



Social Representations of Competition among University Students. How does the University Career Influence the Perception of Competition?

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Abstract

The objective of this work was to analyze the way in which belonging to a certain university career can influence the perception and social representation that students have about competition. For this, a qualitative study was carried out with twelve Mexican students from two different careers: Medicine and Arts. Through semi-structured interviews, information was collected about how they conceive competition within their careers and in society, in general, with the purpose of investigating whether science students have more competitive attitudes and favorable to meritocracy. Than those who study humanities. Taking the model of social representations as the theoretical reference for analysis, it was found that this hypothesis is fulfilled, given that, according to the testimonies analyzed, the medical students expressed a greater willingness to compete and to conceive competition as a mechanism for improvement, while those from the Arts stated that competing can desensitize people and generate conflicts and emotional problems.

Keywords: Competition; Meritocracy; Social Representations; University Students; Merit

Introduction

Liberal economic theory holds that for there to be growth, there must be incentives to increase competitiveness. In other words, when the incentive to compete is to obtain a substantial profit, it is worth investing in a process that allows increasing the performance of the cost-benefit ratio. In this sense, it would be logical to assume that a larger and better investment would produce better results and, therefore, higher profits as well, also recognizing that, in this dynamic, there are several actors who want to access the benefits offered by investment opportunities, but that, given the scarcity of resources and rewards, which is also an elementary principle of economic theory, the benefits

do not reach the same magnitudes for everyone, so that it is necessary to compete to access the best of them [1].

Thus, in order to obtain better results than the other competitors, a greater and better investment is required, as has already been said, which is manifested through better preparation and knowledge of the field in which one is working, in order to establish more efficient strategies. However, not all competitors are in the same starting conditions, since, due to a series of circumstances belonging to various dimensions, some have advantages over others, which gives them more and better opportunities to achieve the objectives [1]. Now, if these macroeconomic premises are transferred to the social dimension of the world of daily

life, it will be possible to observe that, among individuals, there are also competitive processes in which profits are translated into material and symbolic rewards from which they construct the notions of success and failure and, derived from this, structures and social hierarchies are built in which the individuals of a community are located [2].

Of course, it is the cultural patterns of each society that determine how these hierarchies are built, and what has the best values to be located at a certain point in them. However, the idea of competing is in one way or another present in this dynamic, since, although the competition may not be considered fair by and for all competitors, the fact that they participate in the dynamic, with the aim of placing better in the hierarchy, it somehow validates the system. In reality, the notion of competition is present in the human condition even before life begins, as evidenced by the fact that it is only one of thousands of sperm that fertilizes the egg [2]. Afterwards, and for practically all of life, the individual competes for affection, recognition, jobs, positions and, in short, social status. Sports tournaments, which have been practiced throughout the millennia by different civilizations, are further proof that competition is an inherent part of the human condition, and although each society establishes its own axiological system, it is possible to affirm that life itself is a competition, as Darwin let us see in "The Origin of Species" [3].

In the particular case of modern societies, highly influenced by a mercantilist and capitalist logic, competition is constantly stimulated, appealing to social mobility and the promise of success manifested in the accumulation of material and symbolic goods that are granted to those who can access to them the label of "successful", and "failed" to those who are not capable of achieving such accumulation. The capitalist system is, per se, competitive, since the objective is always to obtain better profits than others [2]. However, another of the qualities of modern societies is their heterogeneity, given that a great diversity of identities coexists in them, which has increased in the current context of globalization, since the expansion of communications has allowed people knowing how to identify with other cultures and realities, gradually building a melting pot in which a plurality of world views interact, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the degree of development of each society, with respect to the world of life [4].

This plurality gives modern societies the possibility of considering more than one perspective regarding the notions of success and failure, the system of competition, and, above all, merit, in the understanding that life goals are not uniform, and not all people yearn for the rewards that the mercantilist model of capitalism promises, nor do they legitimize its access and promotion mechanisms.

Therefore, to reach a broad understanding of how the idea of competence and merit is constructed in a modern society, it is necessary to include in the analysis the possibility of this diversity of views on life [5]. On the other hand, the promotion of competitiveness in neoliberal countries has been accompanied by a discourse in which higher education plays a substantive role. An important part of this discourse, which has been echoed in liberal countries since the 1980s, in the voices of leaders such as Margaret Thatcher, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair or Barack Obama, is that the personal merit of students can make them creditors to all the benefits of capitalism, which rewards individual effort and hard work. In other words, the government and the economic system, from this perspective, have been responsible for expanding access to higher education and, in this way, making it easier for young people to unleash their potential. The central idea in this rhetoric is that, once inside the university, each young person will be able to go as far as their talent, effort and, in short, their merit, allow them. There are no limits, more than the individual effort itself [2].

