individuals with attributions toward poverty causes equally balanced between individualism and structuralism in the center of the continuum at zero. I analyzed simple relative frequency distributions for the data collected in Study 1 and 2 (above) to get a clearer picture of the individualistic-structuralistic continuum of poverty cause beliefs and to better understand how mixed attributions contribute to it.

Results

The IvS Index reliably captures an individualistic-structuralistic continuum of beliefs about the poor for both national and local samples.

Table 7 contains relative frequency information on IvS Index scores
for both national and local study samples.

All three sample distributions are roughly bell shaped with modes
at their center near or at the median point. The national distribution
leans in an individualistic direction (Mean $= -0.29$; Mode $= 0$;
Median $= 0$; SD $= 1.60$). The local samples both lean in a structural
direction (Mean $= 0.23$; Mode $= 0$; Median $= 0$; SD $= 1.67$ for the
first sample and Mean $= 0.25$; Mode $= 0$; Median $= 0$; SD $= 1.61$ for
the second). For the national sample over 42 percent scored on the
individualistic side of the continuum (negative scores), about 28 per-
cent on the structuralistic side (positive scores), and about 30 percent
had balanced (zero) scores. Being more structuralistic, the distribu-
tion of scores for the local samples had proportionately fewer respon-
dents on the individualistic side than the national sample (32% for the
first interviews and 29.17% for the second). Conversely, both local
samples had proportionately more respondents on the strucuturalistic
side than the national sample (44% for the first and 43.06% for the
second). Although the modal score for each distribution was zero,
the proportion of respondents holding equally balanced (zero)
attributions for the local samples (24% for the September-October

Table 7. IvS Index scores—1990 U.S. sample and 2003–2004 local samples

| | | | 2003–2004 Local samples | | | |
| | 1990 U.S. sample | | September–October 2003 | | December 2003–January 2004 | |
IvS score	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Very Strong Individualism						
−4	19	1.78	0	0.00	1	1.39
−3	75	7.02	4	5.33	3	4.17
−2	148	13.84	9	12.00	6	8.33
−1	211	19.74	11	14.67	11	15.28
0	319	29.84	18	24.00	20	27.78
+1	166	15.53	16	21.33	12	16.67
+2	82	7.67	11	14.67	16	22.22
+3	32	2.99	4	5.33	2	2.78
+4	17	1.59	2	2.67	1	1.39
Very Strong Structuralism						
Total # Respondents	1069	100.00	75	100.00	72	100.00
Mean	−.29		.23		.25	
Median	0		0		0	
Mode	0		0		0	
Standard Deviation	1.60		1.67		1.61	

Table 8. The mixture of attributions—1990 U.S. Sample and 2003–2004 local samples

Mix of attributions	1990 U.S. sample		Local sample September–October 2003		Local sample December 2003–January 2004	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Neither Structural nor Individualistic	6	.56	1	1.33	1	1.39
Structural Only	50	4.68	10	13.33	10	13.89
Individualistic Only	94	8.79	3	4.00	3	4.17
Both Individualistic and Structural	919	85.97	61	81.33	58	80.56
Total # Respondents	1069	100.00	75	100.00	72	100.00

interviews and 27.78% for the December-January interviews) were slightly lower than those in the national sample (29.84%).[6] There are few scores (less than 3%) at either end of the continuum in any of the three distributions. Although the general distributions lean to one side or the other, the majority of IvS Index scores in all three distributions fall between 1 (slight structuralism) and −1 (slight individualism), inclusive (65.11% for the national sample and about 60% for both sets of local interviews). Most respondents in the 1990 national sample and the 2003–2004 local samples held a mixture of individualistic and structural beliefs toward poverty causes.

[6]Although the veracity of designating a zero score as indicating a balanced mix of attributions on the IvS Index should be evident from the current discussion, some readers may believe that a possible problem may be hiding within this attributions category. This problem can be posed in the form of a question: What if most of the attribution scores that are being classified as balanced are zero (not important) to begin with? That would not indicate a balance between individualistic and structural attributions, but that the respondent felt that neither individualistic nor structural causes are important to explaining poverty. Maybe they are indicating disbelief in individualism and structuralism rather than balancing individualistic and structural beliefs. Frequency distributions for balanced (zero) attributions indicate (as does the analysis of the mixture of attributions provided in Table 8) that few respondents in either the national or local samples with a zero IvS Index score had zero scores on both the Individualism Index and the Structuralism Index (1.9% of balanced respondents for the national, and less than 6% of the balanced respondents in either set of local interviews). Few respondents in any sample believed that neither structuralism nor individualism were important causes of poverty in America. This zero category, in all the samples, truly contains respondents with equally balanced individualistic and structural attributions. They believe, to some extent at least, that both individualistic and structural factors play equal roles in explaining poverty.

