

# Confronting indifference as a priority of active university formation

## Abstract

This is a theoretical work. In it, some theoretical considerations about indifference are developed, among them, the social and historical causes of its increase in the current world, as well as regarding the statement that indifference is growing. Regarding this aspect, it is pointed out that it does not mean that all people are indifferent, but rather that every day the number of people who only attend to their own affairs and ignore those of others increases. It is pointed out that this phenomenon has among its causes, as can be seen with the naked eye, that the universe of interests of many people tends to narrow and they only care about what is part of said universe. In this work it is emphasized that in confronting indifference, the university can play a valuable role, which can be carried out in many ways, one of which is active university formation. With this modality, the enthusiastic and diligent participation of students in learning is emphasized. It is also highlighted that in the process of active university formation, dialogues and the development of students' critical thinking are important. The objective of this work is to highlight some of the possibilities that active university formation has to confront indifference. For its development, a current and varied bibliography was consulted.

**Keywords:** Indifference, postmodern society, individualism, active university formation, critical thinking

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## Introduction

There are authors who claim that humanity has changed so much in recent years that it is possible to speak of a new stage or era: post-postmodernity.<sup>1</sup> If this criterion is followed, the characteristics of the previous society, the postmodern one, have been left behind or have been substantially altered and, consequently, others have appeared. Now, this statement needs reasoning, even if it is brief: In the 1980s, the French philosopher and sociologist, Lipovetsky<sup>2</sup> pointed out that "postmodern society is one in which mass indifference reigns" (p. 9), thus that, if the initial assertion is recognized, when postmodernity was surpassed, this state of mind: indifference, lost its status as an essential characteristic of society. But daily life does not manifest itself in total correspondence with what the two researchers mentioned above claim; one can even perceive intensification and one can think that it can grow and have incalculable consequences today.

The previous statement does not mean that humanity became insensitive to everything, nor even that individuals became indolent beings, what happens is that, according to Lipovetsky<sup>2</sup> "all tastes, all behaviors can cohabit without excluding each other" (p. 41). This characteristic can be considered positive if it is equal to tolerance, but while this consists of allowing what is different to exist, since it has become aware that it has the right to exist, indifference is due to the fact that everything is the same. Such demotivation has direct relations with a fact: limiting interests to the individual framework. In this way, the importance of everything that exists beyond what each person considers valuable is eliminated, which is, above all, what is one's own and not the problems of others.

Today you can find works where indifference is highlighted and highlighted as "one of the problems that most afflict society in recent times",<sup>3</sup> linked to the social, political, economic and cultural and evident in the everyday human actions, but it has not been studied with the intensity it deserves. Frequently it is only mentioned or alluded to,

but is not developed theoretically.<sup>4,5</sup> In some texts, attention is linked to other topics, especially politics,<sup>6,7</sup> also to higher education<sup>8</sup> with the intention of reinforcing humanism in the face of mercantilism. Noteworthy are the considerations of Gilles Lipovetsky, particularly those related to the current era (1986).

In these times, there is another event of unquestionable value: the growth of the importance of the university. The great value of this institution is largely due to the top position that knowledge has today, especially scientific and technological knowledge, not only because it is used in substantive university processes, but because at the university it is also produced, disseminated and stored. The link between professionals and knowledge and the importance that the latter have in today's world strengthens the value of the university.

Based on the previous condition, it is of great importance that in university formation the fight against indifference increases and the work aimed at preventing future graduates from being indifferent to the problems of others, whether of other individuals or of society, is prioritized. In this purpose, a way within the reach of teachers is not to limit the training task to the creation of the qualities of the profession and, to the same extent, to encourage university training to include human training and with it the purpose of achieving a more human life. Luckily, this endeavor is supported by many authors Pallarès et al.<sup>9,10</sup>

One way to confront indifference is for university formation to be conceived as active. There are scholars who refer to active methodologies, for example, Cotán, and Orozco,<sup>11</sup> but with the present work, which is carried out from the Philosophy of Education, it is not intended to offer methodological details about the increase in the participation of students in the training process, but to highlight that the active nature is based on student activism in the training work, in the various actions they carry out. The details of these actions are the responsibility of teachers, who must take into account the specific

characteristics of their work. This paper also highlights that one of the intentions to have with active training is that future graduates expand their interests and are not indifferent to their environment. This purpose is not abundant in the profuse bibliography that exists about university formation.

