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*Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* published online 13 July 2014

DOI: 10.1177/0022022114542284

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# Parental Expectations and Prosocial Behavior of Adolescents From Low-Income Backgrounds: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between Three Countries—Argentina, Colombia, and Spain

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## Abstract

Parental expectations are influenced by cultural models, which in turn are subject to a great influence from historically fluctuating features of the socioeconomic background. Parental expectations seem to be linked to children's social and emotional development in terms of empathy and prosocial behavior. The current study aims to (a) compare low-income adolescents' perceptions of parental expectations of prosocial and antisocial behavior across three Latin countries (Argentina, Colombia, and Spain), (b) compare the empathy and prosocial behavior between the three countries, (c) compare the prosocial behavior between the three countries, and (d) study the effect of perceived parental expectations and empathy on the prosocial behavior of adolescents in all three of the countries studied in this research. The sample was made up of 446 Argentinean adolescents, 474 Colombian adolescents, and 632 Spanish adolescents. The *Expected Parental Reactions Scale*, *Interpersonal Reactivity Index*, and *Prosocial Behavior Questionnaire* were used to measure the variables included in this study. Results reveal considerable differences between children's perceptions of parental expectations in different countries. Results also show the existence of significant differences between male and female adolescents. In all three countries, girls score more highly than boys in prosocial behavior and empathy. Furthermore, we find that low-income Argentinean adolescents score more highly than Spanish and Colombian adolescents in prosocial behavior measures. Finally, expected parental reactions toward prosocial behavior and empathy seem to have an influence on the adolescents' development of prosocial behavior in all three countries.

## Keywords

developmental, social, family/child rearing, values, attitudes, beliefs

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Each country has its own cultural model of parenting, which implies that parental behaviors vary accordingly around the world (LeVine et al., 1994). This idea has led many authors to stress the importance of studying the contexts in which parenting takes place (Baumrind, 1966, 1996; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Richaud, 2010). These authors advocate carrying out studies on parent–child interactions for a range of cultural, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups. The reasoning behind this approach is that parents' goals and values for children change as a result of the parents' cultural and educational characteristics (Suizzo, 2007). Differences in parents' expectations at each stage of a child's development may result in contrasting parent–child interactions and varying child outcomes (Richaud, 2010).

A large number of studies have demonstrated the importance of parenting style in the transmission of values and in the encouragement of prosocial behaviors in children (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2010; Richaud, Mesurado, & Lemos, 2012). Despite this generally rich vein of literature, however, relatively few studies have focused on analyzing the influence of parental expectations in the development of prosocial and antisocial behaviors in children and adolescents (Wyatt & Carlo, 2002). Research into low-income groups of people from Latin cultures is particularly scarce.

A fundamental principle of many sociological theories holds that stressful conditions affect the efficacy of parenting. Such conditions are often associated with maladaptive individual behaviors that have detrimental effects on the social functioning of the community (Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001). Barudy and Dantagnan (2005, 2010) observed that for the majority of parents living in poverty and at social risk, the three functions of social parenting with the greatest importance (i.e., nurture or affective behavior, socialization, and education) are adversely affected. Socially vulnerable parents must probably confront a host of difficulties—in addition to those relating to material deprivation—that affect their parenting capabilities. These difficulties include low education levels, a lack of access to jobs and services, isolation, physical and mental illness, and domestic violence. Although these factors may act independently, it is more likely that they interact to produce an effect on parenting approaches and outcomes for children (Katz, Corlyon, La Placa, & Hunter, 2007; Richaud, Mestre, et al., 2013). In an article analyzing the role of stress in parenting, Deater-Deckard (2004) concluded that cultural influences contribute to determining parents' responses to situations of stress, and have a bearing on how stress affects their parenting.

Furthermore, parenting behaviors that are adaptive for children of a certain age may be harmful for younger or older children (Katz et al., 2007). Furstenberg et al. (2000) hinted at this idea, revealing that restrictive parenting may be a useful approach for younger children in dangerous and chaotic neighborhoods, but maladaptive for teenagers, who withdraw into themselves and fail to develop autonomous behaviors.

## **The Influence of Culture**

Parental expectations are influenced by cultural models, which in turn are subject to a great influence from features of the socioeconomic surroundings that fluctuate over time, such as access to education and economic development (Suizzo, 2007). It is thus to be expected that parenting behaviors reflect cultural differences in parental belief systems, as these systems are built on culturally constructed parental beliefs and values about parenting, child rearing, childhood, and child behavior and development (Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995; Su & Hynie, 2011).

To understand how culture relates to social-psychological phenomena, it is important to determine the precise cultural differences at play (Hofstede, 1980). Traditionally, cultures are classified as either individualistic or collectivistic. Some societies place an emphasis on the needs, values, goals, and points of view of the group, assigning greater importance to social welfare

(collectivism). Conversely, other societies promote goals, attitudes, and personal values that come before those of the group (individualism). Thus, individualistic societies are characterized by a focus on the individual and the nuclear family (Levine et al., 2001), whereas collectivistic cultures place a great deal more emphasis on hierarchy. In collectivistic cultures, the father is generally the indisputable head of the family, and males have more power than females. Individualism, however, gives priority to a person's emotional independence with respect to groups and organizations, whereas the absence of individualism corresponds to an emotional dependence and a strong sense of the *we* (Gobernado Arribas, 1999; Hofstede, 1980).

