



## Inclusion in Higher Education: Appointments on Affiliation of Universities with Disabilities

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### ABSTRACT

This article is linked to a research whose objective was to understand the trajectory of affiliation of students with disabilities in Higher Education. The investigation involved five university students from a federal higher education institution with a self-declared disability in the enrollment form. The empirical material generated through a semi-structured interview was examined in the light of Symbolic Interactionism, a theoretical perspective that assumes that social actors attribute meaning to their acts and to interactions based on a symbolic code. The methodology used was the case study and for this text fragments of student narratives were chosen that reflect the challenges that circumscribe their trajectories. The research has resulted in the understanding that the university trajectory of students with disabilities is marked by challenges similar to those of other students in terms of strangeness and learning of the complex codes of the academic universe. For the former, the demands of an academic nature must coexist with those of a symbolic order, such as the confrontation of discrimination, prejudice and aesthetic judgment in function of difference / deficiency.

### KEYWORDS

Educational inclusion. College education. Student with disability.

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## Inclusão na Educação Superior: Apontamentos sobre a Afiliação de Universitários com Deficiência

### RESUMO

O presente artigo vincula-se a uma pesquisa cujo objetivo foi compreender a trajetória de afiliação de estudantes com deficiência na Educação Superior. A investigação envolveu cinco universitários de uma instituição de ensino superior federal, com deficiência autodeclarada no formulário de matrícula. O material empírico gerado mediante entrevista semiestruturada foi examinado à luz do Interacionismo Simbólico, perspectiva teórica que parte do pressuposto de que os atores sociais atribuem significado aos seus atos e às interações com base em um código simbólico. A metodologia utilizada foi o estudo de caso e para este texto elegeu-se fragmentos das narrativas dos estudantes que refletem os desafios que circunscrevem as suas trajetórias. A investigação trouxe como resultado a compreensão de que a trajetória dos universitários com deficiência é marcada por desafios semelhantes aos dos demais estudantes, em termos de estranhamento e aprendizagem dos complexos códigos do universo acadêmico. Contudo, para os primeiros, as demandas de natureza acadêmica precisam coexistir com aquelas de ordem simbólica, como o enfrentamento da discriminação, do preconceito e do julgamento estético em função da diferença/deficiência.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Inclusão educacional. Educação superior. Aluno com deficiência.

## Inclusión en la Educación Superior: Apuntes sobre la Afiliación de Universitarios con Discapacidad

### RESUMEN

El presente artículo se vincula a una investigación cuyo objetivo fue comprender la trayectoria de afiliación de estudiantes con discapacidad en la Educación Superior. La investigación involucró a cinco universitarios de una institución de enseñanza superior federal, con discapacidad autodeclarada en el formulario de matriculación. El material empírico generado mediante entrevista semiestruturada fue examinado a la luz del Interaccionismo Simbólico, perspectiva teórica que parte del supuesto de que los actores sociales atribuyen significado a sus actos ya las interacciones con base en un código simbólico. La metodología utilizada fue el estudio de caso y para este texto se eligieron fragmentos de las narrativas de los estudiantes que reflejan los desafíos que circunscriben sus trayectorias. La investigación trajo como resultado la comprensión de que la trayectoria universitaria de los estudiantes con discapacidad está marcada por desafíos semejantes a los de los demás estudiantes, en términos de extrañamiento y aprendizaje de los complejos códigos del universo académico. Con el tiempo, para los primeros, las demandas de naturaleza académica necesitan coexistir con aquellas de orden simbólico, como el enfrentamiento de la discriminación, del prejuicio y del juicio estético en función de la diferencia / discapacidad.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Inclusión educativa. Educación universitaria. Alumno con discapacidad.

## Introduction

This article seeks to make some reflections on the data collected in a research carried out in a Brazilian public institution of Higher Education, with the intention of understanding, from the voices of the subjects studied, the meanings they attribute to their trajectories of academic affiliation.

