



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS RESEARCH: E  
MARKETING

Volume 14 Issue 4 Version 1.0 Year 2014

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)

Online ISSN: 2249-4588 & Print ISSN: 0975-5853

# Characters with Disabilities in Brazilian Telenovelas: Almost Invisible Consumers

By Marina Dias De Faria & Leticia Moreira Casotti

*Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

**Abstract-** Although important vehicles of culture and of society's values and perspectives, cultural texts represent little explored possibilities in the research focusing on the behavior of consumers with disabilities. In Brazil, telenovelas, or evening TV drama series, present as suitable cultural texts for such studies, in view of the importance of this type of programming as material that both crosses class lines and has national penetration. The objective of this study was to discuss how the consumption decisions and practices of people with disabilities are presented in Brazilian telenovelas. To achieve the objective, 22 Brazilian telenovela scenes showing characters with disabilities in situations of consumption were reviewed. The results of the study call attention to the need for companies, public institutions and society in general to review how they address these almost invisible consumers, who are often overlooked as potential customers and excluded from public policy actions.

**Keywords:** *people with disabilities, cultural texts, brazilian telenovela, consumer behavior, qualitative research.*

**GJMBR-E Classification:** *JEL Code: N30*



*Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:*



# Characters with Disabilities in Brazilian Telenovelas: Almost Invisible Consumers

Marina Dias De Faria <sup>α</sup> & Leticia Moreira Casotti <sup>ο</sup>

**Abstract-** Although important vehicles of culture and of society's values and perspectives, cultural texts represent little explored possibilities in the research focusing on the behavior of consumers with disabilities. In Brazil, telenovelas, or evening TV drama series, present as suitable cultural texts for such studies, in view of the importance of this type of programming as material that both crosses class lines and has national penetration. The objective of this study was to discuss how the consumption decisions and practices of people with disabilities are presented in Brazilian telenovelas. To achieve the objective, 22 Brazilian telenovela scenes showing characters with disabilities in situations of consumption were reviewed. The results of the study call attention to the need for companies, public institutions and society in general to review how they address these almost invisible consumers, who are often overlooked as potential customers and excluded from public policy actions.

**Keywords:** *people with disabilities, cultural texts, brazilian telenovela, consumer behavior, qualitative research.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural texts such as music, movies and TV drama series constitute important conveyers of the prevailing perspectives of the society that produces and consumes such products. For this reason, cultural texts have been defended and used in academic research on consumption and culture (Askegaard, 2010; Hirschman, Scott & Wells, 1998; Kozinets, 2001). When it comes to cultural texts related to consumer experiences involving people with disabilities (PwD), however, the dearth of studies is conspicuous, especially when one takes into account the recurrence of characters with disabilities in dramaturgy (Norden, 1994). Goodley and Bolt (2010) assert that, given the current socio-cultural context, analyses of disability based on cultural texts are needed all the more.

From a socio-hegemonic conception of the disabled person as someone who is useless and/or worthy of pity, people with disabilities are represented in cultural texts based on the corresponding stereotypes, thus constituting the structuring of a mechanism of oppression (Darke, 1998; Nelson, 2003). In the case of feature films, commonplace are representations of people with disabilities that depict prejudice and the difficulties of inclusion and accessibility; indeed, such difficulties do reproduce many of the problems faced by

such individuals in situations of consumption. DePoy and Gilson (2010), for example, mention a scene in the documentary, *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back* that presents a scene in which an airline attendant tries to accommodate a deaf-mute in a wheelchair. In other cases, the bias is masked as ostensible humor. Barnes (1992) discusses a series called *The Young Ones* to show an example of comic scene of consumption: a blind character tries to buy a bar of chocolate in a supermarket, and everything ends up in a veritable frenzy, involving the customers and supermarket employees.