The reflections presented below were made with a wide degree of generalization, which is why the category human society was used. Furthermore, they focus on what should be and have a sense of prediction, since they are aimed at raising awareness of something that can become a much bigger problem.

## Theoretical approach to indifference as a characteristic of today's society

When the world is studied from the end of the 20th century to the present, indifference comes to light as one of its characteristics. This state of mind consists of the lack of attraction or repulsion, which is why it is shown as a lack of interest towards both the positive and the negative, in the face of which no position is defined; It has various nuances, and, in correspondence with its heterogeneity, different reflections have been deployed about it as a feature of human society of these times.

Indifference has been seen within the framework of capitalist social relations and has been identified as a reciprocal phenomenon between human beings<sup>12</sup> and as an escape route for capitalism, as it found "an ideal condition for its survival experimentation".<sup>2</sup> It has also been placed next to the lack of love, the harshness and cruelties that humanity has been suffering from Morin<sup>13</sup> as a result of the explosion of information typical of these times that leads to constant updating and "makes people assume an indifferent attitude",<sup>14</sup> as well as a resource to oppose impositions.<sup>15</sup> It was recently said that "political indifference is the second most important attitude among citizens of the majority of Latin American countries"<sup>16</sup> and has been associated with corruption.<sup>16</sup>

Indifference is a state of the spirit that can be very negative when it manifests itself in the face of alienation. By alienation is meant all that degenerates humans, threatens their improvement, engenders hatred and discrimination, damages the planet and endangers life. It should be no less worrying when it takes place in everyday interpersonal relationships in the face of individual problems.

Today it is urgent not to be indifferent to indifference. In these times, this state of mind can be seen in people of any age and regardless of individual specificities, such as sex, cultural level or place of residence. But if this is alarming, so is the existence of people who deny that it is a social problem, with which they themselves are giving evidence of being indifferent. To the latter we can add that there are those who maintain that it is not necessary to worry about the decrease in attention to the problems of society and other human beings, because they are issues that belong to a past that has already been overcome.

The indifference began to increase at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century along with the emergence and consolidation of other characteristics of postmodern society, which for a time were only noticeable in some countries, but have already spread throughout the world, among them are the questioning and the elimination of legitimacy (of ideas, social aspirations, ethical and political principles), dissent, the idea of anything goes and the social fragmentation resulting from individualism at higher levels, coupled with the reinforcement of each individual's attention to himself and disdain for others.

One way to understand this phenomenon is to search for its causes; some of them can be found with the study of human society during the last twenty years of the twentieth century: a stage of disenchantment, uncertainty and withdrawal of ideological diversity. These traits can be understood through the events that mark this period.

## Among those with the greatest impact are the following

The collapse of European socialism and with it, of what was then known as the world socialist system, to which countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America belonged. This debacle was not only the return to capitalism of a group of states, but also a blow against many aspects of the philosophy that theoretically supported socialism: Marxism-Leninism and the ideology that was based on said philosophy. The collapse caused disappointment, demobilization and hesitation in those who had in that social system the direction to reach higher levels of development, whose superiority they saw, above all, in the possibilities that it was said that it offered to resolve, with justice, the social problems. In this way, a wall of uncertainty arose before many men and women because the option to address the improvement of society had been demolished and, worst of all, it was argued, in many ways, that this had been pure falsehood. Surely there were many people who thought that everything was over, gave up and, perhaps unintentionally, sank into indifference.