The trajectories of students with disabilities ‘included’ in the university were analyzed in light of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism - a theoretical perspective that favors the understanding of the inherent aspects of the nature of social interactions, mediated by the meaning that actors attribute to objects and experiences.

In order to deepen the discussion about the social reality of the students with disabilities in the research institution, Goffman (2013) studied the third generation of theorists linked to Symbolic Interactionism and Alain Coulon (2008) who carries in his writings a strong inspiration of the interactionist school. The theoretical option for these researchers is limited to the interest of this study in revealing how social actors give meanings to their actions and social interactions, within an institution traditionally organized to serve historically more valued groups.

The research was guided by the qualitative approach, of the case study type, having as a privileged empirical instrument the semi-structured interview conducted with five students with disabilities enrolled in undergraduate courses. The data concerning the participants was made available by the Accessibility and Inclusion Center of the researched institution, which maintains in its database a set of information about students who have declared themselves to be persons with disabilities. The selection of these subjects occurred voluntarily through invitation acceptance.

For this paper we selected fragments of the narratives of five students with disabilities, self-reported handicapped, physical impairment, hearing loss, Turner syndrome and low vision, respectively identified in the text as and studante A, B, C, D and E, in order to preserve their identity, such as provided in the Informed Consent Form (TCLE). The need for protection of the research subjects is also evidenced by submitting the project to the Ethics Committee involving Human Beings from a federal public university in the northeast region of the country. After evaluation, the present study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under protocol nº 1898630.

Thus, in this paper, we intend to emphasize the importance of student affiliation and access to academic culture, as necessary elements for the construction of a sense of university belonging, evidencing the complexity of this process in a context that is culturally contaminated by patterns and idealizations regarding social subjects.

## Affiliation as a Mechanism of Permanence in the University

Joining university is for the student a high-impact event that will requires them to break away from the school world. According to Coulon (2008), it is not a natural or spontaneous process, but delicate and complex, whose implications resemble the learning of a

trade - the office of student. To appropriate this new craft, the student will have to go through what Coulon (2008) describes as "times" that are divided into: time of estrangement - beginning of contact with the new environment; learning time- period of incorporation of the new reality; and time of affiliation- successful transition from class-goer status, to student status<sup>1</sup>. Much of the continuity of studies and academic success will depend on this process.

The process of affiliation is therefore a condition for the student to enter into new modalities of the intellectual life. Therefore, for Coulon (2008), the affiliated student is one who possesses all the characteristics of a member, becoming able to perform the academic tasks in a manner that is implied, autonomous and without strangeness. This process involves two important dimensions: intellectual and institutional. The first refers to the assimilation of academic requirements, intellectual contents and methods of building knowledge. The second dimension is the appropriation of academia's own codes and routines, regarding administrative and institutional aspects.

As Coulon (2008) notes, the affiliation to university life plays a central role in the constitution of a successful academic trajectory. The more the student approaches the world and the culture of the university, the more empowered he will be to face the challenges of the academic universe and build his new social status.

The construction of the university identity and the successful insertion in the academic world characterizes the experience of obtaining the student affiliation. However, it should be considered that the complex processes of affiliation need to be placed on the collective plane, that is, in the field of a system of relations mediated by structured academic-institutional supports that develop in solidarity around the affiliation process (MATOS; SAMPAIO, 2013).

Thus, it is necessary that the devices to support student affiliation are clearly described in the scope of policies aimed at strengthening university permanence. These devices are fundamental strategies for the qualified insertion of the students in Higher Education, since they increase the possibilities of appropriation of the scientific knowledge and of management of the institutional rules.

## Affiliation as a Mechanism for Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

The requirements of the academic world and the challenges inherent to university life are common to all students. However, for students with disabilities, these elements are associated to others, linked to the disability condition, in a society marked by walls barriers and obstacles.