In Brazil the heavy production of telenovelas has established a consistent output of cultural products based on which Brazilian nationality is problematized, identity is established, and individual / family / group behavior patterns are discussed via a pedagogy coordinated by the media (Hamburger, 2005; Oguri, Chauvel & Suarez, 2009). Joyce (2012), studying the representation in Brazilian telenovelas of racial issues, argues that telenovelas are excellent research tools, not only with regard to the way they seek to portray the daily life of Brazilians, but also because telenovelas are open works that viewers can influence as the plot unfolds.

Silveira (2010, p. 2) believes there are three levels of investigation that make researching the representations of people with disabilities (PwD) in Brazilian telenovelas a worthwhile pursuit: "the studies of media representations; the political importance of these representations as portrayals of the theme of inclusion; the importance of the telenovela as programming in as much as it is both national in scope and cuts across class lines."

The focus on Brazil for research on consumers with disabilities is currently of particular relevance, as the country prepares to host major international events, including the World Cup in 2014 and the 2016 Olympics Games, and must concern itself with meeting the demands of tourists with disabilities as well as Paralympic athletes (Faria & Carvalho, 2010). The neglect of people with disabilities in Brazil occurs despite the fact that such individuals account for approximately 24% of the population, representing more than 45 million people with disabilities. Of these, some 16 million have serious or very serious disabilities (Brazilian Institute of geography and statistics, 2010). In light of this scenario, the present work aims to discuss how the decisions and practices of consumption of

*Author α:* Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.  
*e-mail:* marinafaria86@hotmail.com

people with disabilities are presented in Brazilian telenovelas. The research undertaken here follows the transformative research paradigm, as interpreted by Mertens (2007). Transformative research arises from a dissatisfaction with the way in which the dominant paradigms of scientific research address issues related to socially disadvantaged and/or excluded individuals (Mertens, 2009). For Mick (2006), who illustrates his arguments with examples from studies focusing on PwD, the adoption of the transformative paradigm in marketing represents the first step towards consumer research as something that is for the benefit and welfare of humankind, and not just companies.

## II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### a) *People with disabilities in cultural texts*

For Norden (1994), the relationship between a society and the cultural products it produces is reflective of a causal relationship: movies, TV series and telenovelas demonstrate aspects of the society that produces them, while in multiple ways society mirrors the values reproduced in film and other dramaturgical representations of such social grouping. Sandlin and Maudlin (2012) point out that a review of these texts can help understand the proliferation of stereotypes.

Stereotypic assumptions about people with disabilities are based on superstitions, myths and beliefs established over the centuries, which are inherent to our socio-culture and are reproduced by means of media communication and the products of the culture industry (Barnes, 1992). Harris (2002) argues that individuals who do not usually have contact with people with disabilities acquire their knowledge about disabilities from television and cinema. This author points out that the representations of these people in such media are predominantly negative.

A frequent problem with representations of people with disabilities in movies, according to Darke (1998), is the conception of a disability as a difficulty experienced by a single person. This view clashes head on with the current approach to disability based on a collective model, i.e., in consonance with an approach whereby social and political dimensions of the issue prevail (Vehmas, 2008).

As a rule, in cultural texts produced by the mainstream, there are three frequent possibilities regarding representations of people with disabilities (Cameron, 2007): (1) pathetic beings, worthy of pity, sometimes tragically comical; (2) sinister or vindictive beings, or beings marked by evil; and (3) individuals who exhibit great bravery in the face of the tragedy of their lives. Nelson (2003) presents two further possibilities of stereotypic images for people with disabilities in dramaturgy: (1) creatures who should not have survived and who would be better off dead; and (2)

a dead weight; an individual incapable of interacting with his/her benefactors for the benefit of both.

According to Barnes (1992), there are ten prevailing media stereotypes of people with disabilities, especially in movies produced by the film industry: (1) people deserving of pity; (2) objects of the violence of others; (3) wicked / cruel / criminal individuals; (4) elements fostering an atmosphere of misery or degradation in the various scenarios encountered by other characters; (5) supremely crippled; (6) targets of ridicule; (7) persons with disabilities as their sole and very own enemy; (8) burdens for their families; (9) sexual aberrations; and (10) individuals unable to participate in community life.