At the psychological level, the difference between collectivism and individualism is expressed in terms of the personality dimensions *allocentrism* and *idiocentrism*, respectively (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988) observed a positive correlation between allocentrism and social support—in terms of both satisfaction and quantity—and low levels of anomie and alienation. The same study also demonstrated a positive correlation between emphasis on achievement, and perceived loneliness and idiocentrism. Allocentrism–idiocentrism is a reflection, at the psychological level, of the dimension of collectivism–individualism (Hofstede, 1980), or cooperation–individualism (Mead, 1967), at the cultural level. Deutsch (1949, 1962) conceptualized the relationships of individuals and groups, splitting them into three forms. This categorization admits the possibility that individual goals may be correlated with group goals positively (cooperation), negatively (competition), or not at all (individualism; Triandis et al., 1988).

Hofstede (1980) considered Latin American countries to be more collectivistic than European countries. Research by the Hofstede Centre ([www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com)) shows that, with a score of 13, Colombia is among the least individualistic countries, or, conversely, is among the most collectivistic cultures in the world. Argentina, with a score of 46, lies in the middle of the individualistic–collectivistic ranking. Argentina is the most individualistic of all Latin American countries. Despite this, many collectivistic traits prevail. An example of such traits is the opinion of and obligations toward the (extended) family or in-group. Finally, the same research center cites Spain, with a score of 51, as collectivistic in comparison with other countries of Europe (except Portugal). Compared with other areas of the world, however, Spanish culture clearly classes as individualistic.

As Hofstede devised this classification, scholars' views toward this method of identifying countries have changed somewhat (Rotondo Fernandez, Carloson, Stepina, & Nicholson, 1997). A cross-national meta-analysis by Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) yielded a graph that plots individualism and collectivism effect sizes. This curve seems to indicate that Spanish culture has greater levels of individualism than Colombia and Argentina, whereas collectivism levels are similar in all three countries. In addition, differences in country context and circumstances highlight the heterogeneity of cultures and societies, and the way they exhibit individualist and collectivist tendencies (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). An example of this phenomenon is provided by recent studies in Brazil, which show that different variables (e.g., size of city, education level, and cultural conditions) imply different individualistic or collectivistic goals or values (Seidl-de-Moura et al., 2008; Vieira et al., 2010a, 2010b).

The aforementioned cultural characteristics of nations and societies affect the ways in which expectations and values are transmitted from parents to their children. Interactions with and influences from the social environment may cause differences in parental variables, thus affecting the healthy development of children (Su & Hynie, 2011). Although numerous studies have analyzed the differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies, there is a definite gap in the literature as regards the comparison between different peoples living in countries with common Latin roots, but that retain their own individual cultural, social, and historical peculiarities.

## Parental Expectation

As discussed previously, parental expectations, as a cultural factor, are crucial for explaining the relationship between parenting and poverty. Although the term *parental expectation* has been defined in a variety of ways, the majority of studies on the subject have defined this concept as the beliefs and judgments that parents have about the future achievement and behavior of their sons and daughters, in terms of what the parents want or expect from their children (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). As mentioned previously, a considerable body of evidence seems to show that communities differ as regards what they deem valuable for the development of their children (Keller, 2007). Parenting behaviors thus tend to follow the cultural models that the community in question considers appropriate (Keller, 2007).

Several studies reveal the relationship between parental expectations, and children's psychological adjustment (Belsky, 1990; Burbach & Borduin, 1986; Lin, 1999), children's subjective well-being and the self-esteem of adolescents from several different cultures (Oishi & Sullivan, 2005). Parents with high expectations regarding the behavior of their children are more likely to transmit values such as getting on well with classmates and teaching staff (Zhan, 2006). Likewise, Wyatt and Carlo (2002) showed that adolescents who have positive maternal and paternal expectations with regard to their prosocial behavior reveal themselves to be more involved in prosocial activities. Similarly, adolescents stating that they have low levels of maladaptive behaviors also cite negative maternal and paternal expectations with regard to their antisocial behavior. Parental expectations not only seem to exert an influence on the cognitive and educative aspects of the development of children (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010) but also on aspects linked to their social and emotional development (Oishi & Sullivan, 2005; Zhan, 2006), such as empathy and prosocial behavior.

## Empathy and Prosocial Behavior

Empathy offers a way of understanding the intentions of others, and predicting their behavior and emotional experiences. At the same time, empathy allows people to interact effectively in social environments. Empathy also helps hold societies together, bringing people closer to one another and preventing individuals from harming each other (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). For the past decade, academic interest in empirically studying the role of empathy in moral and prosocial behavior, and how empathy inhibits aggression and antisocial behavior has been growing. Studies of adolescents have highlighted the relationship between high levels of empathy and high levels of altruism, showing this link to be stronger in girls than in boys (Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003).