The process of affiliation happens to all students, not only those whose personal and school stories are particularly difficult, specially regarding disabilities. But for those, because of the results of historic processes of discrimination, exclusion and inequality, the academic world tends to be more demanding (SAMPAIO; SANTOS, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> For Coulon (2008) class-goer is the one who frequents high school and builds a learning and study process, which directly undergoes the mediation of a teacher. As for the student status, it is defined by the autonomy, by the appropriation of rules and codes of the university, fundamental aspects to the process of permanence in the university.

Fitting in with some of the norms and traditional ways of organization of the university will not always be a task for students with disabilities. This point is essential in understanding the trajectory of affiliation of students with disabilities in Higher Education, once becoming an university student presupposes establishing connections, dialogues, accomplishing tasks together, as well as recognizing one's self in others, and sharing the academia's world and expressions (OLIVEIRA; ROSA, 2015). How then to reconcile such perspective to the phenomenon of disabilities?

In terms of the affiliation of students with disabilities in Higher Education it is possible to perceive that it is not limited, as for others, to the transition from class-goer to student status, but goes beyond and involves above all the overcoming of prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas, whose presence is capable of restricting or delaying the process of affiliation to academic life.

The entrance to university is accompanied by what Coulon (2008) calls a double affiliation: intellectual and institutional. For students with disabilities, it could be said this is a triple affiliation, because besides the Institutional and intellectual dimensions, add into it that of subjective, symbolic order, such as facing discrimination, prejudice, and aesthetic judgment due to the difference/disability.

In this regard, how can one speak of student affiliation in the face of an environment that is often hostile and unresponsive to the bodily impediments and demands of the disability condition? How to build the sense of belonging in a space, whose place of disability is peripheral and permeated by indifference?

As we approach studies of the affiliation of the phenomenon of disability, in the context of contemporary higher education, we confront the university institution with challenges in relation to which it maintains a relative silence and even indifference. These challenges reinforce the need to broaden the debate about the living conditions and academic experiences of students with disabilities within higher education institutions.

The formative itinerary of students with disabilities has its own peculiarities and challenges, that is, experiences of exclusion and social denial arising from prejudice and discrimination in relation to the body considered out of order. The body marked by disability imposes the memory of human fragility. In a society of perfect, useful and healthy body worship, those who contrast this reality are especially reminded of the fragility one wants to deny (SILVA, 2006, p.427).

This perception on the influence of prejudice and discrimination on the academic trajectory of students with disabilities reinforces the thesis that to ensure equitable conditions of permanence it is necessary to adequately conjugate the relation of equality and difference, through the implementation of specific policies and actions that may minimize the inequalities lived.

Thus, in order for the disabled student to appropriate the codes that characterize academic life, it is necessary to guarantee the opportunity for participation, as well as the possibility of experiencing academic life in all its dimensions, a fundamental aspect of the process of student affiliation and permanence. Without the internalisation of the institutional culture, the possibility of inadequacy and exclusion is created, elements that almost always result in the pausing of disciplines, the prolongation of the course or, even, abandonment.

Students with disabilities need to achieve membership status that essentially characterizes the process of student membership and affiliation, but for that to happen they must have their differences considered. Harmonizing this relation presupposes [...] "to admit that each individual has the right to combine personal experiences of life with the collective, nevertheless imprinting a particular identity that constitutes his individuality" [...] (SILVA, 2006, p. 432).

Considering the concept of affiliation presented, it is worth noting that, predominantly, for students with disabilities, the appropriation of contents and knowledge, as well as participation in academic activities, whether teaching, research or extension, intersect with other needs, such as accessibility conditions.

In this sense, it can be seen that the theme of academic affiliation in the field of inclusive education determines the need for new institutional arrangements that meet the challenge of ensuring the participation, learning and graduation of students with disabilities. In fact, in the university experience, access to academic and scientific needs must in fact contribute to the promotion of self-reliance, personal development and social and academic inclusion of students with disabilities.

## Method

The present research was developed within the scope of the qualitative approach, of the case study type, with the use of semi-structured interviews, with open questions, in order to allow students with disabilities greater freedom in the answers. The proposed questions were not random, but based on a script previously elaborated based on the research objectives. The interviews were all recorded and then transcribed and analyzed.