The mixture of attributions for both the national and local samples (Table 8) provides additional support for this balancing act Americans play when attempting to explain poverty in America. In all three samples, very few respondents held that neither structural nor individualistic explanations were important in explaining American poverty (0.56% nationally and under 1.4% locally). Some, but not many, thought that only structural or only individualistic explanations were necessary. Exclusive structural attributions were given by less than 5 percent nationally and less than 14 percent locally. Less than 9 percent of national respondents and around 4 percent of local respondents espoused only individualistic beliefs. The overwhelming majority of respondents in each of the three samples held both individualistic and structural views to some extent at the same time (over 85% nationally and over 80% locally). They believe, to some degree at least, that both individualistic and structural factors play a role in explaining poverty.

DISCUSSION

These current studies generally confirm much past research on poverty cause attributions and lead to a few specific speculations and conclusions about such beliefs in America. First, these attributions line up on a continuum that relates to background ideologies and institutional logics with very strong individualism on one end, very strong structuralism at the other, and mixed styles in between. Within various samples (nationally and locally), this continuum generally mirrors a conservative-liberal political ideology continuum. This lends credence to the concept of antagonistic institutional logics anchoring oppositional poverty cause attributions with Unbridled Individualism on the individualistic (conservative) side and a contrary structural institutional logic(s) on the other (liberal) side. Where one is situated along this attribution continuum is associated with one's education, occupational prestige, party affiliation, political views, race, and religious upbringing.

Second, the distribution of poverty cause attributions for Americans at the national level on this individualistic-structuralistic (or conservative-liberal) continuum leaned in an individualistic direction from 1969 through 1990.[7] It is clear, however, that, although

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[7]This tendency has held at least through 2001. The NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School "National Survey on Poverty in America" conducted in 2001 (National Public Radio et al. 2001) found that 48% of their respondents said that "people were not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty" compared to 45% who said that "circumstances beyond their control cause them to be poor" in response to the dichotomous query containing these two responses prefaced by "In your opinion, which is the bigger cause of poverty today…"

Unbridled Individualism may sway American poverty cause beliefs more than rival structural institutional logics, the distribution of poverty cause attributions indicates that it does not reign supreme. Most Americans in 1990 (and probably in 1969, 1980, and today) held balanced attributions toward poverty causes or leaned only slightly toward individualism or structuralism. Few Americans in 1990 (less than a quarter) exhibited more than slight individualism. Almost all (95%) said that individualistic factors contributed to some extent to poverty in America, but only a few less (91%) said that structural elements came into play in some way. Almost 86 percent of American's held both individualistic and structural explanations in a mixed attribution style in 1990—a significant number (almost 30%) holding both to be equally important causes of poverty in America. Past researchers, when encountering similar mixes of attributions, have seen them as being indicative of either compromise explanations (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Lee et al. 1990) or instances of dual consciousness (Hunt 1996). It is possible that a simpler explanation exists—one first hinted at by Wilson (1996) in his study of attributions harbored toward distinct types of poor people.

Wilson (1996) issued two largely unanswered challenges to poverty cause attribution researchers. First, he claimed that relying on a generic conception of the poor, these researchers ignore the possibility that people believe that some of the poor got that way because of structural factors, while others are poor because of individualistic ones. He showed that, at least at the local level, people do attribute differently towards different subgroups of the poor. They "have different causal beliefs for different types of poverty" (Wilson 1996, p. 414). The second challenge he raised was an assertion that a "public arenas theory" held better explanatory power than the dominant ideology thesis endorsed by many past researchers. This public arenas "theory maintains that at any point in time many issues compete with each other in institutional 'arenas' of public discourse...dominant frames tend to prevail over minority ones" (Wilson 1996, p. 415).

Wilson (1996) contributed greatly to our understanding of poverty cause attributions, but neither of these challenges does more that clarify points already made by past poverty cause attribution researchers. They have almost always contended that the dominant ideology (Unbridled Individualism) competes with other ideologies and rephrasing the issue into "social problem" terms like "frames" and "public arenas" merely provides some contemporary language detailing mechanisms of legitimation. Gans (1995) pointed to active attempts at influencing American beliefs about the poor by various

conservative forces. These attempts include labeling the generic poor as an "underclass" using what he described as an "ideology of undeservingness." This ideology teems with components that resonate with Unbridled Individualism. The last time a similarly directed attack came from liberal forces was probably during the 1950s and 1960s, when advocates like Michael Harrington and Martin Luther King, Jr., helped spark the Great Society and the War on Poverty. Wilson (1996) may be right: these attempts take place within public arenas; however, we cannot ignore their ideological tone. Speaking of these attempts as supportive of either dominant or contrary subordinate ideologies, or institutional logics as described here, still holds much validity.

As to Wilson's second criticism: most poverty cause attribution research is not flawed because it deals with the generic poor. Actually, past poverty cause attribution literature and the studies presented here may indicate that Americans believe that there are at least two kinds of poor people—a structure of beliefs consistent with Wilson's findings. That may possibly be why a large number of us hold balanced attributions and why few lean more than slightly in either direction on the individualistic-structuralistic continuum. This acknowledgement that there exist at least two kinds of poor people provides a basic underpinning for the distribution of attributions along this continuum. This balancing of attributions regarding at least two groups of poor people helps define the ideological landscape of contemporary American culture. In fact, the institutional logic of Unbridled Individualism fits comfortably with a two-tiered conception of the poor.

