

## The psychologization of *social discomfort*: Imaginaries about Psychology in recently enrolled students

## La psicologización del *mal-estar social*: Imaginarios sobre la psicología en estudiantes de ingreso reciente

**Edwin Hernández Zapata<sup>1\*</sup>, Duvan Ceballos Tabares<sup>2</sup>**

1 Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia y Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellín, Colombia

2 Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellín, Colombia

\* [edwin.hernandez@campusucc.edu.co](mailto:edwin.hernandez@campusucc.edu.co)

**Received:** January 30, 2020

**Accepted:** June 28, 2020

### Background

In the last five years, there has been a rapid growth of high school graduates seeking to study psychology, making this professional career one of the most studied in Colombia, however, the unemployment rates for professionals show that the number of psychologists exceeds the demands of the labor market in the country, this mismatch between supply and demand substantially affects wages and devalues psychological services. (COLPSIC, 2016). The study about the choice of a career in psychology from the theory of social imaginaries has not been carried out, however, research has been conducted from categories such as social representations and motivation, concepts recognized in the scientific literature as factors involved in the choice. Thus, research on motivational factors has found the prevalence of altruistic and prosocial motives (Álvarez-Uría, Varela, Gordo, & Parra, 2008). Studies on the social representations of psychology show the predominance of the clinical approach (Sierra, et al. 2005), identifying that educational, social, legal, sports psychology, among others, have less preference (Lodieu, Scaglia & Santos 2005). Some studies on representations conclude that newly entered students to the race, they perceive the psychologist as an idealized professional, socially committed, humanitarian and enabled to solve different problems (Torrez, Maheda, & Aranda, 2004).

### Aims

This article analyzes the imaginaries about the psychology, present in students recently admitted to the psychology degree, in two private universities of Medellín, Colombia, the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia and the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. According to the imaginaries, inputs are provided to answer the following questions: Why is it attractive to study psychology at this historical moment? How are these imaginaries related to the exponential growth of psychologists? In summary, this article analyzes the relations between the growing choice of career and the imaginaries about the psychology present in the discourses. This research finds its mean in a socio-labor context where the increase in psychologists hinders employability, promoting job insecurity and professional remuneration.

### Method & Procedures

A qualitative design was used, the analysis of discourse as a method, in the tradition of interpretive repertoires proposed by Potter and Wheterell (1996), as a strategy consistent with the approach of Lizcano (2006) regarding the study to the social imaginary, which is structured around the identification of living and dead metaphors present in the discourses; thus, the metaphor as a rhetorical figure constitutes an organizing element of the interpretive repertoire. The sample was made up of 24 students enrolled in the first semester in the undergraduate psychology of the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia and the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, 12 participants from each university, 12 women and 12 men whose ages range from 17 to 28 years. Within the inclusion criteria of the sample, it was considered that they had not previously studied other professional careers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a flexible guide, with questions related to psychology and the role of the psychologist in society, these were audio-recorded and transcribed. Coding

processes were carried out, identifying units of meaning, rhetorical figures (especially metaphors), and key narrations present in the discourses; the codes were grouped into families, considering variability and discursive function.

### Results & discussion

A structural metaphor and three interpretative repertoires are identified, which articulate the imaginary ones about psychology to the neoliberal discourse of self-management, promoting the psychologization of social discomfort. The psychologist appears as a manager of the competences of the others, in a precarious and risky world. The dominant psychology in Colombia continues to be imagined through an adaptationist metaphor, based on methodological individualism and on the image of the psychologist as a subject with privileged gaze, who knows the truths about discomfort. It is specifically in a neoliberal historical period, breeding ground for individualistic and competitive practices, where psychology is in great demand. The image of psychology that appears in the discourses does not break with the medical paradigm. Thus, the function of the psychologist according to the imaginary, is the administration of a social medicine supplied subject by subject, according to the logic of methodological individualism; which claims the findings of Scaglia, Lodieu, Arias and Noailles (2002) on the hegemony of the clinical representation of the figure of the psychologist. The findings are close to those presented by Bedoya (2018), who considers that neoliberalism turns the psi space into a market niche, persuading the individual to better manage their internal processes, as a possibility of becoming a more competent subject within the risk society, context in which, psychology and other psi knowledge acquire great demand.

### Conclusion

Both social image theory and constructionism emphasize the way in which instituted power makes subjects see, speak, feel, choose, and think, based on standardized metaphors and socially instituted texts. If society is a text, whose metaphors are currently marked of neoliberalism, there is a possibility that psychology and its representatives may rethink them, daring to construct emerging texts that question the commodification of knowledge, the psychologization of disease, methodological individualism, the figure of the sage and other discursive resources, which consolidate the backbone of the imaginary on psychology in Colombia.

**Keywords:** discourse analysis, neoliberalism, psychology, social imaginaries

### References

- Álvarez-Uría, F., Varela, J., Gordo, Á., & Parra, P. (2008). El estudiante de psicología: La socialización profesional de los futuros psicólogos y la cultura. *Revista Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría*, 28(101), 167-196.
- Bedoya, M. (2018). *La gestión de sí mismo: Ética y subjetivación en el neoliberalismo*. Editorial Universidad de Antioquia.
- Lizcano, Ernesto. (2006). *Metáforas que nos piensan: Sobre ciencia, democracia y otras poderosas ficciones*. Ediciones Bajo Cero/ Traficantes de sueños.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1996). El análisis del discurso y la identificación de los repertorios interpretativos. In A. J. Gordo, & J. L. Linaza, (Ed.), *Psicologías, discursos y poder* (pp. 63-78). Visor.
- Torres, T., Maheda, M., & Aranda, C. (2004). Representaciones sociales sobre el psicólogo: Investigación cualitativa en el ámbito de la formación de profesionales de la salud. *Revista de Educación y Desarrollo*, 2, 30-42.

**Financial support:** Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana.

**How to cite this article:** Hernández Zapata, E., & Ceballos Tabares, D. (2020). La psicologización del mal-estar social: Imaginarios sobre la psicología en estudiantes de ingreso reciente a la carrera. *Psicoperspectivas*, 19(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol19-issue2-fulltext-1882>



Published under [Creative Commons Attribution International 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)