Based on Minayo (2006), it is understood that qualitative research is ideal for the development of studies that aim to investigate the meaning and intentionality inherent in acts, relationships and social structures, the latter being taken both in its advent as in their transformations, as meaningful human constructions.

The case study, in turn, in the perspective pointed out by Yin (2015), is appropriate for the construction of an empirical investigation that is interested in questions like "how" or "why", with a focus on a contemporary phenomenon, in a natural context, over which the researcher has little or no control over the events and manifestations of the phenomenon.

Anchoring up to these references, the field work in the researched institution, consisted of a continuous reflective exercise, based on the objectives and guiding questions that outlined the methodological route. A detailed protocol preceded data production, with references to the procedures to be used, so that the study could be replicated and applied to another case that maintain similar characteristics. The protocol was developed based on the adopted theoretical framework, in close approximation with the case, allowing thus to test the reliability of the research and its findings.

Drafts, transcripts, comment registers and opinions were systematized and indexed according to criteria defined in the study protocol. As Yin (2015) points out, the case study protocol is more than an instrument, it contains the procedures and general rules that must be

followed when using the instrument. In addition, it is one of the main tactics to increase the reliability of case studies, guiding the researcher in conducting the research.

In order to ensure the objectivity and the scientific nature of the discussion about the affiliation trajectory of the interviewed university students, Content Analysis was used, as conceptualized by Bardin (2014), considering it a technique of privileged analysis when the intention is to understand the meanings beyond the speeches themselves. Thus, the analysis of content proposes to the apprehension of a reality that is not always apparent, but that is manifested in the "in-between-lines".

In view of a recent and complex theme, Symbolic Interactionism served as an important paradigmatic support, helping to understand the results gathered in the research regarding the socialization and resocialization processes of this specific group, as well as their experiences and interactions face to face.

## Affiliation of Students with Disabilities: Analysis and Discussion of Results

In this section, we present the results of field research, exploring the theme of student affiliation in the field of special education, with the aim of pointing out new perspectives of analysis regarding the process of inclusion of students with disabilities in Higher Education.

In general, it is verified in the analyzed narratives that the university experiences of the students studied are marked by common challenges, especially in terms of the school-university transition.

According to Paivandi (2015), the transitional character that occurs with the transition of the student to the Higher Education has an important weight on the university experience, since it implies a strong acculturation that imposes the development of a set of competences necessary to constitute the affiliation and access to university knowledge.

Although each academic trajectory is distinct and peculiar, Student A's narrative about his experience in Higher Education makes us think about the dilemmas faced by university students in the process of appropriation of the rules governing intellectual work and university functioning.

*The demands, norms that you have to obey here, to produce a text, to speak, to express, to present a work, there is a whole process of technical norms, very rigid, that need to be followed. The other aspect is in the deadlines, it seems that the university does not consider that the student has a more complex life outside the walls of the university (Student A, reduced mobility).*

This markedly academicism in the first half of courses, is, by itself, an affiliation element that interferes with the affiliation to university life that contributes to enhance the time of strangeness. Although this situation reaches students in general, for those in a disability situation it may be an additional difficulty to overcome. Thus, attitudinal and pedagogical barriers encountered by these students, in addition, of course, to physical barriers, become more challenges to be faced in the process of transition from Basic to Higher Education.

It is necessary to consider that the different barriers imposed on people with disabilities in social settings are rewritten in their academic trajectories, assuming an important role in the formation of institutional bonds and in the construction of student identity. Student B reveals in their interview the social disadvantages arising from the disability condition, which they incorporate as a natural destiny.

