

Editorial

Alba E. Mustaca (1943-2023). In memoriam

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*How my wound hurts and deepens!
Her eyes were closed.*³

Alba Elisabeth Mustaca's death is a great loss for all of us who knew and appreciated her, for her family, her colleagues, her students, and in general for psychological science in Argentina, Latin America, and the international community.

Alba was born on July 9, 1943 and died on April 3, 2023. She was a researcher dedicated to her work, a great mentor, a warm and affectionate person with whom it was very pleasant to share. She studied Psychology at the University of Buenos Aires and received her title as *Licenciada en Psicología* [Bachelor's degree in Psychology] in 1972, and years later, in 2001, her Doctorate in Psychology at the University of San Luis. She worked at her *alma mater* for most of her academic life, during a time of great turbulence, changes and

vicissitudes, politically, ideologically and also in the field of psychological discipline. Later she joined the Universidad Abierta Interamericana, where she worked during the last years of her life.

She was a very prominent member of the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (Conicet) [National Council of Scientific and Technical Research], reaching the highest levels. She founded and directed for more than 20 years the Laboratorio de Psicología Experimental y Aplicada (PSEA) [Laboratory of Experimental and Applied Psychology], which was the training and research center for many students who over time became leaders in Argentine psychology and are now highly recognized figures.

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³ Tango interpreted by Carlos Gardel, with lyrics by Alfredo Le Pera: <https://youtu.be/ecqN0z9vtyo>

During her time at the Facultad de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales [Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences] of the University of Buenos Aires, Alba Mustaca recruited many young talents from different fields (biology, pharmacology, chemistry) who worked for a long time on behavioral problems of non-human animals.

Alba was a very prolific and creative researcher. She published about 200 scientific articles in Argentine and international journals. The most important Colombian journals published her research. Other journals in which her work appeared are the most outstanding in the international panorama in experimental psychology and behavioral biology, among others: *Behavioral Neuroscience*, *Developmental Psychobiology*, *Animal Cognition*, *Physiology and Behavior*, *Animal Learning and Behavior*, and *Learning and Motivation*.

Her areas of research have been diverse, always in the context of science: experimental psychology, comparative psychology, research methodology, psychopharmacology, cognitive-behavioral therapy, autism, frustration and anxiety, psychoneuroimmunology, health psychology, evidence-based psychological therapies, among others.

She participated in numerous workshops, symposiums, conventions and congresses in different countries of the region. She visited Colombia several times, invited by the main universities of the country. For example, she was one of the keynote speakers at the XVII Biennial Congress of the International Society of Comparative Psychology (ISCP) in Bogota, September 10-12, 2014. At this event, with her participation, the Red Latinoamericana de Ciencias del Comportamiento (RedLACC) [Latin American Network of Behavioral Sciences] was created.

Alba Mustaca was one of the founders of the Asociación Argentina de Ciencias del Comportamiento (AACC) [Argentine Association of Behavioral Sciences], which brings together the most recognized basic and applied researchers in these fields. The AACC represents Argentina in the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS).

This great legacy led Mustaca to become the first recipient of the Premio Rubén Ardila a la Investigación Científica en Psicología [Rubén Ardila Award for Scientific Research in Psychology], a distinction awarded by the Fundación para el Avance de la Psicología [Foundation for the Advancement of Psychology], with the support of the Sociedad Interamericana de Psicología [Inter-American Society of Psychology], to individuals

with an outstanding life and work trajectory in the service of psychological science in Ibero-America (see Urrea & Pérez-Acosta, 2015). He received this award in Buenos Aires, during the 2005 Inter-American Congress of Psychology.

On a personal level, Alba is remembered as a cheerful and lively person, with enormous curiosity, a great reader, supportive, rigorous in her research, an excellent mentor, and much loved by her students and colleagues. To share with her was a party. She was always willing to share her knowledge, ideas, time, and research funds with her students and colleagues.

Her legacy will live on in his many students, co-researchers, colleagues and friends in Argentina, the rest of Latin America and beyond.

“I feel a pain in my soul”: metaphor or reality?

Following the interesting methodology of Laura Andrea León’s posthumous tribute to Dr. Alfredo Ardila in an editorial of the journal *Acta Colombiana de Psicología* (León Anhuamán, 2021), we highlight in the great published production of Alba Elisabeth Mustaca the article “Siento un dolor en el alma”: ¿metáfora o realidad?” [“I feel a pain in my soul: metaphor or reality?”] (Mustaca, 2013), published in the *Revista Argentina de Ciencias del Comportamiento*.

This paper presented the scientific literature produced with animal and human models on the behavioral, physiological and neural correlations between *physical pain* and its anticipation—that is, fear and anxiety about it—, *psychological pain* and *social pain*, as well as their respective anticipations—that is, total or partial loss of incentives, individual or social, or negative changes in access to them. In fact, the title of this work recalls those old tangos such as *Mi noche triste* [“My sad night”] by Pascual Contursi, which expresses the abandonment of his beloved with the words: “Leaving my soul wounded and a thorn in my heart”.

The general question that this educational literature review answers is, “Are there empirical data showing a functional and neural identity between the type of psychological pain produced by losses and disappointments and that produced by somatic pain?” (Mustaca, 2013, p. 47).

After posing the question, the author reviewed the various academic definitions of pain, such as the one proposed by the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP), which was recently updated as follows:

“An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or similar to, actual or potential tissue damage” (Raja et al., 2020, p. 1977).

Next, Mustaca (2013) uses the classification of pain by Mauricio R. Papini, Ph.D. (Texas Christian University), who distinguishes between 1) physical pain, 2) psychological pain, and 3) social pain. Physical pain is a “multidimensional experience that results from the presentation of nociceptive stimuli and/or their anticipation by previous experience” (p. 48). Psychological pain “refers to the emotional, behavioral, psychophysiological, and brain changes that occur when animals are exposed to omissions, devaluations, or disruptions to the achievement of incentives they expected to receive based on previous experiences” (p. 48; cf. Cuenya et al., 2015). And social pain is “the response elicited by rejection, exclusion, separation, or loss events involving conspecifics” (p. 49).

Mustaca concludes that the empirical experimental evidence mostly confirms that the behavioral effects and psychophysiological and neural mechanisms of both phenomena are analogous, although some research published in the last decade does not show complete identity.

In addition to this review article, Alba Elisabeth Mustaca published on several occasions with a very clear and didactic style—such as the complete review of evidence—based practices (Mustaca, 2014)—leaving an important intellectual legacy for future generations of researchers trained in the behavioral sciences. For this very reason, her departure has left us with a deep pain, psychological and social, like a deep wound in the heart.

Thank you, dear Alba! We will always remember you.

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