Spread of the theory known as of the End of the History. This theory was in itself a hymn to neoliberalism, bourgeois ideology and Western capitalist democracy.<sup>17</sup> With it, not only was the supposed irreversible triumph of capitalism glorified as the unsurpassable destiny of humanity, but the sterility of the struggle for a different world was exalted. It was, according to the Uruguayan intellectual Galeano,<sup>18</sup> the final form of government that the North imposed on the South as the only and final system, with which oppression was consecrated under the banner of freedom. You had to make do with what you had, apparently that was the only thing there was and nothing else could be done.

The characteristics of the society, that in the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to be called postmodern. During the eighties of the twentieth century, when the name postmodern society was used, it referred, above all, to the developed capitalist countries, but as time passed, many of its characteristics spread throughout the world, among them, the questioning and the loses of the legitimacy of ideas, social aspirations, ethical and political principles, as well as some of their principles: dissent, the idea of anything goes and the social fragmentation resulting from individualism at higher levels, which responded to the notion: each Let him live his life and let others manage it as they can, with which each individual reinforces attention to himself and disdains others.

Individualism in postmodern society and the human being deserve separate attention. During the last years of the last century, this topic was addressed by several authors and from various perspectives. An example is an article by the author Molina,<sup>19</sup> where she brings out the criteria of the American sociologist Daniel Bell and the French philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard. Among the ideas collected from the former is the advent of postmodernism as a cause of social fragmentation, because each individual only pursues their self-realization, while the French philosopher points out, among other statements, that in such a complex society, with so many and very varied relationships, where the permanent thing is the flow, each individual only tries to look like himself, because in the world where

he lives everything is taken to the screens and privacy is lost, in the face of which human beings can only be passive and indifferent. Another example of authors who dealt with the topic in the last decades of the last century is the Spanish author Cortina,<sup>20</sup> who asserts that the postmodern way of thinking and feeling is characterized, among other features, by the refusal to harmonize the universal and the singular and the decision to opt for the latter.

The aforementioned features, especially the cult of the individual and the singular, were more than taken advantage of by the neoliberal discourse, which was reinforced in those years, and accentuated the disinterest in the future and the past and called for attention only to the present, as an individual matter.<sup>17</sup> It is worth emphasizing that, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although the discourse of the variety of thoughts was reinforced, what the forces possessing great political power, as well as their ideologues and acolytes, tried to do was to spread neoliberalism and, with it, the unification of criteria. At the same time, they spread the end of ideologies, whose tacit intention was the stopping of critical ideas and arguments, popular demands and the forgetting, due to disappointment, of the possibility of transforming society and building a superior one, an ideal that began to be seen as a chimera, as something totally unrealizable. Furthermore, along with this and as a consequence, the loss of interest in the future and the past intensified, which was accompanied by attention focused on the present as a solely individual matter.

This soil was fertile for the germination of indifference, which, as noted above, does not mean that nothing is done, but “that everything can cohabit”<sup>19</sup> and was, in turn, a fruitful framework for the growth of pessimism and the renunciation of criticism, which is why, at the same time, imagination, dreams, and the ability to deploy utopias received hard blows.

In today’s human society, driven largely by the market and the mass media, popular demonstrations of discontent have taken place, but interest has focused on the present or the immediate future and the individual perspective has made itself felt. One of the fundamental causes of such a characteristic is the influence exerted by the fatalistic, immobilizing ideology, which attempts to convince that nothing can be done to change society. With it, it is about engendering passivity and resignation and making thinking about human improvement seen as absurd. Such opinions are heard by the ideologues that support it, and develop them theoretically and by ordinary people and in simple conversations. Another danger is that indolence stops attracting attention and that she herself becomes indifferent to people, or, worse still, that it comes to be seen as a positive quality and, in fact, becomes a value.

Humanity is in danger if indifference continues to grow<sup>7</sup> and that it stops attracting attention, that is, that it becomes indifferent. Today it is urgent to think more strongly about it, to turn it into its opposite: interest, enthusiasm, vehement longing; or, at least, to slow it down. There is still a possibility of preventing it from becoming an essential characteristic of the century and that in the future the generations of this era are characterized as indifferent to indifference.