*I put hardship on myself, right, there's a lot, it's a lot of effort. I see it like this, if there's something in the way because I declared my arm disability, then I don't get involved, I stay out. (...) Depending on the work to be accomplished I see myself like, I can't for this and for that, I put it in my mind (Student B, physical disability).*

The relationship that this student establishes with the university environment and with the requirements of the student routine are generated from an understanding of social organization that strictly favors people without disabilities. It is not uncommon in a society that differentiates people by categories of deviations and places them in different social paths, based on the conditions of deficiency they have, that the "stigmatized" themselves takes the disability as an integral part of the construction of their identity, something that supplants the integral perspective of being human. This means that "the stigmatized person learns and incorporates the point of view of the normal, thus acquiring the broader society's beliefs about identity and a general idea of what it means to have a particular stigma" (GOFFMAN, 2013, p.41). From this perspective, Student B's speech points to self-responsibility for participation in activities, not making society and the university itself responsible for the changes that are necessary to ensure their inclusion.

In this context, based on the goffminiana perspective, it is understood that the stigma fulfills the social function of keeping the persons with disabilities linked to the beliefs that prevents them to require structural changes of society, because it reinforces the idea of difference as a deviation, incapacity and inferiority. Such a perspective produces a complex reality in which the stigmatized person incorporates the social imaginary that legitimates prejudice on the grounds of disability, to forge, hide and/or "cover" a possible stigma.

The tendency of the stigmatized person to conceal stigma may represent a defense mechanism against a socially imposed "script" on the "theater of life" (GLAT, 1995). Glat, supported by Goffman, stresses that this occurs because not only the stigmatized person acts according to the expected behavior patterns, but also the other actors. Thus, all of them begin to act according to the specific stereotype of their category of stigma, further reinforcing this situation (p.91). This behavior brings important attention to the design of public policies aimed at the inclusion of people with disabilities in Higher Education: to what extent the desire of the disabled student to meet the expectations inherent to the academic universe, has made the university a place of disability denial?

Disability reminds us of our own lacking, instability, and ephemerality, to the experience of our own fragmented existence (GLAT, 1991, 1995). Thus, the desire not to be seen in the deficiency condition reveals, in fact, fear of experiencing prejudice, indifference and coldness that historically marked the social interactions between people with and without disabilities. Blindness, deafness, intellectual disability, among other conditions, were treated throughout history as unwanted variations and the characterization of a non-human condition in relation to a perfect body ideal. This perspective on disability resulted in physical withdrawal and isolation, as well as in restricting co-habitation with differences.

For decades, people with disabilities have been confined to the silent world of the home or special institutions, with limited opportunities for social interaction, being submitted to medical intervention and clinical-therapeutic treatments, in order to adapt to the environments in an expectation of normality (BARBOSA; DINIZ; SANTOS, 2009). This view that reaffirms the disability as pathological and deviant, represented a hegemonic discourse in the field of special education.

Special education has traditionally been organized as specialized educational services that substitute common teaching, showing different understandings, terminologies and modalities that led to the creation of specialized institutions, special schools and special classes. This organization, based on the concept of normality/abnormality, determines clinic-therapeutic care forms strongly anchored in the psychometric tests that, through diagnosis, define the school practices for students with disabilities (BRASIL, 2008, p.1-2).

On the other hand, understanding disability as a socially constructed condition of life, it is possible to risk the assertion that once opportunities for inclusion are created, as well as adequate conditions of accessibility and interaction with the environment and with others, the barriers of social, stereotyped and prejudiced representations tend to be modified and broken.

It is in this complex configuration which are constituted the trajectories of affiliation of students with disabilities to Higher Education. The natural challenges related to access, permanence and graduation add to the concern of social acceptance and restrictions caused by environments insensitive to human diversity, often prolonging the time of estrangement and incorporation into membership.

This study, in line with Coulon's (2008; 2017) perspective, identifies that in the process of appropriation of university life it is fundamental to know how to reconcile personal demands with the demands of academic routine. However, in the case of students with disabilities, the experiences of appropriation are more difficult to be equated, there is no doubt, due to the symbolic factors added to the others.