The altruistic nature of most moral beliefs implies that group selection (i.e., mentor, peer, and parent-child transmission) helps shape these beliefs (Campbell, 1975). Applying this observation in the context of people's values leads to the hypothesis that collectivistic values are transmitted more easily than values of an individualistic nature, because the latter are not shaped by group selection, whereas the former are. Collectivistic values may in fact allow group maintenance to function properly, and may in turn lead to cooperation between more disparate groups of individuals that are otherwise unrelated (Schönplflug, 2001).

The definition of prosocial behaviors is given as social acts performed to promote the well-being of others (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Eisenberg et al. (1999) offered an alternative definition for prosocial behavior; namely, voluntary behavior carried out with the intention of benefiting others. This may include, for example, behaviors that aim to help, share, and comfort. These behaviors act as a buffer to protect against aggression, and imply a behavioral orientation toward strong social skills (Carlo et al., 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger, & Cric, 2005).

## The Influence of Sex

Parents' expectations for boys and girls differ. Expectations are that boys are more autonomous, whereas girls develop greater concern for social evaluation of others and tend to be more nurturing (Mestre, Mesurado, Tur, Samper, & Richaud de Minzi, 2014; Richaud, Lemos, & Oros, in press). As a consequence, girls have a greater concern for external evaluation and a lower degree of mastery and control than boys, owing to the above stereotypical gender socialization (Blehar & Oren, 1999; Ruble, Greulich, Pomerantz, & Gochberg, 1993).

Some gender socialization theorists (Gilligan, 1982; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) have asserted that girls are encouraged to display nurturing and caring behaviors to a greater degree than their male counterparts. This process emerges through the gender-specific practices of many actors—including parents and other family members, peers, and other adults (e.g., teachers), as well as via institutional policies (e.g., gender segregation)—in children's early life.

Evidence of differences between the empathy of males and females is abundant, with the latter consistently being viewed as more empathetic (Garaigordobil & García de Galdeano, 2006; Litvack-Miller, McDougall, & Romney, 1997; V. Mestre, Frías Navarro, & Samper García, 2004). Studying empathy in boys and girls uncovers differences between the two sexes. Specifically, girls are generally more empathetic than boys, in both cognitive and affective dimensions (Richaud, 2013; Richaud, Lemos, et al., 2013). These results coincide with those of all previous studies on the subject (see, among others, Broidy et al., 2003; Carlo, Eisenberg, Koller, Da Silva, & Frohlich, 1996; Carlo, Raffaelli, Laible, & Meyer, 1999; Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; M. V. Mestre, Samper, Frías, & Tur, 2009; Toussaint & Webb, 2005).

Gender-role socialization from a young age involves encouraging differences in prosocial behavior between men and women. Studies reveal that men tend to engage in risky or chivalrous behavior (in public settings), whereas women act out more nurturing roles (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Hastings, Rubin, & DeRose, 2005; McGinley, Opal, Richaud, & Mesurado, 2014). Given that studies depict women as more empathetic and prosocial than men (Carlo, 2006; Mestre et al., 2009), we acknowledge the value of considering these differences in the current study.

## Present Studies

The theoretical introduction of this article discusses the myriad studies that have highlighted the importance of the role of distinct aspects of parenting in the fostering of children's and adolescents' prosocial behaviors. Nevertheless, few studies have focused on the influence of parental expectations of prosociality. By the same token, the literature lacks studies that draw comparisons between Latin countries—especially with a focus on the low-income sector of the population—such as Argentina, Colombia, and Spain.

Argentina, Colombia, and Spain are three nations that share some common cultural characteristics, but that maintain their own peculiarities. These differences owe to their vastly dissimilar histories and disparate socioeconomic realities. These three countries are quite similar to each other as regards their predominantly European heritage, sharing the same language (Spanish) and the Catholic culture.

Both Spanish and Latin American cultures are considered *friendly* (*simpáticas*); that is to say, cultures with a proactive attitude, a socioemotional tendency, and a concern for the social well-being of others. The cultural characteristics referred to above imply that people in these countries choose to be actively polite, friendly, and helpful toward strangers (Levine et al., 2001; Rodrigues & Assmar, 1988; Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). In spite of these similarities, the three countries display differences regarding cultural values transmitted to children via parenting styles. Previous comparative studies have highlighted sizable differences between Argentina and Spain regarding the styles of parenting

perceived by children from low-income backgrounds. Spanish children note a greater degree of pathological control—pathological control corresponding here to Baumrind’s description of authoritarian style—accompanied by a significantly lower degree of negligence—negligence corresponding here to Baumrind’s description of uninvolved style—than in Argentinean children (Richaud, Mestre, Lemos, Tur, Ghiglione, & Samper, 2013).

The aims of this study are as follows. First, we aim to compare low-income adolescents’ perceptions of parental expectations of prosocial and antisocial behavior across three Latin countries (Argentina, Colombia, and Spain), and as a function of sex. Second, we set out to compare the empathy of residents of the three countries, and observe how this variable is affected by sex. Third, we seek to compare prosocial behavior in the three countries, and observe how this variable is affected by sex. Fourth, we study the effect of perceived parental expectations and empathy on the prosocial behavior of adolescents in all three of the countries under study.