This process has resulted in a heterogeneity of perspectives regarding higher education, since, on the one hand, the expansion of private universities has led to the construction of a mercantilist logic of education, in the sense that the line between being student and being a client is, at times, diffuse, which does not necessarily imply a vice, but rather a different way of understanding higher education, which must be included in the analysis of the phenomenon. On the other hand, this expansion of the possibilities of accessing this level of education has been perceived by low-class families as a great opportunity for their children to have better opportunities to find a good job and get out of poverty [6].

In such circumstances, it is necessary to reconsider whether the idea of merit that is part of the aforementioned discourse is in accordance with the reality that young people experience day by day within universities. In other words, there are elements in different dimensions that, to a greater or lesser extent, affect the probabilities of academic success, and, with it, those of obtaining a well-paid job, which may have a greater specific weight on the result of university studies than the simple fact of making an effort and making merits. In addition, there is the issue that, derived from the diversity of youth identities, material success may not be everyone's aspiration, but it is possible to find a plurality of meanings and meanings of what it means to finish a university degree [7].

This plurality can be understood from the representation that students make of education, the meritocratic system within which they find themselves, the projections about their future work, and the consideration that society makes

of the careers and universities to which they are enrolled. They belong. These representations are built from everyday life, since it is the daily interactions with other individuals and with institutional and social structures that provide the experiential information from which configurations, hierarchies and mental schemes will be elaborated that will serve as a guide to order thoughts and give meaning and meaning to the situations that are experienced in such daily life [8].

In these terms, in order to better understand merit and the competitive system that exists in the university, it is necessary to broaden the perspective of analysis and not strictly classify it in terms of the notion of success promoted by the economic discourse, but to grant students the ability to develop an idea of merit and success that is better coupled with their own identity and with the representations they make of things, thereby overcoming the success-failure dichotomy promoted by the mercantilist model. In other words, a young student can come to perceive himself as successful in other terms more in line with the representations he develops, which would enrich the debates around the meaning of higher education and its purposes for society [7].

Following this line, it is possible to argue in favor of a hypothesis that suggests that the identity of university students, expressed in the social representation they make of merit and meritocracy, is linked to an attitude towards it, which could have an impact on their performance academic and about their labor projections and their worldview of society. In this order of ideas, some of these attitudes could be favorable towards the way in which the idea of merit has been socially constructed, and, in addition, towards the meritocratic system, while others, derived from the contrast between the promises emanating from the discourse meritocratic and the reality experienced by some of the young people, could be unfavorable to the same notions [9].

From this hypothesis, it follows that favorable attitudes could come from students whose trajectories and socio-family contexts have allowed them to compete in the educational system with certain advantages, in addition to the fact that the careers they study enjoy greater social recognition, as they are the most demanded. by the current market system. The counterpart would point out that those students with less favored trajectories and socio-family contexts, in addition to taking courses whose social recognition and remuneration in the labor market are not so high, could develop unfavorable attitudes towards the idea of competition and meritocracy [10].

However, understanding a phenomenon that is linked to both the subjective and social dimensions, and which

is also experienced every day through interactions and social networks that affect the self-perception of university students, requires entering the world of everyday life, in a world in which the past, the present and the future are concatenated to form identities from which day-to-day situations are faced, while a projection of the future is built based on experimentation of everyday life that shapes the way in which one perceives oneself, life, and the future. Therefore, for these purposes, it is considered appropriate to resort to the model of social representations, since it offers analytical elements that allow linking the subjective with the structural, while allowing the construction of a psychic trajectory from which it is possible to analyze behavior. of people, and their attitudes towards things [11].

In such circumstances, and according to Moscovici, the subjects interpret reality from social representations that they make in their minds, and that allow them to take an attitude in accordance with the situation they are facing. Social representations are a way in which individuals understand life events based on their own history, social context, and culture. They are, in short, images that include meanings and referential systems to interpret and evaluate reality [8].

The process of social representation involves three elements: information, field of representation and attitude. Information refers to everything that comes from abroad, whether derived from direct interaction with other individuals, or through the consumption of cultural products, or the learning of values as part of the educational process. The information is selected based on the situation in question, and is hierarchized within the field of representation, which is a mental figure in which an ordering and configuration of what has been selected is produced to finally take an attitude, that is to say, a more or less favorable evaluation of a particular object, accompanied by an emotional charge and reaction that in the future will be linked to the presence of that object [8].