Under this understanding, it is worth highlighting the role of social interactions and participation in academic-scientific activities in building a sense of belonging, as well as in overcoming stigma and prejudice. The bonds of coexistence, the affection, the exchanges that are established in the institutional spaces are important strategies of residence for students, increasing their chances of academic training. "It is a question, then, of getting the student into the world of ideas, of helping them to join the new world in which they have entered" (COULON, 2017, 1242).

Students with disabilities will have in their approach rite with the academic world, much like other students, the need to develop new subjective and intersubjective bonds, with a view to gradually establish the sense of belonging. It is in this place of exchange and experimentation that opportunities are given for them to elaborate important questions about the conditions of permanence in the university.

Thus, it is indispensable that the opportunities of coexistence and sharing extrapolate the space of the classroom. Institutional events, research initiation groups, extension activities, and even cultural and leisure moments are strategies that favor student affiliation. In this process, it is essential for the student to know in detail all the subtleties of social relations, actively mastering and sharing the natural and common language of the group in which they are inserted (COULON, 2017).

These social interactions are even more important for students with disabilities, as they seem to function as a network to combat prejudice and as a mechanism for coping with discrimination.

Strictly speaking, this is not what actually happens, given the objective conditions of organization and functioning of the university. In general, what is observed are social contexts that are not very sensitive to the comprehension of body diversity (DINIZ, 2007), as well as the specific demands of students with disabilities who every day are challenged to persist despite all the barriers that surround them.

In discussing this subject, Santos (2013), analyzes that the policies of inclusive education directed to Higher Education do not necessarily imply the achievement of the educational inclusion of students. According to the author this is because such policies do not offer conditions of sustentation in their own context, since once it ignores the special needs of these students, end up highlighting contradictions between academic discourse and social practices present in university education, making the permanence impossible in the end.

These studies allow to infer that there are nuances in the condition of deficiency that defy the rigor and inflexibility characteristic of the university culture. The particular character of the condition of deficiency implies the need for the ways of organizing the university, its time and spaces, its teaching and assessment, its curricular organization, to be thought about considering the different forms of learning.

Without this, there is a risk that the perceptions of students with disabilities about university life will develop from an idea in which difference is understood as a deviation, as a mark of discredit, against socially established parameters. Thus, the strategies of affiliation begin to be conducted in a field of possibilities much more restricted.

In fact, in addition to the inherent challenges to the process of intellectual and institutional affiliation, in itself, a naturally complex experience, students with disabilities must also build, in their trajectories, strategies of affiliation capable of overcoming prejudices and stigmas that almost always intertwine the university culture. This is what is defined here as the symbolic dimension of the process of student affiliation.

The symbolic dimension of the student affiliation process is understood in this text based in the Goffmanian approach to social interactions. For Goffman (2012, 2013), social actors mobilize and position themselves, in terms of symbolic interaction, towards others ... "in frames of meaning that shape the interpretations and actions of the actors involved." [...] "Frames are not simply perspectives or opinions, but intersubjective ties that cross human relations and structure them" (Mendes, Simões, 2012, p. 198).

In this sense, the student affiliation process for students with specific demands is woven into the intricacies of everyday practices, through which pass the social ties and their culturally shared codes. As this is an important aspect of the process of affiliation, it must be recognized as an element that is present in university insertion, in all its spheres.

When questioned about his participation in academic-scientific activities promoted by the university, Student B's interview highlights the symbolic element as part of the process of affiliation of students with disabilities in Higher Education:

*(...) I don't take part in all, actually because I don't like it very much, I'm a little out of it, when it comes to that, I know it's good to interact with people, the communion is also good, but I'm not into it (Student B, physical disability).*

The analysis of this narrative approaches the interactionist theoretical thought and its central category - social relativity. Symbolic Interactionism understands the nature of social interactions as a generator of social dynamics. It means that individual and collective actions are built in the context of everyday reality, that is, social reality is shared with the other, through so-called face-to-face meetings.