From a semiotic analysis, Harris (2002) points out two fundamental recurring structures for movies whose drama revolves around PwD. The first brings the following sequence of events: (a) a person becomes disabled; (b) the deficiency leads to self-pity; (c) the person with disabilities moves away from society; and (d) one or more people without disabilities show the person with disabilities that life is worthwhile. The second screenplay is structured as follows: (a) a person is born or becomes disabled; (b) the disability leads to bitterness, despair and/or violence; (c) the person with disabilities seeks to take revenge on society; and d) one or more people without disabilities come to the rescue of the PwD. Currently, as a function of the imperative of inclusion of diversity, images of people with disabilities in cultural texts should probably portray them in situations of enjoyment of the myriad opportunities offered by contemporary consumer society (Douglas & Isherwood, 2009). However, as discussed below, this is not what happens in the context of the cultural industry's recent representations of PwD in Brazilian telenovelas.

### b) *Consumption and people with disabilities*

Mansfield and Pinto (2008) characterize people with disabilities based on the concept of consumption vulnerability, that is, people with diminished access to goods and services. This difficulty to play the role of consumers can be observed even when these people must get from one place to another: taxi drivers, for example, often choose not to pick up the disabled (Jain, 2002).

For Doessel and Williams (2011), from a socio-economic perspective, disabilities manifest themselves in the form of fewer available practices vis-à-vis the market for a given cohort of society, who remain on the sidelines of the main activities of production and consumption. Nicholson, Kulyukin and Coster (2009) argue that the removal of social conviviality and dependence with respect to other people limit consumption possibilities and opportunities for people with disabilities. Faria, Silva and Ferreira (2012), in turn, suggest that marketing theorists and practitioners may disregard people with disabilities as consumers.

Moreover, even in moments of leisure, people with disabilities must overcome barriers (Poria, Reichel & Brandt, 2011). Studying the consumption of leisure, Burns, Reichel and Brandt (2009) point out that the biggest obstacles for people with disabilities are not architectural barriers, but rather the barriers created by other consumers who harbor bias vis-à-vis the disabled. Emira and Thompson (2011) emphasize the negative effects that result from the lack of access to leisure in the development of children with disabilities and point out that some parents find it impossible to involve such children in leisure activities.

Still with regard to children with disabilities, increasingly common is the defense that such children should study in regular schools. Inclusive education, however, is still in need of development in Brazil, especially with regard to teacher training (Anhão, Pfeifer & Santos, 2010; Iarskaia-Smirnov and Romanov, 2007). In an autobiographical work that recounts the experience of a father of two children with learning disabilities, Fournier (2008) laments of never being able to see his children going to school.

Rituals and consumption are key elements for building and maintaining the individual and family identity (Epp & Price, 2008). In line with this perspective, Baker (2006) argues that marketing academics should devote themselves to investigating how people with disabilities can build their individual and collective identities through consumption.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, fragments of culture industry products—Brazilian telenovelas, to be specific—are analyzed in accordance with the methodology proposed by Hirschman, Scott and Wells (1998), which is to establish relationships between consumption practices and cultural texts that represent such consumption.

Arnould and Thompson (2005) and Askegaard (2010) view cultural texts as tools to identify lifestyles, identities and ideologies. Mikos and Perrotta (2012) are proponents of analysis of television programs, with the goal to understand behavioral aspects; furthermore, Joyce (2012) believes that in the case of Brazilian society, telenovelas are prominent among such programming.

The collection of data for this study included cultural texts selected from Brazilian telenovelas (i) previously presented on open television channels and that (ii) cast people with disabilities as fixed characters of the series. The cultural texts collected for the survey were obtained via the Internet website YouTube. Hartley (2009) mentions YouTube as a powerful channel for reproduction and for the posting of cultural texts.