## **Method**

### *Participants—Argentinean Sample*

Over the last three decades in Argentina, poverty, changes in social class structure, high indices of unemployment, and labor vulnerability and precariousness have all been steadily increasing (Aguirre, 2009). These changes have had particularly significant negative consequences for certain at-risk social groups, while also affecting great swathes of the population in general (Vargas Rubilar, 2011). According to the 2012 Social Debt Barometer carried out by the Argentine Catholic University, 21.9% of the Argentinean population is poor and 5.4% is indigent.

In general, the marginalized urban population comes from inland regions. This social group comprises very poor individuals who are unable to find work in their home regions. In many cases, the members of this group have lost their cultural customs, are unemployed, and suffer from economic shortages and grave social, emotional, and family problems (Richaud, Lemos, & Vargas Rubilar, 2013). According to census data, the population living in low-resource settlements on the outskirts of Buenos Aires increased by 52.3% between 2001 and 2010.

The Argentinean sample is formed of 446 adolescents of both sexes (291 males—65.2% and 155 females—34.8%) living in the city of Buenos Aires. The mean age is 16.38 with a standard deviation of 1.26. The adolescents attend schools that national organizations (Ministry of Education) consider to be at social risk. The distribution of the educational level of the mothers of these adolescents is 1% without studies, 53% completed primary education, 30% completed secondary education, and 16% with tertiary or higher educational studies. The distribution of the occupation of the head of the family is 4% in unemployment, 2% retired, 37% non-qualified manual labor, 37% qualified manual labor, and 20% administrative and sales.

### *Participants—Colombian Sample*

After Bogotá, Medellín is the most important city in Colombia. During the 1970s and 1980s, Medellín suffered heavily at the hands of the Colombian drug cartels, whose activities severely affected the lives of the city’s residents socially, politically, and economically. The scarcity of opportunities and the lure of earning easy money led many young people to become involved in drugs and violence. In addition to the rise of the drug trade and the paucity of intervention from the state, armed groups also had their part to play in the city’s problems. These groups consisted of guerilla militias and neighborhood vigilante groups made up of local tradespeople and individuals from the neighborhood, who, after declining to collaborate in the drug trade, grouped together to prevent reprisals in the form of attacks and extortion by drug traffickers and guerilla militias.

Although the above summary is a simplification of the city's problems, it provides a coherent explanation for Medellín's ranking as the fourth most violent city in the world. During the 1990s, following the fall of the main drug trafficker in Medellín, the volume of drugs flowing through the city dropped, bringing about an urban transformation. Nowadays, Medellín is a city of extremes. On one hand, it is garnering recognition for its excellence in public administration and urban transformation, but, on the other hand, the same high levels of violence persist. This violence refuses to abate, and its nature is constantly changing. What was once an armed conflict stemming from the country's political problems, with a considerable political and ideological component (guerillas and vigilantes), is now a turf war driven by organized crime (gangs and crews). Violence in Medellín has caused thousands of people to relocate, has prompted more than a 100 students to leave school, and has heightened the sense of general insecurity in the city (Jaramillo Quintero, 2012; Muñoz Rincón, 2012).

The Colombian sample is formed of 474 adolescents of both sexes (254 males [53.6%] and 220 females [46.4%]) living in the outskirts of the city of Medellín. The mean age is 15.54 with a standard deviation of 1.40. The adolescents attend schools that national organizations (National Ministry of Education) consider to be at social risk.

The distribution of the educational level of the mothers of these adolescents is 3.6% without studies, 38.5% completed primary education, 48.9% completed secondary education, and 9.0% with tertiary or higher educational studies. The distribution of the occupation of the head of the family is 4.8% in unemployment, 2.4% retired, 43.3% non-qualified manual labor, 27.1% qualified manual labor, and 22.4% administrative and sales.

### *Participants—Spanish Sample*

Since 2008, Spain has been reeling from the effects of one of the worst recessions since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The unemployment rate in Spain rose from 8% in 2007 to more than 21% in the second quarter of 2011. In 2008, the poverty rate in the Valencian Region stood at 19.6%, climbing to 20.8% in 2010. The last few years have seen an upsurge in poverty in Spain, as the recession has hit the poorest social strata hardest, with the effects being felt particularly acutely in the Valencian Region.

Participants were selected from the population of schools located in two sites on the outskirts of Valencia, in the city's industrial heartland. The cultural level of the families whose children participated in the survey ranges from low to very low. Around 50% of parents completed primary studies, and a small portion completed their high school studies. The rest are functionally illiterate, and the jobs that are available to them are highly precarious and involve spending many hours away from home. Many of the adolescents have high incidences of truancy.

The Spanish sample consists of 632 adolescents of both sexes (332 males—52.5% and 300 females—47.5%) living in the city of Valencia. The mean age is 16.30 with a standard deviation of 1.01. The adolescents attend schools that regional organizations (Valencian Government) consider to be at social risk. The distribution of the educational level of the mothers of these adolescents is 10.0% without studies, 45.7% completed primary education, 30.1% completed secondary education, and 14.2% with tertiary or higher educational studies. The distribution of the occupation of the head of the family is 3.4% in unemployment, 2.4% retired, 36.3% non-qualified manual labor, 37.3% qualified manual labor, and 20.6% administrative and sales.

In the three countries that form the sample, we provided the adolescents and their parents with information about the research aims, and invited them to participate voluntarily with guarantees of full anonymity and data confidentiality. The parents and tutors of the adolescents signed a consent form before letting children complete the questionnaires used to collect the study data.