The fit between a two-tiered conception of poor people and poverty cause attributions became apparent as I interviewed still another set of Habitat for Humanity volunteers during the winter of 2003–2004 (Robinson 2004). Although a few of them made no distinction between different kinds of poor people, most clearly distinguished between at least two groups of poor people. These respondents (individualistic and structuralistic attributors alike) distinguished between those that were poor because of "bad choices" and those that were poor despite their ability and willingness to make "good choices." They distinguished between these "worthy" and "deserving" poor and those that try "to beat the system and get as much as they could." They separated the poor on welfare from those who avoid it because "it stifles individual effort, initiative." They espoused the belief that "... there are poor people who are poor by choice and that there are poor people who are poor by circumstance." Connecting

this distinction between two types of poor people to the institutional logic of Unbridled Individualism, I was told that:

> ...in the United States, nobody is poor by circumstance for long—forever. I think that if you remain poor, you are poor by choice. Because this country offers too many opportunities, not just to poor people, but to everyone—to everyone to take advantage of to improve their status in life. Those opportunities are not everywhere—globally...In the United States, there is no reason that you cannot improve your status in life, if you choose to. There are ways out of the hole.... in the United States everyone has the opportunity who chooses to take it.

This illustrates how consistently the dominant ideology of Unbridled Individualism fits with a two-tiered conception of the poor. Individualistic attributions may be leveled at the "unworthy and undeserving poor," while structural attributions are offered for the plight of those that are "poor by circumstance" instead of choice. Welfare dependents are generally viewed as poor by choice, while the homeless and the "working poor" are viewed as poor by circumstance. An individualistically prone attributor views those that are poor by choice less worthy of help than those that are poor by circumstance. Structuralistically leaning attributors may also see two kinds of poor people as an acknowledgement of situational evidence, but see poverty as "caused" by social and economic factors beyond the poor individual's control. The IvS Index score on the individualistic-structuralistic continuum may indicate a respondent's best guess estimate of the proportion of the nation's poor by choice compared to those poor by circumstance. Unbridled Individualism and its structural alternatives influence the perception of this choice/circumstance mix.

CONCLUSION

Naively reading recent national polls lead us to believe that "half the public says the poor are not doing enough to help themselves out of poverty, and the other half says that circumstances beyond their control cause them to be poor" (National Public Radio et al. 2001, p. 1). Social reformers react with discouragement and say that little has changed since Feagin's (1975) classic study. By establishing poverty cause beliefs on a conservative-liberal continuum, the current analysis shows the fallacy of these polling results and this disenchantment.

Yes, we Americans currently lean toward individualistic explanations for poverty causes (and probably have for a very long time). Most of us—even those of us who are most prone to liberal, structural explanations for poverty—admit that there may be those who are poor because they lack the initiative to change their circumstance or choose actions contrary to making a positive change in their situation—essentially those who are poor by choice. But, most Americans also admit that there may be some fellow citizens who are poor by circumstance, who suffer from their position at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy because of forces largely beyond their personal control. An ongoing clash of ideologies may be taking place—but the most common battleground lies within us individually. We are not divided as a people about the causes of poverty. Americans individually carry around a conflicting and often oddly-balanced conceptual mix about why people become and remain poor in this country.

Understanding this mix of poverty cause attributions and the meanings attached to it is still critical to unraveling the riddle of how poverty can continue to exist in a nation where the opportunity to succeed supposedly exists for all those willing to take it. Convincing most of us that more poor Americans are the victims of circumstance than makers of their own poverty has and will continue to be an uphill battle in the face of persistent and pervasive socialization by principal institutions in American life instilling and reinforcing the institutional logic of Unbridled Individualism. If maintenance of the current structure of social inequality in America truly relies upon a set of individualistic beliefs about poverty causes and an underlying institutional logic of Unbridled Individualism, we must discover mechanisms to increase the attractiveness of oppositional structural institutional logics. The existing odd mixture of attributions held by most Americans provides hope for such efforts.

Sociological social psychologists, reformers or not, should continue to develop a better understanding of how these mechanisms of legitimation for structured inequality operate. We should adequately address issues of social inequality and encourage integration with sociological concerns about stratification. We should contribute more frequently to the social side of social psychology's grasp of these issues. Poverty causes attribution research has been and continues to be useful in understanding social inequalities within their social context. The current study continues that tradition. We need future research on how individualistic poverty cause attributions and the institutional logic of Unbridled Individualism are instilled and maintained in an environment where evidence exists, but is

largely ignored, that competition with others is not always valued or adequately rewarded and opportunities for success are not equally available to all. Several other areas covered here also deserve more attention, including: (1) the link between poverty cause attributions and political views; (2) the relationship between poverty cause attributions and distinctions between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor; (3) direct empirical testing of alternative explanations for the distribution of poverty cause attributions within American population samples (three have been discussed here); and (4) detailed explorations into how the acknowledgement that there are at least two kinds of poor people supports the dominant American ideology of Unbridled Individualism.

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