It should be acknowledged that not all telenovelas already produced by Brazilian TV that included characters with disabilities were included in the study. At the outset, sources were referred to such as Menescal, Michalawski, Lemos and Monteiro (2010), Postal (2008), Silva (2008) and Souto Maior (2006) to get access to information regarding telenovelas featuring PwD, which had excerpts posted on YouTube; then, via the smart search facility built into YouTube itself, additional telenovelas that addressed the same issue were found. In all, more than 250 scenes from 22 different telenovelas were analyzed, depicting a total of 28 disabled characters. In the analysis of the results, certain characters appear prominently for being the ones who are most strongly linked to introducing to the storyline discussions on consumption practices.

The treatment of data followed the steps below: (a) retrieval and selection of scenes; (b) syntactic analysis of the narrative via dynamic and concrete observation of scenic elements, such as actors and dramatic action; (c) analysis of the contexts of the scenes. The discussion of results followed the guidelines of categories of analysis recommended by Hirschman, Scott and Wells (1998). After selecting the scenes in which the characters with disabilities appeared in consumption situations, the dialogues of the characters present, the settings, and the scene objects were analyzed.

### IV. REPRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

#### a) *Characters with disabilities in Brazilian telenovelas*

To aid in the understanding of the representations of the characters with disabilities in the telenovelas, Table 1 was prepared, providing a general information framework for the 22 television series analyzed for the study.

Table 1 : Characters with disabilities in Brazilian telenovelas

Year	Telenovela	Free translation	Character	Disability
1978	Te Contei?	Have I told you?	Léo	Visual
1982	Final Feliz	Happy Ending	Rafael	Mental
1982	Sol de Verão	Summer sun	Abel	Auditory
1989	Sexo dos Anjos	Fruitless Pursuits	Tomás	Auditory
1993	O Mapa da Mina	Map of the Mine	Marquinho	Down's syndrome
1993	Mulheres de Areia	Women of the Sand	Tonho da Lua	Mental
1993	Renascer	Born again	José Inocência	Motor



1995	História de Amor	Love Story	Assunção	Motor
1997	A Indomada	The Untamed One	Emanuel	Mental
1998	Torre de Babel	Tower of Babel	Jamanta	Mental
2000	Laços de Família	Family Ties	Paulo	Multiple
2000	Laços de Família	Family Ties	Edu	Motor (temporary)
2002	Coração de Estudante	A Student's Heart	Oswaldo	Down's syndrome
2002	Coração de Estudante	A Student's Heart	João	Down's syndrome
2005	Belíssima	Beautiful	Jamanta	Mental
2005	América	America	Dudu	Visual
2005	América	America	Flor	Visual
2005	América	A Student's Heart	Jatobá	Visual
2006	Páginas da Vida	Pages from Life	Clara	Down's syndrome
2008	Água na Boca	Mouthwatering	Joana	Motor
2009	Cama de Gato	Cat's cradle	Tarcísio	Auditory
2009	Caras e Bocas	Making eyes	Anita	Visual
2009	Paraíso	Paradise	Zeca	Motor (temporary)
2009	Viver a Vida	Living Life	Luciana	Motor
2011	Insensato Coração	Foolish Heart	Pedro	Motor (temporary)
2012	Malhação	Workout	Jefferson	Motor
2012	Malhação	Workout	Felipe	Visual
2012	Vidas em Jogo	Lives at Stake	Miguel	Down's syndrome

#### b) Categories of analysis and interpretation

##### *The act of giving gifts to people with disabilities.*

The act of giving harbors a high symbolic importance and may entail anxiety for the giver; moreover, the intensity of this anxiety is related to the characteristics of the recipient (Sherry, 1983). Maria Claudia Coelho (2006), an anthropologist, points out that when someone gives as a gift an object inappropriate for use by a disabled recipient, they are expressing a mistaken view about the disabled person. In the telenovelas analyzed, one can discern characters who appeared anxious and fearful with regard to failing to please when gifting a character with disabilities, in the belief that the disabled have tastes very different from those of other people. A scene from *Páginas da Vida* illustrates such a situation. The scene depicts Christmas Eve, and a family friend takes brings gift for the child with Down's syndrome:

HELENA (mother): She loved the gift.