During the process of representing socially, three elements must intervene: a subject of representation, an object of representation, and a particular context in which the representation arises. The first of these is an individual; a social subject that is located in a particular time and space within which it establishes interaction relationships with other subjects, in which, at the same time that it is part of the construction of social representations, it appropriates them and internalizes [11]. The object of representation is that on which the social representation is made, be it a human, a group, an idea, an institution, a system, or something inanimate material. For an object of representation to be considered as such, it must be relevant to the subject of representation, and related to its practices. Likewise, this

object must have some degree of historical implication with the subjects, in the sense that its presence is a recurring theme in the subject's communication. The object forces the subject to give an explanation, as a result of the attention that has been captured [11].

Finally, the context is that structure formed by time, place, history and culture that gives a macrosocial foundation to social representation. The context provides macrosocial elements that will be used by the subject to build social representation in the place and time in which he is. In this sense, a social representation is the product of a problematic situation that the subject faces, delimited by space, time and current social conditions [11]. On the other hand, within the studies of social representations, it is possible to identify two approaches: structural and procedural. The first has the purpose of knowing the organization of those elements that make up social representation, dividing them into nuclear and peripheral, and then develop explanations about the function of the structure in the representation process [12].

The procedural approach implies a hermeneutic approach to social representation, conceiving the subject as a producer of senses and meanings. Through this approach, the researcher focuses on the analysis of the symbolic productions of meanings, from which the subjects build the image of the world in which they live. In addition, this type of study is interested in understanding the facts and particular elements that give rise to specific representations, in a process in which the meanings assigned to an object of representation are linked to history, context and culture [12].

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with twelve Mexican students from two majors: Medicine and Arts. Six students were chosen from each career: three men and three women from each. They're all from the same university, and they're from the same generation. They are currently in the middle of their careers. The criteria for choosing these two careers was that, within their corresponding areas of knowledge (sciences and humanities, respectively), they are the ones that are in greatest demand among applicants in Mexico, and enjoy greater prestige in terms of the quality of their studies. The education that is imparted in its classrooms, within the category of public universities. The number of students per career was taken using the work of Bernard R, et al. [13] as a reference, who wrote that, for qualitative studies that aim to compare characteristics of population subgroups, a good option for selecting a sample is quota sampling, since this strategy is used when intense analysis of the interviewees' narrative is desired. Likewise, the number of people for each quota or subgroup can be determined from the number of topics that

the researcher has previously established for study, and the percentage of the prevalence of these topics in the daily life of the interviewees.

Following this line, the authors recommend that for a 95% prevalence of the topic to be analyzed, that is, a frequency so common that a deep theoretical knowledge of it is not required, but rather to interact with it regularly, each installment should be six people for a total of five topics. Therefore, having six students from each major meets that criterion [13]. It was decided that they would be a career in science and another in humanities, because there are studies in Mexico that describe how science students have a better perception of the meritocratic system and the material and symbolic recognition that careers in this area have, as a result of its functionality for the labor market, in contrast to the testimonies of students of careers such as Anthropology or other humanities, in which they express resentment and discontent towards the society that does not value their work because it is not considered useful for the economic growth of the country, therefore that it was considered that analyzing the possible prevalence of this differentiation from the model of social representations could be a good contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon [14].

On the other hand, it was decided that they would be mid-career students in order to ensure that they had already experienced the university environment in person, taking into account that the pandemic forced universities to work online. That is, although the selected students also took courses online, they were previously attending university, unlike later generations, who began their studies working from home. It was important that they had a vivid experience of the university environment, because for the purposes of this research, inquiring about the students' perceptions regarding the daily demands of university life, such as transportation, housing, food, interaction with teachers and classmates from other generations in the different spaces was crucial, since it could lead to the construction of a social representation about the competition that is perceived in face-to-face encounters, which is not possible in distance education.

The script for the semi-structured interviews consisted of 44 questions, divided into three blocks: field of knowledge, field of representation and field of attitude. This division was made taking as a guide the model of social representations, which, as already stated, expresses that the process of representing an object goes through precisely three stages: the reception of information, the configuration or representation of the latter, and the development of an attitude towards an object. In that sense, the field of knowledge part of the script had the purpose of collecting information related to the knowledge that students have about competition and

meritocracy, including the sources from which they have acquired that knowledge, such as the education received from their parents, their own experiences throughout their lives, and the elements that have contributed to their having a certain perception of competition and meritocracy.

