



REPLY TO GONZÁLEZ-BLANCH (2006): SHOULD ALL HEALTH-RELATED DISCIPLINES BE REGULATED AS HEALTH PROFESSIONS?

Comments on the studies by Professor Buela-Casal and colleagues

Gualberto Buela-Casal

University of Granada

This article is a reply to González-Blanch's comments about the studies conducted by Buela-Casal's research group on the image of Psychology as a health profession that were published in issue 91 of Papeles del Psicólogo. The comments and criticisms made by González-Blanch are only personal opinions, and are even wrong most of the time, an exemplifying being his proposal to use different procedures for data recollection in the same study. Furthermore, the author contradicts himself on considering that the samples present problems of representativeness and, at the same time, discussing certain results from these samples that he finds interesting. However, perhaps the most surprising part of his article concerns his interpretation of the data from the study with the general population.

Key words: image of Psychology, health profession, health disciplines

Este artículo es una réplica a los comentarios de González-Blanch sobre los estudios realizados por el grupo de Buela-Casal sobre la imagen de la psicología como profesión sanitaria y que fueron publicados en el número 91 de Papeles del Psicólogo. Los comentarios y críticas realizadas por González-Blanch no son más que simples opiniones personales, las cuales en la mayoría de los casos son incorrectas, como por ejemplo, proponer que se utilicen procedimientos distintos en la recogida de información en un mismo estudio. Por otra parte, el mismo autor se contradice al considerar que las muestras tienen problemas de representatividad y al mismo tiempo resalta algunos resultados que parecen interesarle especialmente. Pero quizá lo más sorprendente es la interpretación que él hace de las respuestas del estudio con la población general.

Palabras clave: imagen de la psicología, profesión sanitaria, disciplinas sanitarias.

Some time ago I came across a text by González-Blanch criticizing the work of other authors, and the title of his critique began like this: "Publishing hastily and badly ..." (published in the journal *Siso Saúde*); well, now we could adapt this and begin "Making remarks hastily and badly ..." It is beyond doubt that criticism of research, and reply to such criticism, are not only recommendable, but in science are indeed considered essential. However, in order to make comments and criticize it is not sufficient to know how to write; one must also know what to write and how to write it. Therefore, I shall make some remarks about both formal aspects and content-related aspects, with the sole aim of helping this author to improve subsequent texts, and to avoid confusing some of his readers. González-Blanch's (2006) text not only includes some substantial formal mistakes, but also includes erroneous arguments, incorrect interpretations and some logical contradictions. I shall first address

some of the formal deficiencies, and I shall follow this with some considerations about the content.

Considerations on formal aspects:

- 1- I earnestly recommend the author to review the formal aspects of writing texts for publication in scientific journals, beginning with the title. He might consider reading the norms proposed by Bobenrieth (2002) (also recommended are Montero & León, 2005 and Ramos-Álvarez & Catena, 2004), in particular the part referring to titles. In the case of the comments by González-Blanch (2006), the title is totally inappropriate, since, in none of the works to which he refers is there any mention in the titles or the objectives of the question "Should all health-related disciplines be regulated as health professions?"; without doubt, only a very biased reading could lead to the conclusion that the published works deal with this question, as the author appears to claim, given the title of his text. As pointed out in Buela-Casal (2005), the authors tried to present the results of the studies in the most descriptive way pos-

Correspondence: Gualberto Buela-Casal. Facultad de Psicología. Universidad de Granada. 18011 Granada. España.
E-mail: gbuela@ugr.es



sible. In a previous article by one of the authors of the studies (Buela-Casal, 2004) the title: "Psychology: a health profession with different specializations?" is even followed by a question mark, in an attempt to highlight the speculative tone of the reflection.

- 2- The author is strongly recommended to follow APA norms, both for quoting within the text and for including references, since in some cases one has to deduce which works he is referring to. As an example, when he writes Buela-Casal et al., 2005a,b,c.: what do these letters mean?
- 3- It would be preferable to write using more technical and precise terminology to make himself more easily understood. For example: "The studies are based on the remote administration of a brief questionnaire to large samples." I think no comment is necessary, especially about "remote administration".

Considerations about content:

- 1- According to González-Blanch (2006), it is difficult to abstract Clinical Psychology from Psychology in general, referring to the fact that respondents are questioned separately about Clinical Psychology and Psychology in general. On this point it must be said that logic and common sense lead us to think that this can be done, just as we can assess the attitudes of Spaniards and the attitudes of Europeans; indeed, the factor analysis confirmed that the distinction between Clinical Psychology and Psychology in general occurs in the respondents of the first study (Buela-Casal, Gil Roales-Nieto et al., 2005).
- 2- The author finds it surprising that the study with university students (Sierra et al., 2005) did not include students from the UNED (*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia* » The Open University), and that the text does not include a proper explanation of why they were excluded. First of all I should say "a word to the wise is sufficient", though as it seems this is not appropriate here, some clarification is necessary: a) depending on the objectives of a study it is perfectly viable to define university as a sampling unit, and it would seem difficult to argue that a study including 70% of universities is not representative; b) in any opinion survey one of the methodological requirements is to always use the same data-collection procedure. If we consider the procedure of the study by Sierra et al. (2005) we see that this cannot be applied to UNED students, and it

would not be equivalent to record their opinions using other procedures via the institution's associated centres. Moreover, the author may or may not know that the UNED has more than 60 associated centres, and in cities as far flung as Malabo, Tangiers, Sao Paulo, Miami, La Coruña, Melilla, and so on. In sum, it is clear to any reader why UNED students are not and could not be included in the procedure employed.