In the 1980s, Lipovetsky<sup>2</sup> stated that indifference was growing and that teaching was more visible, because “the Master’s discourse has been desacralized, trivialized, placed on the same level as that of the mass media and teaching has been turned into a machine neutralized by school apathy” (p. 38) and, after ensuring that school has become a place where schoolchildren abandon knowledge and get bored. He highlighted innovation, participation and pedagogical research as the antidote. Educational institutions, including the university, have been

able to find ways to continue their work at higher levels, but this does not mean that they have reached the unsurpassable level and therefore, we must continue thinking about their improvement.

## For an active university formation contrary to indifference

The university formation category refers to the system composed of ideas and actions focused on the creation of new and superior qualities in university students, with their consciousness and will, led and promoted by teachers; In turn, it is a process, because it unfolds in stages and levels, always nuanced by sociocultural conditions and the links between the objective and the subjective.

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to be in line with the development of science and technology, university formation must be developed through the deep and stable learning of students<sup>21</sup> and for this it is essential that participate actively in the training process, even if it is carried out under the guidance of the teacher.

Today, university students require “activities that allow them to activate and apply knowledge, investigate, reflect, solve problems and communicate effectively”.<sup>22</sup> University formation focused on the transmission of knowledge does not satisfy such needs. The active role of the students allows them to be the ones who determine their learning process, while the teacher must provide them with tools to advance and stimulate their interests, even in matters not typical of the specialty. Therefore, this training has to be flexible and not tied to a preconceived pattern.

In active university formation, interaction, dialogues, and debates are valuable. Through dialogues, interaction between individuals, and between an individual and a group, is favored.<sup>23</sup> In its realization and when conceiving it, the teacher must observe a very important requirement today: inclusiveness. In today’s world and with increasing frequency, students lead teachers to dialogue, because they want to express their opinions and feelings. It is advisable to take advantage of their insistence. Today it is difficult to develop a formation activity with high quality if it is unilateral. But dialogue is more valuable if it challenges the productive capacity, of students and teachers, if it contributes to the formation of future professionals and, above all, if it awakens curiosity in them, both with their future work life and with issues current social. This is a way to stimulate student attention to these issues and confront indifference.

The teacher must stimulate dialogue and not allow deviations from the topic, nor the fall into secondary or inappropriate topics, in turn, must he take advantage of the doubts that arise. To dialogue, you have to encourage the interlocutor to express himself and this includes doubts, the value of which is high in any cognitive task.

In the deployment of the active nature of university formation, the search for knowledge is valuable. One way to encourage it is to raise concerns in students. What to do if students are indifferent? So the work of formation is arduous and he has to investigate how to motivate them. Sometimes it is effective to let the students talk freely among themselves, but the teacher has to take advantage of the first link that appears with some teaching content, and from there, guide the students in the search for knowledge, which is usually motivating when guides through problems because they force their minds to produce and thus expand.

A perpetual task of human beings is to solve problems. This task gains depth when it is given a main place in university formation, especially when it is an articulating axis and an impetus to move



forward. In this case, problem solving is more than a situation that requires solutions and answers or a difficulty to overcome. It is more than a task to accomplish. Now, there is no reason to make them an absolute. A weakness that humanity has always had is turning something into an absolute. This limitation must be avoided in university formation. Explanations, arguments, descriptions and other methods and ways that promote the arrival of new knowledge or the consolidation of existing knowledge are also valuable, for example, the processes themselves, the tasks and their link with learning,<sup>24</sup> as well as the theory and its application. It is not prudent to relegate conceptual approaches to lower levels to privilege the methods and strategies applied to problem solving.<sup>25</sup> University formation is made more valuable when taking into account Aristotle's recommendation to find the balance point.

There are links between problems and questions, although these are not always problematic. In university formation great emphasis must be placed on the formulation of both, not only so that students do not become disoriented and give up on completing the task, but also for two other reasons: to awaken curiosity in them and to induce them to think not only about their specialty, but also on other topics: society, the individuals that make it up, the culture of which they are part. The teacher must guide students to learn to ask questions. Each question has value, but those that provoke deep cognitive mobility are more valuable. The teacher must be careful when evaluating the students' questions and be able to find their importance, even the naive or poorly formulated ones, so as not to discourage or frustrate them.