In turn, the part of the representation field was intended to collect information on the mental images that students have built about competition and meritocracy, based on the hierarchy and ordering of the information they have received in the previous field. In this part, it was highly relevant to inquire about the senses and meanings they give to things and the experiences they have had, so we sought to develop a type of biography derived from their life trajectories and the possible emotional effects that compete has left in them. Finally, the attitude field of the script focused on extracting information that would allow identifying the assessments and evaluations that students make of the competition, in order to determine if these are positive or negative, so that there can be points of comparison that can later be used. Be linked to belonging to the respective career and its influence on identity and the perception of having to compete.

The information collected from the interviews was processed for interpretation with the help of the Atlas Ti software, using the content analysis technique [15]. The interpretation of the testimonies consisted in the identification and classification of the elements that, according to the model of social representations, are necessary for the development of an attitude towards an object. In that order of ideas, the information related to the perception of competition and its effects on the success of people and the possible emotional consequences that it may have was weighted.

Results

Regarding the question of competition, there is a clear difference between the students of both careers, since, of the six Medicine students, five expressed that competition is a fundamental element for the improvement of society and people, because it promotes that each one strives to achieve their goals and develop their full potential. They recognized that the Medicine career is highly competitive, because the best students receive better opportunities for internships and stays in the best hospitals and with the best doctors. Three of them mentioned that part of the competition consists of comparing their work with that of other colleagues, because it motivates them to improve themselves. They do not consider that these comparisons are harmful, because they are an incentive that helps them overcome their own limits, and that, despite this competition, it is possible to form bonds of solidarity, since their career is very demanding and support is required to fulfill with all the demands.

However, all of them recognized that, although the competition is individual, the support they receive from their parents is essential, because it is an expensive career, so the economic support provided by their families is an element that is decisive for success. Following this line, they recognized that effort is not always enough to be successful, because there are certain factors that give some students advantages over others, especially the financial issue. They assured that the lower-income colleagues have to make a greater effort, because they cannot always afford the purchase of materials or books that are needed, in addition to the fact that transportation and food affect competition, since some come from distant places, which which contributes to wear more physically and emotionally.

Nevertheless, they expressed that although these economic differences exist among the students, they all feel the obligation to make the maximum effort and overcome all obstacles, since their vocation demands it. In that sense, they think that the experiences related to competing will help them when they practice their profession, because they are learning to overcome challenges that could arise throughout their professional life. The fact that they are studying to be doctors has favored the construction of an image of themselves linked to altruism, because they know that, eventually, people's lives will be in their hands and they cannot afford to make mistakes. For this reason, they consider that competing helps them to be better each time, since in doing so, they experience mistakes that will leave them with great learning.

Arts students, on the other hand, expressed, in general, that the competition causes them anxiety and stress, because they feel under a lot of pressure when they have to deliver assignments and assignments, since they consider that, since their career needs a lot of sensitivity to create, competing against others diminishes that creative capacity, because they feel that their works are being forced in some way. Five of the six students have that idea of competition. They consider that competition is not good for a society, because it fosters conflicts, envy and resentment, because a natural part of competition is the existence of losers, which, from their perspective, is not healthy, because it can contribute to personal decline. Likewise, they think that winning a competition can make the winners become arrogant and belittle other people, generating social gaps that damage the harmony that a society needs to be stable.

The same five students recognized that their teachers demand too much of them, and that this represents a dilemma for them, because, on the one hand, it prepares them for the challenges of future professional life, but, on the other, it makes them not feel free to create and follow their feelings to produce works in which a part of themselves goes.

They were especially dissatisfied with the grading system for the subjects they take, because they consider that art should not be measured or evaluated with a number, but rather, being a matter of subjective appreciation, there should be another way to certify their work. Then, when asked about the meaning that the career they are studying has for them, and what they hope to obtain from it, four of the Medicine students expressed that they hoped to become successful professionals so that, derived from it, could achieve great prestige among people and be recognized as great doctors. In this order of ideas, they agreed that they hope that this success will also translate into material benefits, since they considered that their work is so important that it deserves a good monetary reward. However, they insisted that this is simply the consequence of their good work taking care of the health of their patients, and not the main objective of their vocation, although they would not feel satisfied if their work is not well paid.

The students of Arts, on the other hand, answered, in their majority, that the meaning that studying their career has for them is to grant them the possibility of self-realization as people, since they consider that their vocation is more linked to the love of their work. Than with economic remuneration. Five of them mentioned that, although they would not disregard a job opportunity that would give them a good income, their greatest expectation is oriented towards becoming important artists who make their works known to the world, because they hope to capture their emotions in their art and, therefore, therefore, to realize themselves as human beings through it. Regarding the social recognition that their careers receive, the medical students were satisfied with the fact that society considers doctors to be extremely important people, since they contribute to saving lives. In this sense, they assume this responsibility, for which they know they are obliged to study and prepare a lot in order to repay this recognition. Four of them assured, without a doubt, that their career is the most important of all, because their function is to take care of people's health, which is the basis of any society.