## Measures

**Expected parental reactions.** This scale was designed by Wyatt and Carlo (2002), and assesses the reactions that adolescents expect from their parents (mother and father) when faced with different behaviors. The scale comprises 16 items with 8 individual items describing antisocial behaviors and 8 items describing prosocial behaviors. Adolescents then give a rating to each of the items according to whether they feel that their parents would react appropriately or inappropriately to each behavior. To assess adolescents' expectations of their parents' reactions to prosocial behaviors, we solicited information from the adolescents on how they would expect their parents to react if, for instance, they joined a volunteer organization, asked for help from their parents to raise money for a school club, lent lunch money to a classmate, or helped a neighbor with their tasks around the house. For antisocial behaviors, we requested information on how the adolescents would expect their parents to react if, for example, they stayed after school because they started a fight, lied about completing their homework, blamed another person for their own wrongdoing, or arrived home later than they were supposed to. Specifically, 1 antisocial item began, "If I had to stay after school for starting a fight, my parent(s) would react . . ." The adolescent then scored the item by marking a number on a 5-point scale from 1 = *very inappropriately* to 5 = *very appropriately*, thus completing the sentence. We translated the scale into Spanish and adapted it for each of the three countries under study, obtaining good psychometric results for the instrument. Cronbach's alpha for the present study in each one of the dimensions is expected parental reactions to prosocial behavior (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Argentina = .70, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Spain = .75, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Colombia = .72), and expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Argentina = .75, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Spain = .83, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Colombia = .82). Partial results of validity and reliability studies on this instrument are available in M. V. Mestre et al. (2014).

**Interpersonal Reactivity (IR) Index.** This instrument evaluates empathetic disposition via two cognitive and two emotional factors: Perspective Taking and Fantasy, and Empathic Concern and Personal Distress, respectively (Davis, 1980). The instrument consists of 28 Likert-type items, each adopting a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *does not describe me very well* to 5 = *describes me very well*. This study only uses the dimensions of Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern. Cronbach's alpha for these two subscales provides a measure for the reliability analysis of the IR empathy questionnaire. Perspective Taking (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Argentina = .70, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Spain = .69, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Colombia = .68) and Empathic Concern (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Argentina = .73, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Spain = .70, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Colombia = .65).

**Prosocial Behavior Questionnaire.** The adolescents score their prosociality using a 10-item scale that assesses various behaviors such as their degree of helpfulness, sharing, kindness, and cooperativeness (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993). Example items from the scale are "I try to make sad people happier" and "I help others with their homework." This instrument provides an overall measure of prosocial behavior (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Argentina = .76, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Spain = .84, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  Colombia = .68).

## Data Analysis

We used a MANOVA to test the first objective of the study regarding differences between countries (Argentina, Spain, and Colombia) and sexes in parental expectation toward prosocial and antisocial behavior. The dimensions of parental expectation form the dependent variables of the model, and the three countries and sex were fed into the model as fixed factors. A further MANOVA was performed to study whether empathic concern (the emotional aspect of empathy)

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) of Parental Expectation, Empathy, and Prosocial Behavior by Country and Sex of the Participants.

	Argentina		Colombia		Spain	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1. Parental expectation. Expected reactions to prosocial behaviors	4.19 (.43)	4.29 (.38)	4.01 (.56)	4.08 (.62)	4.14 (.56)	4.35 (.44)
2. Parental expectation. Expected reactions to antisocial behaviors	2.33 (.47)	2.26 (.42)	2.56 (.76)	2.53 (.77)	2.77 (.74)	2.61 (.67)
3. Empathy. Perspective taking	3.39 (.68)	3.61 (.68)	3.06 (.65)	3.30 (.61)	3.16 (.64)	3.47 (.61)
4. Empathy. Empathic concern	3.56 (.60)	3.89 (.61)	3.15 (.60)	3.44 (.59)	3.23 (.57)	3.70 (.60)
5. Prosocial behavior	2.42 (.32)	2.54 (.30)	2.29 (.29)	2.42 (.28)	2.25 (.42)	2.50 (.36)

Note. Numbers in parentheses denote standard deviations.

and perspective taking (the cognitive aspect of empathy) differ between countries and sexes. The two dimensions of empathy constitute the dependent variables, and the three countries and the two sexes the fixed factors. With the aim of comparing the prosocial behaviors of the adolescents of different countries, we conducted a three (countries) by two (sexes) factorial ANOVA. Finally, to evaluate possible relationships between expected parental reactions, empathy (independent variables), and adolescents' prosocial behavior (dependent variable), we performed multiple regression analysis.

## Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables under study by country and sex of the participants.