The contradictions that mark the trajectory of affiliation of students with disabilities, such as the need to combine personal demands with the rules of institutional belonging present in the codes of university culture, show the weight of the symbolic interaction in the process of student affiliation. In order to become a member of this social group, it is necessary to know in detail the subtleties of social relations, as well as to actively dominate and share their natural and common language (COULON, 2017).

Considering the studies of Coulon (1995); Goffman (2012) the experience of each individual is a result of the way they fit the reality around them, how they understand and interpret social action, taking as reference the meanings constructed in the prolonged interaction with the subjects in their natural environment. Thus, the symbolic interaction is not through direct reaction to the actions and gestures of the other, but through the interpretation of these actions and gestures, according to the meanings attributed to them. The narrative of Student E points to this reality:

*(...) there is still a kind of prejudice (...) I prefer to stay quiet, (...) the ones we can try to talk to are really few (Student E, low vision)*

The situations of indifference and prejudice present in this student's experience may have been interpreted by them as an invitation to detachment and segregation. In this sense, it should be emphasized that the reactions of both disabled and non-disabled people will always be due to the types of interactions that occur in such social contacts. The study showed that the relation that the disabled student establishes with the university environment is to a great extent impregnated by this variety of signs and social representations.

The fear of exposing oneself and, consequently, not meeting academic expectations, distances the disabled student from the processes necessary for student affiliation. It is perceived that the fear of facing subtle or explicitly manifest situations of prejudice leads students with disabilities to use the main "survival" strategy in Higher Education, the "cover-up" of disability. It is a decision according to Goffman (2013) based on the objective of reducing the tension generated by the stigmatized condition.

The narrative of Student C, regarding their experience in Higher Education, refers us to the discomfort and embarrassment described by Goffman (2013) in the aforementioned text:

*I do not feel comfortable talking. When there is a question directed towards me, I take a step back, but end up answering, but to speak first, no. (Student C, hearing impairment).*

The organization of the discourse of students with disabilities is covered by the care in hiding any type of label or stigma that put them before a social role of inferiority. This reaction is revealing and can be interpreted in the light of Goffman's (2013) Glat (1991, 1995) and Omote (2004) writings as an attempt to reduce or conceal stigma in order to maintain a more spontaneous involvement in the public content of interaction and greater freedom in choosing the place that will occupy in the "theater of life".

Regarding the accessibility conditions and their effects on the student affiliation process, the answers show an interesting fact - not everyone can identify the need to modify the configuration of the university to meet their specific demands, as stated by student B:

*Actually, my disability isn't in vision, in relation to physical disability if I feel the need ahead, I can go after a resource to better help me (Student B, physical disability).*

This statement reproduces the concept that there are types of disability that require more attention, such as visual impairment. In this case, it is considered that the physical disability "does not disturb" the academic activities, requiring, therefore, few adjustments by the institution.

Although students with disabilities face stigma in their academic journeys in terms of socially stereotyped attributes, some reports express a distancing relationship in terms of awareness of their own demands:

*The structure here still wouldn't support a person with physical disability, a wheelchair user (Student D, Turner syndrome).*

*I think there is still a bit more in terms of structure. For example, if you were a blind person you would not be able to get around here at the university. A wheelchair user, even though they made a ramp, I find it still quite difficult to move around the bathrooms. I think it would have to have an accessible bathroom for a wheelchair person. What about people who have low vision? I see a lot more, if it were someone else, my sister, for example, who has low vision, I think if it was my sister she could not see the slides (Student C, hearing impairment).*

The students' reports do not show the challenges that run through their academic trajectories, but they are directed at the symbolic space of otherness. Recognizing oneself as part of a historically discriminated and subjugated minority is not always an easy alternative, in some cases, when possible, when stigma is not immediately visible, some efforts are made so that it does not appear too much (GOFFMAN, 2013). It is an attempt marked by the desire to reduce the tension generated by non-compliance with socially imposed patterns of behavior, whose place of disability is discredit.