GREG (friend): Great. I was so afraid of making a mistake; it's hard to know what she likes.

HELENA: She likes the same things that any girl her age likes.

GREG: Really? I thought it could be different for her.

The difficulty of giving gifts to people with disabilities is also portrayed from the standpoint of the recipient. Scenes were identified in which the characters with disabilities complain of rarely receiving gifts, corroborating an observation made by Fournier (2008). In *Caras e Bocas*, a scene between a visually impaired individual and her boyfriend shows how the character is

surprised to get a present, suggesting this to be a rare occurrence:

ANSELMO (the boyfriend): I brought a gift for you, a gift that symbolizes my love for you.

ANITA (visually disabled): A gift! How wonderful! I almost never get presents.

ANSELMO: A Braille edition of a work by Carlos Drummond de Andrade.

ANITA: A book! It's been so long that I've received a book! And in Braille, too—so unusual!

This scene also portrayed other aspects that indicate differences in the exchange of gifts involving people with disabilities. Firstly, the dialogue emphasizes that books in Braille are scarce—thus pointing to consumption restrictions of the visually impaired. Second, closer examination of the scene reveals that the book was not wrapped in gift paper, despite the occasion representing an important milestone in the love story of the characters. This might suggest that the visually impaired individual would not know how to open the package or would fail to appreciate the wrapping, given their lack of sight.

Regarding the gifts given to the characters in the scenes analyzed, it is interesting to note that many have a direct association with the disability of the person. For example, the character Luciana in *Viver a Vida*, for example, received several gifts (mostly clothing) before being involved in an accident and becoming wheelchair-ridden; after the accident, however, she only receives gifts specifically related to the disability, such as an adapted bicycle and several wheelchairs. Jefferson, a wheelchair-ridden character in

*Malhação*, talks about this type of gift in an ironical tone in one scene in the telenovela:

NELSON (friend): Jefferson, I'm going to buy you a present. We're going straight to the store. Boy, you're not getting a wheelchair—you're getting a Formula 1 race car.

JEFFERSON: Who knew that the best gift that I could get would be a wheelchair.

*Consumption decisions of people with disabilities.* The analysis of the telenovela scenes showed that many characters with disabilities do not participate in decisions involving the consumption of goods and services—not even the simplest ones, such as choosing what they want to eat. An example of this situation occurs with the blind character Felipe, in *Malhação*. In family breakfast scenes, Felipe is always served by the maid who does not even ask him what he wants to eat or drink. In the same telenovela, a recurring scene is a convenience store where the characters buy their groceries. There, where Felipe always appears accompanied by the father and/or brother, he neither buys anything nor has any input regarding family consumption decisions. This dependency on others that people with disabilities seem to have in choosing what to consume had already been described in the literature (Doessel & Williams, 2011).

As regards the lack of independence of people with disabilities as consumers, exclusion from the labor market seems to be one of the main causes. Irigaray and Vergara (2011) point out that even when a PwD manages enter the labor market, they often hit the glass ceiling and are prevented from developing professionally. In the telenovela *Caras e Bocas*, one scene includes the following lines by Anita, a blind character, who alludes to work as a possibility for her to gain more independence as a PwD consumer.

ANITA: (...) I need a job.

GABRIEL (brother): (...) Why?

ANITA: I need to get a job. To buy my own stuff, choose what I want to have and not get what Mommy or you guys decide.