### Comparison of Expected Parental Reactions by Country and Sex

A three (countries) by two (sexes) factorial MANOVA provided the tool to test the first objective of comparing expected parental reactions across the three countries and according to sex. The model is significant, according to Hotelling's trace criterion, for the country variable,  $F(4, 3084) = 35.61, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .10$ , as well as for sex,  $F(2, 1543) = 18.24, p \leq .001, \eta^2 = .10$ , although the interaction, Country  $\times$  Sex, is non-significant. Significant differences across countries for expected parental reactions to prosocial behavior,  $F(2, 1544) = 24.23, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ , and expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior,  $F(2, 1544) = 44.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$ , emerge under univariate analysis. Univariate analysis also reveals that there are significant differences between males and females with respect to expected parental reactions to prosocial behavior,  $F(1, 1544) = 24.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$ , and expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior,  $F(1, 1544) = 5.74, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$ . Female adolescents present more appropriate expected parental reactions toward prosocial behavior than boys, whereas male adolescents perceive their parents to be more tolerant of antisocial behavior than girls do.

The post hoc Scheffé contrast indicates that both the Argentinean and the Spanish adolescents perceive more appropriate parental expectation toward their prosocial behavior than the adolescents from Colombia (Argentina vs. Colombia Scheffé = .18,  $p < .001$ ; Spain vs. Colombia Scheffé = .20,  $p < .001$ ). Despite these results, there is an absence of significant differences between the adolescents from Argentina and those from Spain.

The post hoc Scheffé contrast indicates that, in the case of parental expectations toward antisocial behavior, Spanish adolescents perceive their parents to be more tolerant of antisocial behavior than their Argentinean and Colombian counterparts (Spain vs. Argentina Scheffé = .39,  $p < .001$ ; Spain vs. Colombia Scheffé = .15,  $p < .001$ ). This observation suggests that Spanish adolescents expect their parents to react better (i.e., more benevolently) than the parents of Argentinean and Colombian adolescents from low-income backgrounds when faced with antisocial conduct by their children. Similarly, adolescents from Colombia perceive a greater level of tolerance from their parents than participants from Argentina (Scheffé = .24,  $p < .001$ ).

### *Comparison of Empathy Between Argentina, Colombia, and Spain, and by Sex*

To test the second aim of the study, which addresses the variation of empathy (perspective taking and empathic concern) across the three countries and opposite sexes, we deployed a three (countries) by two (sexes) factorial MANOVA.

Hotelling's trace criterion shows the model to be significant for both country,  $F(4, 3078) = 31.95$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , and sex,  $F(2, 1540) = 76.2$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ . The interaction Country  $\times$  Sex is non-significant, however. Univariate analysis reveals significant differences between countries for perspective taking,  $F(2, 1541) = 26.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ , and empathic concern,  $F(2, 1541) = 56.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .17$ . Univariate analysis uncovers significant differences between males and females for both perspective taking,  $F(1, 1541) = 58.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ , and empathic concern,  $F(1, 1541) = 137.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .18$ . Females scored higher than males in empathy (perspective taking and empathic concern) from the three countries in question.

The post hoc Scheffé contrast indicates that the Argentinean adolescents are more empathetic than the adolescents from both Spain (perspective taking Scheffé = .15,  $p < .001$ ; empathic concern Scheffé = .22,  $p < .001$ ) and Colombia (perspective taking Scheffé = .29,  $p < .001$ ; empathic concern Scheffé = .40,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the Spanish adolescents are more empathetic than those from Colombia (perspective taking Scheffé = .14,  $p < .001$ ; empathic concern Scheffé = .17,  $p < .001$ ).

### *Comparison of Prosocial Behavior Between Argentina, Colombia, and Spain, and by Sex*

To study the variation in the prosocial behavior of the adolescents from low-income backgrounds across the three different countries, a three (countries) by two (sexes) factorial ANOVA was carried out. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the prosocial behavior of the adolescents depending on their country of origin,  $F(2, 1544) = 17.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , and on their sex,  $F(1, 1544) = 90.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .17$ . Significance also holds for the interaction Country  $\times$  Sex,  $F(2, 1544) = 6.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ .

The post hoc Scheffé test indicates that the Argentinean adolescents from low-income backgrounds scored higher than the adolescents from both Spain (Scheffé = .10,  $p < .001$ ) and Colombia (Scheffé = .11,  $p < .001$ ) in prosocial behavior. The analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences between the adolescents from Spain and Colombia.

### *Influence of Parental Expectations and Empathy on Prosocial Behavior*

For each country, we performed a regression analysis for the criterion variable to test the contribution of *expected parental reactions* (toward prosocial and antisocial behavior) and *empathy* (perspective taking and empathic concern) in the adolescents' prosocial behavior. Multicollinearity tests yield satisfactory results, with all variance inflation factors taking a value of less than 2.00 and tolerance metrics for all variables taking values in the vicinity of 1.00.

**Table 2.** Parental Expectations and Empathy as Predictors of Adolescents' Prosocial Behavior by Country.

Predictors	Argentina				Spain				Colombia			
	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
Parental expectation			.51	.26			.27	.07			.51	.26
Expected reactions to prosocial behaviors	.18	4.23***	1	6	.10	2.32**	7	7	.19	4.35***	1	
Expected reactions to antisocial behaviors	-.01	-0.34			.03	0.72			.06	1.41		
Empathy												
Perspective taking	.25	5.58***			.15	3.38***			.28	6.65***		
Empathic concern	.25	5.54***			.11	2.58**			.23	5.44***		

Note. Dependent variable = Prosocial behavior.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The analysis shows that expected parental reactions to prosocial behavior and empathy (perspective taking and empathic concern) encourage prosocial behaviors in adolescents from low-income backgrounds in the three countries under study. However, expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior are not associated with adolescents' prosocial behavior—Argentina:  $F(4, 439) = 37.97, p < .001$ ; Spain:  $F(4, 625) = 12.28, p < .001$ ; Colombia:  $F(4, 469) = 40.52, p < .001$  (see Table 2). For Argentina and Colombia, expected parental reactions and empathy explain 26% of the variance of the adolescents' prosocial behavior, whereas, for Spain, these factors explain just 7% (see Table 2).