The teacher must be able to lead the students to understand that his opinion is not the only one and that he is not infallible. Through the differences between authors and between professors from the same university, regarding the appreciation of problems and their solutions, the professor can comment on the questions formulated by his students and at the same time awakens curiosity in them and entice them to investigate to take sides, thus inciting them to confront indifference.

Active university formation has basic links with critical thinking. In specialized bibliography, various types of thinking are usually talked about, including analytical, systemic, practical and critical. Critical thinking is not something new, in ancient philosophy it was already given attention related to the elaboration of questions.<sup>26</sup> However, it is one of the most mentioned forms in the aforementioned bibliography, where it can be found very diverse definitions. The decisive thing is to understand it as a revolutionary, transformative disposition, whose ultimate goal is to obtain some degree of human emancipation. Critical activity is not only the exercise of high-level thinking, but the active search for challenges, and alternatives to them,<sup>27</sup> for this it is always necessary to include and exclude and recognize that "no there is no theory that exhausts the fact from which it emerges or to which it is directed".<sup>28</sup> Therefore, its ultimate goal is to obtain degrees of human emancipation, for which the extermination of alienating forces is necessary, that is, everything that stops or subjugates the human being.

Critical thinking is the human ability to distinguish, on an objective basis, the positive and the negative in information, thus creating ideas and using them based on the exercise of judgment, it is not saying what you want, nor condemning or censoring, although it may contain these actions or lead to them.

This type of thinking includes the interpretation and evaluation of information prior to decision-making,<sup>29</sup> hence its deployment must be based on fairness and deep knowledge, and be accompanied

by intellectual autonomy, flexibility, tolerance, ability to remove established concepts and test alternative ideas, with it we tend to prioritize the rational in search of a fair conclusion, but this also requires feelings. Its use leads to formulating transformative commitments, which are optimized through an integrative vision.

There is a dialectical relationship between the development of critical thinking, independence for decision-making and autonomy for lifelong learning and between them and the development of work, research and communication skills, as well as for creative problem solving of all kinds. This mesh of qualities has a high value in today's society due to the weight that information has in it. The training task must prioritize that students perform critically with it.

In university formation, the exercise of criticism favors the active participation of students in their training as professionals and stimulates their interest in the environment; hence its importance in confronting indifference, all of this is more valuable when it carries within itself a profound theoretical elaboration, which is much deeper when it is based on society and is more meritorious when the development of human beings and their emancipation is pursued.

According to the authors Bezanilla et al.,<sup>26</sup> critical thinking is deployed at different levels: analyze - organize; reason - argue; question - wonder; assess; position yourself - make decisions; act - commit. Each one is important to confront indifference. University professors must ensure that students are able to display critical positions and make commitments.

In today's human society it is urgent to develop, at higher levels, critical thinking, not only regarding politics and ethics. One way to achieve this in professionals in training is careful attention to students who appear impassive to what is happening around them. These concerns can be channeled by opening spaces in teaching for them to criticize (and if necessary, to condemn) and to stimulate the search for solutions to the problems that have caught their attention, and thus open the way to social transformations and confront indifference.

These reflections have been written with enthusiastic trainers, lovers of their work and interested people around them. They can be of any specialty, each one has relationships with humanity and it is their specialists who are prepared to use them in the confrontation with indifference, which is not letting die the hope of achieving a more humane world.

## Conclusion

The increase in indifference at the end of the last century was associated with the strengthening of individualism. There is a dialectical interrelation between the current growth in importance of knowledge, professionals and university training. The high value that such training has today gives it a privileged place in society that must be used to solve social problems, including indifference. University formation is in more optimal conditions to confront indifference if it has an active nature. The protagonist of students in their training, the use of active methods in learning, attention focused on problem solving and the development of critical thinking lead to the formation of a socially active human being. Active university formation does not automatically give rise to confronting indifference, it is a conception that facilitates it, but in this endeavor the conscious and enthusiastic role of teachers is essential.

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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