Other characters illustrate the lack of autonomy of disabled people as consumers. Jamanta, a mentally disabled character who appears in two telenovelas, dresses carelessly or sometimes in tatters; his invariably torn costumes vary little in terms of articles of clothing or color, which are usually washed out or pale. Jamanta is not represented in any situations that would require active participation in practices of consumption.

*People with disabilities in the consumption of leisure services.* Many telenovelas depict people with disabilities as individuals with great difficulty when it comes to consuming recreational products and services. Moreover in the academic literature, authors also argue that there are numerous barriers that PwD have to endure in order to enjoy leisure services (Burns, Reichel & Brandt, 2009; Faria, Silva & Ferreira, 2012). In

*Malhação*, Jefferson, who is wheelchair-bound, regrets never being able to go to music shows now that he is of "crippled" and concludes that "fun is no longer possible when you're in a wheelchair."

Sassaki (2003) emphasizes that besides the architectural barriers attitudinal barriers and service barriers are apt to hamper the PwD in moments of leisure. In the cultural texts analyzed here, attitudinal barriers were discernible in the relations between family / strangers and the PwD. In telenovela scenes, this type of barrier is made evident when the other characters demonstrate their believe that people with disabilities cannot attend leisure venues; in one such scene in *Laços de Família*, the wheelchair-bound Edu encounters a friend in a nightclub. The friend says they would expect to find anyone other than Edu there, given that he is in a wheelchair. At the end of the scene, Edu eventually concludes that he really should not be there and withdraws as though the environment were not befitting of him.

The literature emphasizes that leisure performs an important role in terms of inclusion of PwD, and that this is so especially during childhood (Emira & Thompson, 2011). In the novel *Páginas da Vida*, the (previously mentioned) Clara, a girl with Down's syndrome, was always portrayed as passing leisure time playing in a playground. However, in a later scene, a woman quips that the girl should not be in a place like that, since she "isn't normal." In another scene from the same telenovela, a bookstore salesperson says she has no books for "kids like Clara."

In the telenovela *América* the character's mother blindly accepts that the girl cannot go out to have fun, since the options for leisure would not geared to people with disabilities. In one scene Islene (Flor's mother), Feitosa (her boyfriend) and Flor talk together:

FEITOSA (mother's boyfriend): I'm going to take you to see an art exhibit of my gorgeous pictures.

FLOR (visually disabled): Me? To an art exhibition? What happiness! But ... Feitosa, what's a picture?

ISLENE (mother): She's not going to understand. She can't see. Better not to take her.

FLOR: Oh yes I can go! Jatoba says so. He said I can travel around the world, that I can go to museums. And that I can appreciate works of art for real.

ISLENE: Ah, Flor! Without seeing? Of course not!

FLOR: I can do anything!

FEITOSA: Yes you can.

ISLENE: Don't encourage her, because then it's me that has to deal with her frustration.

The dialogue illustrates the parents themselves as the creators of barriers to the leisure of their children with disabilities, as already shown in the studies of Emira and Thompson (2011). In another scene Flor does in fact attend an art exhibition, feels all the works with her hand and is touched by her emotions; the mother is amazed and finally understands the

importance of providing this type of experience for her daughter.

In *Caras e Bocas*, the blind character, Anita, suggests that difficulties regarding leisure activities may originate in the dependence on both the family and the group of friends: "I've never danced. It's not common for a blind girl to go to a dance club. Nobody would take me" ... "I never come to the parks, but I love it. I don't come because my brother thinks it's too dangerous for me" ... "I'd never stood under a waterfall—no one has the patience to take a blind girl to these places."

Anita experiences a specific situation in the telenovela that illustrates the service barriers faced by people with disabilities to engage in leisure activities. On arrival at the hotel where Anita will spend her honeymoon, the receptionist hands her the room key. Then the receptionist realizes that Anita is blind, and says, "Oh, I do apologize! It's just that I didn't expect to see a blind girl here; it's quite uncommon." The lack of preparedness of the service providers depicted in the scene seems to be associated with the perception or reality that PwD do not patronize places of leisure.