## Discussion

### Country and Sex Differences in Expected Parental Reactions

The first aim of this study was to analyze whether low-income adolescents from different Latin countries perceive parental expectations of prosocial and antisocial behavior differently. The results show that, despite sharing a common European heritage, a common language, and the cultural tradition of the Catholic Church, adolescents of the three countries express divergent perceptions of parental expectations.

The low-income adolescents from Argentina and Spain perceive, to a greater degree than the Colombian adolescents, that their parents expect them to exhibit collaborative behaviors toward others. These results indicate that the low-income Argentinean and Spanish adolescents have similar perceptions of parents' reactions toward prosocial behaviors. This may owe to the vast majority of Argentines descending from European settlers and immigrants between the 15th and 19th centuries, some of whom later mixed and intermarried with the indigenous populations. The majority of these European immigrants came from Italy and Spain. More than three quarters (86.4%) of Argentina's population identifies itself as being of European descent. An estimated 8% of the population is *Mestizo* (of mixed race). In contrast, Colombia has no such ties to European ancestry and culture. Instead, its citizens have a stronger notion of the Colombian nationality, and a more deeply ingrained sense of belonging to the indigenous populations.

Argentina, Spain, and Colombia are characterized by collectivism and familism (Agudelo, Cava, & Musitu, 2001; Facio & Resett, 2011; Sánchez Vera & Bote Díaz, 2009). In fact, family is seen as being more important than country, religion, or politics (Bornstein et al., 2012; Facio & Resett, 2011; Sánchez Vera & Bote Díaz, 2009). Nevertheless, the families of the Colombian adolescents who participated in the study were, due to social circumstances, more exposed to

violence and conflict than the low-income adolescents in Argentina and Spain. For instance, many of the fathers and brothers of the Colombian adolescents were involved in drug trafficking and guerilla warfare in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, or are now involved in organized crime. These ties to violent activities may affect the way that the adolescents perceive their parents' expectations of prosocial behavior. The extent to which conflict is entrenched in Medellín's society may lead low-income adolescents to view violence as a means of survival, and, consequently, to perceive lower levels of parental expectations toward prosocial behaviors than Spanish and Argentinean adolescents. In other words, the acceptance of violence within the family context—particularly toward any so-called “enemies,” or even toward people outside the family unit—may cause adolescents to perceive less appropriate parental expectations toward prosocial behavior.

In contrast to Spain, Argentina, and, to an even greater degree, Colombia remain traditional Latin cultures, which are affiliative and have hierarchical structures in which parents maintain a clear position of authority over their children. In all three countries, scores for parental expectation toward antisocial behavior are low. This observation indicates that parents consider this behavior inappropriate, or not fully appropriate. Nonetheless, Spanish adolescents perceive their parents to be somewhat more tolerant of this conduct than adolescents in Argentina and Colombia.

The results of this study also reveal significant differences as a function of sex. Girls perceive more appropriate parental reactions to prosocial behavior, whereas boys perceive their parents to be more tolerant of antisocial behavior. This may indicate that boys from low-income backgrounds in the countries under study perceive that their parents are more tolerant of their antisocial behavior than girls. It is likely that this stems from the tendency of parents—especially parents from Latin cultures—to be more liberal when raising sons than they would be with daughters.

### *Measuring Prosocial Behavior and Empathy Across Cultures and Sexes*

A noteworthy observation from the analysis of prosocial behavior is that girls show markedly greater levels of prosocial behaviors than boys in all of the countries under study. This may be a result of women's greater empathetic capacity and heightened sensitivity compared with men, which other studies have demonstrated. By making comparisons using several different instruments, Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) offered a comprehensive review of the effect of differences in sex on the tendency to be empathetic, with empathy being analyzed from both emotional and cognitive perspectives. This study found sex differences to be in favor of women. More recent investigations have shown that empathetic disposition, widely considered to be the driving force behind involvement in prosocial behavior, develops to a greater extent in female adolescents than in their male counterparts (M. V. Mestre et al., 2009). Thus, women have a greater capacity to *stand in another's shoes*, as well as being better at expressing feelings toward another person who may be in trouble or in need.