- 3- González-Blanch (2006) also criticizes the representativeness of the study sample of Spanish psychologists, saying precisely: "...in spite of the fact that only just over 10% of the initial sample replied to the questionnaire...". A brief consideration of the study method of Buela-Casal, Bretón-López, et al. (2005) reveals that González-Blanch is not correct in what he says. In the sample it is stated that there are 1206 professional psychologists in associations. This author confuses the sample with the e-mails sent, and it is clear that in this case we cannot speak of non-response rate, which seems to be what the author wants to do. Common sense is more than sufficient to realize that the fact that 10,380 e-mails are sent does not imply that these are read by their addressees, who then decide not to reply. It is impossible to know how many affiliated psychologists decided not to reply. In any case, 1206 psychologists is a sufficiently representative sample of psychologists affiliated to associations. González-Blanch is also critical that such a sample does not represent all Spanish psychologists, but the reality is that we do not say that it does, and this is made quite clear in the first sentence of the article by Buela-Casal, Bretón-López, et al. (2005): "The aim of this study is to discover the opinion of the members of professional psychological associations..." (p. 16).
- 4- It is surprising, to say the least, that González-Blanch (2006), after considering as inappropriate or unrepresentative the sample for the study with professional psychologists (Buela-Casal, Bretón-López et al., 2005), goes on to support his arguments on certain data that seem to interest him particularly, such as when he states: "less than 25% are of the opinion that any psychologist can diagnose and treat emotional and mental problems that affect health". Could it be that when the participants responded to this they were sufficient and representative? And later he writes: "...This finding is of special relevance, given that, despite a widespread misunderstanding,



diagnosing and treating are not in themselves health-related activities" Is it that when certain results emerge on some items there are no longer any problems with the sample, and they can be used as arguments against widespread misunderstandings? The interpretation this author makes of the response to this question in particular is curious to say the least, since the fact that seven out of ten consider that any psychologist can diagnose and treat emotional and mental problems that affect health does not imply that respondents think psychologists can work in other health-related areas, as can be hypothesized if we consider that just 17.5% of the same sample feel that psychologists should not form part of professional teams in hospitals. Could it be to do work other than that related to health? Or perhaps what occurs is that when they answer this item the respondents are not sufficient or representative? Or maybe it is the result of a biased reading and interpretation...?

- 5- With regard to the comment "the COPPS sub-scale on the affinity between psychological and medical disciplines,... the usefulness of the data it provides is at best questionable," it should be stressed that this is nothing more than a personal opinion, related, without doubt, to the level of analysis each reader may make. As for "Is it not reasonable to assume that we all find some affinity between them, and between specializations with such similar names?" – of course, and for the simple reason that they are similar, as the author himself acknowledges; indeed, nobody would claim a similar resemblance with other disciplines of the social and juridical sciences. But certainly the most surprising thing about González-Blanch's (2006) article is that he appears to confuse an opinion survey with a survey of knowledge; and that is not all, for he asks: "Do the students know about the medical (and psychological) specializations on which they are giving an opinion?" "And the teachers and psychologists?" This is brazen, and more than inappropriate: it is difficult to imagine how someone could question whether senior Psychology students, teachers and affiliated psychologists know the meaning of Oncology, Paediatrics, Psychiatry, Forensic Medicine, etc.; but to question whether they know about Psychology specializations themselves is pure insolence.
- 6- González-Blanch (2006) asks: "...why should we understand, as the authors assert, that "these data would support Buela-Casal's (2004) proposal that other psychological disciplines apart from Clinical Psychology should eventually become considered as health-related"?". If one takes a look at the results the answer is obvious, given that in the vast majority of the comparisons in the first three studies (Buela-Casal, Bretón-López et al., 2005; Buela-Casal, Gil Roales-Nieto, et al., 2005; Sierra et al., 2005) it emerges that there is a considerable affinity between the disciplines compared, in the opinion of respondents.
- 7- González-Blanch (2006) also makes some comments on the study with the sample of the general Spanish population (Buela-Casal, Teva et. al., 2005), specifically: "the questionnaire used with this sample [general population] favours the identification/confusion of Psychology with Clinical Psychology,... since the latter is not presented separately, it can be assumed that respondents reply to the questions (referring to Psychology) thinking about the clinical sub-discipline,". This is worthy of admiration; for González-Blanch's capacity for interpreting what a sample of the Spanish population really mean, and for helping us to all to understand what, according to him, they really mean, we can only be grateful. We can only show our thanks for such a "disinterested and "objective" interpretation that involves saying something other than what they meant; indeed, one might ask oneself if he will understand one's words or interpret them.
- 8- González-Blanch (2006) also states: "It would have been more pertinent to sound out the opinion of the population on the possibility of being treated for an illness or its effects by a "health" professional without supervised training." If I might offer the author some advice, he may like to review the work by Virués, Santolaya, García-Cueto and Buela-Casal (2003), and if he does not reinterpret it he will realize that supervised training, as carried out in Spain, is perhaps not the panacea – but of course, this study can also be reinterpreted.

Finally, González-Blanch (2006) reserves another surprise for us when he writes that "The authors should have taken this into account...". One might think the author has some kind of "carte blanche" that authorizes him to say what a research team should or shouldn't do; but we might also ask ourselves whether this author has accred-



ited capacity for directing research. We should not forget that a universal rule in the assessment of scientific research is peer review and criticism, and being peers requires having the capacity and recognition to be peers. Another characteristic of valid scientific research is that it is replicable, and in this case – there are the Psychology students, the Medicine and Psychology lecturers, the affiliated psychologists and the general population, all available so that González-Blanch can replicate these studies, or carry out similar ones, and afterwards be in a position to give an opinion with arguments based on the data he obtains, and not, as he has done in this case, on mere speculation, on erroneous interpretation, or indeed, on some unstated interest.

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