However, positive experiences of people with disabilities were also encountered. In *Sol de Verão*, for example, a person close to the character with disabilities is taken aback with how he manages to enjoy a moment of leisure. In the scene, Abel, who is hearing impaired, is at a nightclub with his girlfriend, who admires his ability to dance by following the rhythm of the music. She asks him how he does it. Abel replies that is able to feel the vibration of the music by placing his hands on objects and that he pays attention to how others dance. In *América*, Jatobá, a blind man and his girlfriend go to a musical performance and he says that now that he is blind he likes such performances all the more: since he can feel the music better he gets even more enjoyment.

In *Viver a Vida*, the main character Luciana was used by the screenplay writer to discuss issues relating to leisure for people with disabilities. Luciana and her husband Miguel are to spend their honeymoon in Paris and, upon entering the hotel, the two talk about how good it is to stay in an accessible hotel and how uncommon this is. In her blog, the character talks about how Paris is accessible and points out that she only noticed the fact when she became wheelchair-bound.

LUCIANA: Paris just gets more beautiful. The city is really accessible to wheelchair users. The last time I was here, I didn't pay much attention, but, now, of course I'm much more aware of accessibility. And everything works perfectly well for those who get around in a wheelchair. All the streets have ramps, people are extremely polite, and every single cafe or restaurant we've been to so far has been accessible. Ah, our Brazil still has to make so much progress in that regard.

In another scene, the same telenovela addresses the problem of attitudinal barriers in leisure

situations. The scene takes place in a restaurant, where a woman has her gaze fixed on Luciana, who comes up to her table and says, "Excuse me, but you've been looking my way so much I started wondering if we are acquainted," which the woman responds to assuming she does not want to be watched during a moment of leisure: "I was looking at you because I was moved by your suffering. Such a beautiful young woman in a wheelchair, and here all exposed in this restaurant, would be better off staying at home." This scene illustrates, albeit in an indirect way, the desire on the part of the general population for the disabled to remain invisible, to not show themselves in public.

*Urban mobility.* Accessibility by PwD to urban spaces has been increasingly discussed in the specialized literature as a factor either preventing or facilitating a full life in society and, by extension, practices of consumption. Beyond public transport, urban mobility implies being able to walk around easily, without facing discrimination based on personal characteristics. However, in the telenovela scenes analyzed, the reality portrayed falls short of that advocated by the various manuals on accessibility.

For example, the character Jefferson, in *Malhação*, comes from a poor community and cannot leave home by wheelchair because of his neighborhood's steep, narrow and pot-holed roads. Em a *Viver a Vida* scene, the wheelchair-bound Luciana attempts to take a bus ride. After several fruitless attempts to wave down a bus, Luciana finally succeeds. However, the conductor immediately says:

CONDUCTOR: Be aware that this is going to take a long time. This is a long process.

LUCIANA: Do you get training on how to use this chair-lift?

CONDUCTOR: Of course not! But we'll give it a try.

The scene continues with a discussion between Luciana and a passenger, who refuses to stop repeating how Luciana is messing up her trip and that she should get a taxi instead. This situation illustrates the lack of preparedness of the people who work with public transport and the attitudes of the larger society, which fails to include persons with disabilities. Sometime after the episode, Luciana's father buys a specially adapted car for her, a solution that is beyond reach of the vast majority of Brazilians.

Despite the difficulties of tackling obstacles in the streets, two visually impaired characters, in two different telenovelas, Anita (from *Caras e Bocas*) and Felipe (from *Malhação*), appear in several scenes walking about in the street without too much difficulty, aided by their walking sticks alone. In contrast, the visually impaired Jatobá (from *América*) relied on the help of a guide dog. Curiously, the same character also leads a scene in which he drives a car with the help of a couple of friends. Jatobá is thrilled to drive and tells how important it is to be able to do this again. Another scene

shows Jatobá nearly falling while trying to get off a bus. The character indignantly complains, "They really don't think twice about people who can't see, do they? Does it really not occur to them that blind people have to work, study, and go to the mall just like everyone else?"