The comparison of prosocial behaviors leads to the finding that low-income Argentinean adolescents exhibit higher levels of prosocial behaviors than Spanish and Colombian adolescents. Argentinean adolescents have been characterized in other studies as optimistic, spontaneous, emotional people, with an open character (Facio & Resett, 2011). These characteristics may contribute to the development of more disinterested and altruistic prosocial behaviors, along with a disposition to help when faced with an external appeal for aid. It is important to highlight that the low-income Colombian adolescents show lower levels of empathy (both emotional and cognitive) than the adolescents from Argentina and Spain. Similarly, the Colombian adolescents also show lower levels of prosocial behavior than the Argentinean participants. This may be a consequence of the low-income areas situated in Medellín belonging to a poverty belt. In recent years, most of its inhabitants have had to deal with a transition from living in a tightly bonded, rural

environment to residing in urban surroundings, a process characterized by great social upheaval (Agudelo et al., 2001). This disruptive transition has probably led the residents to be less empathetic and prosocial with their surroundings, which they may perceive as hostile and with barely any sense of community.

At the time of carrying out the research, Spain was generally more economically prosperous and also well integrated with others countries of Europe, which itself represented a very prosperous community. Levine et al. (2001) showed the economic productivity of a country was significantly, negatively related to the overall helping rate. Citizens of prosperous countries may, in general, be required to show greater individualism in the pursuit of personal goals, at the expense of traditional societal values that promote a helpful disposition toward other members of the same society (Inkeles, 1997; Levine et al., 2001). Despite Spain, Colombia, and Argentina all being labeled as collectivistic countries, variations in the level of collectivism in these three countries may explain our findings. As the Hofstede Centre asserts, Spain appears collectivistic when compared with other countries of Europe, although it is clearly seen as individualistic when compared with other areas of the world. Levine et al. (2001) observed helping activities in a field experiment in big cities across 23 different countries (e.g., Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, New York, and 18 others, none of which were in Argentina or Colombia). This field experiment assessed how frequently strangers were being helped in three different non-emergency spontaneous helping situations requiring little effort (e.g., alerting a stranger who dropped a pen). The authors of the study found that the most helpful city was in South America (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) and that, although Madrid (Spain) also received an above-average score, this score was lower than that of Rio de Janeiro.

The traditional individualism–collectivism distinction seems insufficient to explain the differences in scores of empathy and prosocial behavior across countries. Different studies have shown that individualism and collectivism are not absolute concepts, but are rather modified by environmental variables (Seidl-de-Moura et al., 2008; Vieira, et al., 2010a, 2010b). Our findings are consistent with this notion, showing that individualism and collectivism seem to be affected by a context of violence, in the case of Colombia, and economic prosperity, in the case of Spain.

### *Influence of Parental Expectations on Prosocial Behaviors*

The fourth aim of this study focused on analyzing the influence of parental expectations and empathy on adolescents' prosocial behavior. Results confirm that parental expectations toward children's behavior and empathy play a key role in fostering prosocial behavior. This finding holds for all countries examined in this study. Expected parental reactions toward prosocial behavior and empathy (in both its cognitive and emotional dimensions) seem to have a certain influence on the development of prosocial behaviors in adolescents from all three countries. This is true above all of Argentina and Colombia, as the explained variance in the Spanish sample is low. Probably, the difference with Spain owes to the latter having achieved, particularly in the last few years, integration with the rest of Europe. This integration has converted Spain into a society with fewer traditional characteristics and with closer ties to the values, customs, culture, and economy of the rest of the European countries, bringing with it a series of significant changes in the Spanish society (Agudelo et al., 2001). This difference is probably a result of a phenomenon observed in other studies, whereby Latin American parents are expected to value more highly than European parents goals for children that relate to conservatism (e.g., tradition) and self-transcendence (e.g., benevolence; Suizzo, 2007). Although the family is very important for Spaniards, studies show that many changes have taken place in the Spanish society that may be associated with the differences in parental expectations between these three countries. During the period of Spanish dictatorship under General Francisco Franco (1939–1975), the government imposed a national–Catholic family model. In contrast, in the years subsequent to the transition

to democracy up until the present day, Spanish society has been much more permissive of modern forms of coexistence and the family (Sánchez Vera & Bote Díaz, 2009). This has obviously had repercussions on parental relationships and expectations.

However, expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior do not appear to be linked to prosocial behavior of low-income adolescents in any of the three countries studied. It would thus seem that parents' encouragement of positive behavior such as a collaborative endeavor is more important than the fear of punishment or reproof for committing a negative act. It would nonetheless be interesting for future research to examine the influence of expected parental reactions to antisocial behavior on the aggressive behavior of children, as this may uncover stronger, more significant links.

### Limitations and Future Lines of Research

The present study was carried out with a clear focus on a specific, low-income socioeconomic group, while adolescents of the middle socioeconomic level were excluded. Future research that aims to study the links between expected parental reactions and prosocial behavior should therefore broaden the scope of this article by including a variety of cultural and economic groups. In the future, it would also be of interest to study expected parental reactions of the father and the mother separately, to ascertain whether the parents' sex has a differentiating effect depending on the sex of the adolescent. Aside from this consideration, it is worth bearing in mind that reciprocal helping behaviors are the tools used to teach children to fulfill their obligations toward their families (McWright, 2002). For this reason, it seems that when studying prosocial behavior, as well as analyzing the influence of parental expectations on prosocial behavior, it is fundamental to study the influence of parenting practices; that is to say, prosocial behavioral modeling via the example set by parents.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Funding support was provided by Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID), para el Programa de Cooperación Interuniversitaria e Investigación Científica entre España e Iberoamérica (Reference: C/032037/10), to Maria Mestre.

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