One of them even expressed that it seems very fair that doctors are paid more than other professionals in the humanities or social sciences, because these careers do not represent risks, in the sense that they do not have lives in their hands. He said that these careers can be useful for some things, but that they do not have the importance of doctors. In that "risk", he based the fact that the Medicine career is so demanding and demanding with its students and that, therefore, it is correct that the retribution for that effort, both materially and symbolically, be higher. Than for those other career. As for the Arts students, all of them agreed that they feel upset with the fact that in Mexico the work of artists is not recognized, neither in the material nor in the symbolic.

They regretted that the arts do not receive the support of the people, because they consider that they are as important for society as any other of the most demanded careers, because they maintain the necessary cultural dynamism to build a feeling of national identity.

They expressed that part of the cause of this neglect has to do with the capitalist system, because it gives greater importance to activities that pay only economically and not spiritually. Therefore, they are aware that it will be very difficult for them to be very successful financially, but despite this, they love what they do. In addition, they know the social prejudices that exist around the humanities and the arts, such as the fact that, in Mexico, many people think that these types of people are hippies, drug addicts, lazy or problematic, and that they do not deserve recognition for what they do [16]. When asked about the difficulty of their careers compared to others, the medical students pointed out that theirs is much more difficult than those of humanities and social sciences, because in the latter everything is subjective and interpretive, in addition to the fact that there are no absolute truths, which favors careers based on opinions and not on laws. On the other hand, the Medicine career requires a very wide knowledge not only with theoretical bases, but also practical, since the surgical interventions and the treatments must be perfect. In addition, they argued that the amount of things they have to learn and memorize is greater than in other careers, because it is necessary for them to know deeply all the functioning of the body and its components.

Three of them mentioned that careers such as Arts and other humanities require great manual skills, but deep knowledge of things is not required, rather it is enough to learn to master a technique. One of them said that studying things in the social sciences is very easy because you only have to read books and express interpretations, compared to how complicated it is to treat a disease or perform surgery.

The Arts students said that their career is very complex because making models, paintings, sculptures and designs requires a lot of skill and a lot of creativity. They maintained that their career is as complicated as others, and that they do not feel that studying it is being easy for them. However, they said they know what people from other careers think about the humanities and the arts, in that they are simpler, but they said they did not agree.

In what has to do with merit and meritocracy, the twelve students expressed their agreement with the idea that those people who make an effort and work more should receive more and better rewards. Likewise, all of them recognized that, in Mexico, making an effort and working hard is not enough to be successful in life, because there are various kinds of elements that hinder that objective. Among them,

corruption was one of the most mentioned, because they perceive that jobs are not usually assigned based on merit and skills, but with influence peddling practices. They also mentioned that it is easier for students from higher social strata to get better jobs because their parents have connections with people in companies and offices that facilitate their entry. On the contrary, students from lower social strata do not have these opportunities and have to do everything on their own, not always with good results.

In that sense, they strongly disagreed with the way in which meritocracy operates in the country, because merit is not the value that predominates in the system, but there are structural factors, such as social class or social connections, that they mean that the most qualified are not the ones who have the best opportunities. They said that, under ideal conditions, they would agree with meritocracy, in the sense that there is equality of opportunity, careers open to merit, and that jobs are assigned based on ability, but that, in reality, the system it is unfair because it perpetuates inequality. To the question of whether, despite all the obstacles, a person should be forced to overcome them and become successful, three of the Medicine students answered affirmatively, while only one of the Arts did so. Those who responded negatively said that the structural factors of society are so entrenched in the country that social changes are necessary so that young people can access better living conditions. In that order of ideas, they recognized that they will do everything in their power to improve, but they are aware that there is no justice in the country and that they will have to face many frustrations derived from it.

Analysis of Results

According to the model of social representations, the way in which a person gives meaning to things depends on psychic mechanisms in which the information received and accumulated from the outside is filtered, organized and hierarchized, until an image is built from it. from which you interact with the object in question. Now, these psychic processes, or social representations, although they occur individually, are influenced by the environment external to the individual, since, being part of a society, the interactions with its members and elements contribute to shaping the images of the things that are formed in the mind [12]. Within these social factors, belonging to a group influences the individual in the transmission of values and worldviews, which, although with maturity and interaction with other groups can be modified and remain dynamic, maintains a certain essence from which the group is understood. World. For example, the experiences that a child from a high social class may have will differ from those of a child from a low social class, as will the type of environments in which

they develop, values, education and, in Generally, culture. Therefore, someone's representation of an object will, in a certain sense, be a reflection of her life trajectory [12].