The desire to adapt to university life is attributed to them as the need for accommodation and incorporation of a standardized and unique social role. The narratives of the interviewees, has as a striking point this concern in attending to a certain category of student, idealized for Higher Education:

*I did not want to be treated as different, I wanted to be treated as a normal person, because I am a person like any other. This inclusion, in order for me to feel more at ease, should not be something that made me visually different from others. But an inclusion that gave me access like any other person, but did not make me different (Student C, hearing impairment).*

It is important to emphasize that when exposed to an institutional environment that ignores the implications of the disability condition, it minimizes the chances that the affiliation process will take place adequately, since the unique conditions of this group require a set of strategies related to care and special needs.

Referring to the conditions of accessibility and inclusion of the university, student A makes some considerations that reveal the feeling of frustration with the indifference of the institution in relation to its special demands:

*From the administration building to the campus, there are absurd things for nowadays, here at the university. I didn't imagine finding here at university barriers that have long been surpassed (Student A, reduced mobility).*

The university experience can be interpreted as an important opportunity to strengthen the personal and social affirmation of students with disabilities. But it is important to consider that depending on the conditions placed on the students and the political positions assumed by the university in relation to ensuring the conditions of inclusion, this experience can work against the process of affirmation.

The process of affiliation to Higher Education of students with disabilities is marked by antagonistic influences. On the one hand, there is a need to become a member of a new group and to assimilate new functions, to develop new tasks, to appropriate new routines, as Coulon (2008) points out. On the other hand, we understand that the condition of disability requires the university to form a space for reception and respect for difference, giving the student the condition of becoming affiliated.

Thus, the process of affiliation of students with disabilities occurs precisely at the intersection between individuality and collectivity, tied to the principles of equity and social justice. It is worth highlighting the presence of another element that crosses, in a transversal way, the students' narratives: the decision to persist in Higher Education.

Dreams, life projects, and perspectives for a better future appear spontaneously in the midst of their narratives. Despite appearing discreetly in the students' interviews, their narratives reveal the desire for permanence, graduation and entry into the work force, elements that end up favoring the construction of the strategies of affiliation:

*I hope to change my life, stop being a simple person, to be a future veterinarian, give a future to my son, have a future (Student E, low vision).*

*I hope to conclude in the given time, not only for a professional matter, of money that the course provides, but mainly, for the love that I have in that area (Student B, physical disability).*

As seen, the processes of stigmatization and prejudice, as well as the existence of barriers in the university environment, negatively interfere in the process of student affiliation, making the trajectory of students with disabilities more complex and sinuous. Thus, recognition of the university as an instrument to promote social mobility, points to the need to expand policies and institutional actions that ensure not only access to Higher Education, but the conditions of permanence and diplomacy.

Taking as reference the reports of the students interviewed, it is observed that despite the challenges faced, however, joining and staying in university represents for the student with a disability the opportunity to participate more fully in social life. Affiliation and retention at university can be one of the most consistent ways of overcoming prejudice and discrimination. Also, they may represent changes in the student's own perception of themselves and their potentialities.

In addition, students' participation in academic activities that allow them to experience university life in all its breadth, can definitely be considered one of the most successful strategies of affiliation. Building affiliation as well as strengthening institutional links contributes to the development of autonomy and personal affirmation, so necessary to historically excluded people.

## Final Considerations

The research results reveal that despite facing similar challenges to other students, in terms of strangeness and learning the complex codes of the academic universe, students with disabilities are placed in the need to overcome resistances, barriers and stigmas that touch their trajectories as students. Thus, in the process of affiliation of students with disabilities, the academic demands coexist with those of a symbolic nature.

The study, therefore, makes it possible to infer that the symbolic dimension of student affiliation, captured in students' narratives, reveals the permanent tension in meeting socially imposed expectations, directly reflecting the formation of the personal and social identity of students with disabilities. Therefore, we understand that the formative itineraries of students with disabilities need to be built in close articulation with institutional actions that allow these students to experience new forms of autonomy, only then the university experience can represent the opportunity to strengthen personal and social affirmation.

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