In addition, society contributes to the construction of these representations through the construction of archetypes that, to a greater or lesser extent, are promoted by people, by some media, or by the education provided in schools. Thus, although the same phenomenon is presented to different types of people, the representation that each one will make of the phenomenon may vary substantially. Within these variations are the attitudes that each subject takes towards the objects of the world, since, again, according to the model of social representations, the attitude towards an object is the consequence of the representation process that occurs in the mind [11]. These attitudes may be associated with certain emotions that, at a given moment, will help the individual with the tasks that he has to perform, or, on the contrary, cause him such an aversion that it affects his performance. Therefore, to understand why a person develops a certain attitude towards a particular object, it is necessary to investigate the psychosocial mechanisms that have contributed to the construction of a specific image and, derived from it, express the attitude [12].

Transferring all this to the case of the students, it is possible to argue in favor of an explanatory hypothesis in which their belonging to their respective academic groups, that is, Medicine and Arts, contributes to the representation of the competence they expressed in their testimonies. In this sense, and as was said, society and culture are part of the information that enters the field of mental representation from which the image of the object will be built. Thus, at least for the Mexican case, there are cultural elements that associate the image of doctors with superior, highly intelligent, respected people, with great social responsibility and a certain status that confers them a very important social position [17].

For example, for many families it is a great honor that one of their children is a doctor, which is strengthened by the fact that other relatives turn to them for advice or even consultation. In addition, the media, which project movies, television series or other products, in which doctors appear as something very close to a superhero, contributes to building that superior image of them [18]. This idealization is fostered, as the students reported, within the Medicine career, since professors constantly talk about the important role they play for society, which is reason enough to always stimulate their best performance through competition. . They are always required to be the best, with the constant reminder that a simple mistake could cost their patients their lives, so they aspire to perfection.

Taking all this into account, it is understandable why for these students the competition is so important, since all the information they receive from the outside is configured in their field of representation in such a way that the image they build of the competition is that of a mechanism to become the best, because in this way they will be able to meet the demand that society has entrusted to them, to save lives. In fact, even before entering university, the competition is very tough for them, since, in Mexico, the number of correct answers needed in the entrance exam is very high, so the simple fact of being in the career means that they are among the best students who passed a big test [19].

In a certain sense, life is represented as a competition, because in important moments of it, it is necessary to fight battles, especially for a doctor, since, it could be said, he will compete against the diseases of his patients. Therefore, the image that students have of the competition is consistent with this cultural context in which they find themselves. On the other hand, the social representation that Arts students expressed about competition could be explained if one takes into account that, as with the Medicine students, there is a cultural representation of what people who are dedicated to humanities do. Within this representation, Arts are linked to spiritual worldviews of life and the world, in the sense that artists must be sensitive and sentimental. Sensitivity and sentimentality, then, are related to notions of life close to solidarity and empathy, for which competing against other people for rewards or material recognition would be incompatible with this image [19].

Likewise, the representation made of competition is associated with the capitalist economic system, since, as the Arts students expressed it, in the capitalist model competition is encouraged in order to produce more and generate more profits. However, this productivist and mercantilist idea of life does not satisfy those who understand the world from its sensitive and spiritual elements. That is to say, the fact that the capitalist system constantly demands that people compete is contrary to the solidarity and empathy that the students of Arts express [20].

Following this line, the feeling of community that these students manifested is challenged by the competition system, since, in competition, there are winners and losers, which is annoying for them, because within their worldview, the ideal of society it is linked to cooperation and the construction of strong ties between people. At this point, it is important to remember that the students mentioned that they are not against granting material rewards to people for their work, and that such rewards are more for some than for others, but that what bothers them is that they are assigned with based on competing, because this, in some way, distorts art, turning it into another consumer product. These two visions are

consistent with what the two groups of students described regarding the meaning that the career to which they belong has for them. As was said at the time, most of those from Medicine mentioned that the purpose of the career is to help them become successful professionals, which implicitly implies being winners, that is, winning the competition.

Although being a successful professional in Medicine entails the idea of playing a good role in society, since that would mean saving many lives, a certain desire for social recognition can be perceived in this self-image, which is also consistent with the cultural context. That has already been reported, in relation to the social representation of doctors in the country. Also, being a successful professional is linked to individual victory, which is, in fact, the basis of competition in the current system. That is, the competition in this system is individual, and therefore so are the rewards. Success, then, is a powerful motivation for these students, which would explain why competition is an important issue for them, and why the attitude they express towards it is positive: competition is a means to achieve the goal of being successful. a successful professional. In some way, competing implies showing oneself and others how good one is, and thereby receiving material and symbolic recognition.

The Arts students, as stated before, expressed that the meaning that studying has for them is associated with self-realization, which is also consistent with their refusal to compete, given that, from their perspective, self-realization is an emotional process that, although it also has to do with professional development, it is more linked to the expectations one has of one's own growth as a person. That is, self-realization implies improving oneself, so the idea of having to compete against other people does not fit into this humanistic vision. In this sense, it is important to remember that these students reported that they are aware that their careers do not enjoy the social recognition in the country that other more technical careers do, but that, despite this, they do it because it satisfies them emotionally and emotionally. Intellectually, in such a way that the reward they hope to obtain is not necessarily material, but could be found in the feeling of satisfaction that they will experience when they have been able to cross the finish line.

It could be said, then, that the students of both careers seek success, but the way of understanding it is different between them. In Medicine students, this success is oriented "outwards" in the sense that they expect to be recognized by others, while success in Arts students is "inwards", since they expect to feel fulfilled with themselves. As stated before, the same phenomenon can be represented in different ways by people, depending on how the information configuration processes occur in their minds. Regarding the question of the comparison of the complexity of their careers with respect

to others, the fact that medical students have expressed that theirs is more complicated than others can be explained by taking into account the representation of superiority that they have made of it, in the sense that, by dedicating themselves to saving lives, they perceive their work in society as of a higher order than other careers and, therefore, they associate this work with a greater difficulty than that of other activities.

This representation has, in some way, a certain bias of contempt towards other careers. As one of the students reported in his testimony: the other careers are not as important because they are not risky. In other words, all this culture around the Medicine career, linked to an image of superheroes, could permeate the minds of some of the students to build a self-perception of superiority that, in a certain way, can be traced back to the competition and eventual victory in it. Michael Sandel [2] wrote about it, saying that, in meritocratic societies, as there are winners and losers, some of the former can develop arrogant attitudes, as a result of the perception that they have been able to achieve success based only on their effort and, therefore, they consider it fair to boast and look down on the “losers”. This attitude, as has been said, could be the result of psychosocial factors associated with each person’s life trajectory [2].

The Arts students mentioned that they did not agree that the complexity of other careers is greater than theirs, since simply, each career has its own difficulty that cannot be compared. This attitude is consistent with the perception of solidarity they expressed, since, for them, competing goes against that vision. In addition, accepting that their career does not enjoy the same recognition as others encourages them to try to vindicate themselves by expressing, quite rightly, that their career can be as complicated as others. As was said in previous paragraphs, both Medicine and Arts students agreed that it is fair that people who make more effort and, therefore, achieve greater merit, deserve more and better rewards, but that This condition is not always met in the Mexican case due to factors such as corruption or differences in social classes. This shared vision may be due to the fact that the socially promoted notion of justice, in the sense of giving everyone what they deserve, be it good or bad, has been internalized and interpreted as an ideal.

However, the contrast between this ideal and the reality experienced in the country produces discomfort in the students, because they consider that their effort will not always be recognized or remunerated as a consequence of factors beyond their abilities, which is a source of frustration. It affects your emotional states. In this sense, the meritocratic discourse is an unfulfilled promise, because, according to it, every person who makes an effort can rise socially as far as their abilities allow them, but the vices that

persist in society are an obstacle to the realization of the goals, people’s purposes. This contrast in meritocracy affects the emotional state of students in both careers in different ways. For those of Medicine, it can be a hard blow to become aware that, despite having worked so hard in the career and becoming that professional around whom there are so many expectations, they may not find a remuneration according to that effort, due to the structural conditions already described, including the lack of employment and the poor economy of the country, as well as the large number of doctors recently graduated from the university who aspire to similar goals.

For Arts students, this inconsistency between the meritocratic discourse and reality is, in fact, one more projection of what they have already been experiencing regarding the little social recognition that their career has in the country. From his perspective, it is unfair that there is economic inequality, but it is even more so that it is configured around what is functional for the capitalist system, because, at least in the Mexican case, artistic production does not receive much support to develop and, therefore, making an effort and having a good performance during the career, beyond self-realization, does not produce enough income to be able to live from their work. According to the testimonies, it is possible to identify a clear difference between Medicine and Arts students with respect to competition, but what effects does competitive dynamics have on mental health from both perspectives? This is another point on which all the interviewees agreed, because, although the medical students recognized that competence is necessary for their professional and personal growth, they also accepted that it has a price that is often too high¹.

They expressed that the overload of obligations, as well as the demands of the subjects, added to the pressure that teachers exert to always expect the best from them, can become emotionally exhausting, and that cases of classmates collapsing are known. Cases of stress, anxiety and depression are, according to testimonies, very common among colleagues, and it is well known that many are unable to continue and have to give up. This dark side of competition is what Sandel [2] describes as the tyranny of merit, since the need to succeed that is fostered by the market system leads many young people to internalize it so much that they forget about their sanity. This can be explained if one takes into account that the social representation they have made of themselves and of their career, as already described, is associated with success, so that not achieving it represents a defeat from which not many can get up [2].

1 For several years, there have been cases in the Faculty of Medicine of students who, faced with excessive pressure and the demands of the career, have fallen into severe depression and have committed suicide within the Faculty’s facilities, or have tried to do so.

Giving up the degree would be more serious for those students from low social strata, because they cannot always give themselves the opportunity to start another degree, because, many times, the effort that their families make to pay for their studies is only enough to try. One time. Knowing this, these students exceed their emotional limits in order not to drop out of school, until they can't take it anymore and collapse. It is even possible to find cases of students who resort to substances and drugs in order to keep up with the pace of work, especially during the period of hospital stays, which have strenuous work hours. On the other hand, for students from high social strata, it is possible that abandoning the degree does not weigh so much financially, because they can afford to study another degree, even in a private university, but that does not exempt them from the emotional repercussions that a career implies. failure. In fact, when asked about failure, five of them answered bluntly: they can't afford it; they find it unthinkable and aberrant. This speaks of how important competition is for them, but it is also a risk factor for mental health, due to what has already been described.

For their part, the Arts students were more flexible regarding the idea of failure, since four of them expressed that, although it would be very hard to have to give up the degree, they would prefer to do so than to collapse emotionally. They mentioned that they also feel a lot of anxiety, stress and depression due to their work dynamics, but if they feel they can't take it anymore, they are willing to take a break, at least for a semester, something that medical students cannot do, because their curriculum is different. This differentiation seems to be consistent with the representation that each group of students expressed about competition, because for Medicine students, success is a primary issue, and competition is the means for it, so it is natural that failure is a such a serious idea for them, while for Arts, competing is an undesirable mechanism, so that, even if it were painful, failing would not affect them as much as Medicine.

Conclusion

Through this qualitative study it has been possible to verify that belonging to a certain social group has an influence on the social representation of an object, since around that group there is a whole set of structural and psychological elements that contribute to the construction of the object. of images and attitudes about things. When the group to which one belongs is a university career, the notions about elements of social dynamics, such as competition, are as diverse as the worldviews built around the meaning of university studies. It was found here that there is a clear difference in the way in which students of a science career socially represent the competition, and that of humanities students. It is feasible to affirm that the cultural context has a certain influence on

this differentiation, given that the current world of work, marked by a market logic, tends to weigh those activities that are more profitable for the mercantilist and mass production logic, which could explain, at least in part, why certain careers are more recognized than others.

This mercantilist logic could influence people to value and appreciate more what is perceived as more useful, especially in a country that is a manufacturer, like Mexico. In this sense, it would seem normal that students belonging to careers appreciated within this logic, assume that struggle for efficiency and productivity as an inherent condition of university dynamics, and that they also perceive it as the path to individual success. On the other hand, those students whose identities are not so permeated by that logic, and who study careers that are not as appreciated by it, have a different social representation of competition, and express an attitude in opposition to the current that ponders the efficiency. Despite these differences, there are meeting points that are interesting and worthy of being studied in depth, such as the fact that competition has a dark side related to damage to the mental health of students. The market logic focused on increasing productivity and competitiveness has the potential to wreak havoc on the affective states of young students, so it is necessary that educational institutions have more and better guidance and psychological care programs.

It may be true that competition is a mechanism that helps develop skills and aptitudes and contributes to the progress of a society, but it is important that competition does not become so voracious that it ends up being a risk factor for emotional health. As has been found here, the same phenomenon can be represented differently, whether someone studies the sciences or studies the humanities, but, at the end of the day, mental health is an issue that transcends those differences and deserves all the attention. The objective of this research was fulfilled, because it was possible to identify the differences in the social representations that students have based on their belonging to a certain career, which can contribute to a deeper understanding of how people apprehend reality according to the activities that they carry out, and above all, depending on the expectations that are socially constructed around those activities.

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