*Barriers in consumption environments.* In the telenovelas surveyed, the main problems regarding accessibility to retail stores are represented by the lack of accommodation by store workers, by architectural barriers, and impediments to seeing-eye dogs, despite the federal law that provides for the free movement of such animals.

Indeed, there are several scenes in the telenovela *América* that illustrate the issue of failure to comply with laws that provide for the free movement of these dogs. In one episode of the telenovela, Jatobá takes Flor to buy a dress; however they are barred from entering the store because the salesperson refuses to let the seeing-eye dog enter the establishment along with the characters. At a second store, although they do manage to enter, the salesperson becomes upset, does not know how to serve them, and ends up ignoring them, offering no assistance whatsoever. When they finally find a store where good service is provided, the scene shows that PwD (as would people without disabilities) intend to return to the establishment in the future: "I'm going to tell my mother to always bring us here."

The complaint that laws exist but are not respected is also depicted in telenovelas, for example when blind characters seek, albeit without success, to get a Braille menu in a restaurant. The study by Faria, Silva and Ferreira (2012) regarding the experience of the blind consumer in Rio de Janeiro restaurants shows that even though provided for by law, the requirement for menus in Braille to be available was not respected by restaurants.

Also in regard to people with visual impairments in consumer environments, a scene in *Malhação* shows Felipe, a blind character, chatting with his girlfriend about the difficulties he encounters when choosing and making purchases. In the following scene, Felipe takes the girl to a store, blind-folds her and gets her to try and buy a cookie. Confusion ensues and the merchandise winds up on the floor.

A scene from *Páginas da Vida* also illustrates service providers' lack of preparation as a barrier to consumption by people with disabilities. Clara's speech therapist takes the girl to a bakery to practice some words, and asks the child to tell the seller she wants to buy some chocolate. When Clara makes the request, the clerk says he doesn't understand, and that it would be better of someone would "give the sick kid some help."

In relation to architectural barriers, in a scene from *Viver a Vida*, Luciana enters a luxury retailer and chooses some clothes; the saleswoman then warns her that she will have to buy them without trying them on

because the changing room is too small for the wheelchair. Luciana becomes outraged and updates her blog with her bad experience:

LUCIANA: Went to do a little shopping at the mall with my mom and Mia. Almost gave up, folks! I got very upset when I could not take my wheelchair into the changing room in one store. While I'd rather not mention the name of the store, I do want to point out that this is ABSURD! How can a store simply exclude a consumer? They think people in wheelchairs don't buy clothes? They think we go around naked? It made me very sad and angry. It's rotten to be embarrassed like that. My mother gave the salesperson a piece of her mind and we left.

*The family and education of children with disabilities.* In the literature of pedagogy, the discussion surrounding inclusive education has spanned many decades. Anhão, Pfeifer and Santos (2010) studied the benefits that living with children without disabilities can provide children with Down's syndrome. Over the course of several episodes in *Páginas da Vida* (2006), the mother of a child with Down's syndrome appears in several scenes trying to get a school to let her daughter attend. Then, when she finally does find a school, problems with the parents of the other children and the teachers ensue. In one scene, for example, a teacher says the girl cannot be treated like the others because she is disabled, and that, therefore, she does not need to learn anything. In the following scene the mother says she is going to file a complaint with Public Prosecutor's Office; the principal replies that, although many parents have already threatened to take their children out of the school for not wanting them to study with Down's child, the school management has decided to allow the girl to remain. A favor or a right? The principal is presented in the script as someone who is good and tolerant in the face of the complaints from other parents, which appears to fairly reflect reality. In the literature, Wanderley (2008) highlights this behavior of construing "rights" as "favors" and claims that this type of attitude reinforces the process of exclusion of people with disabilities.

In another telenovela, in which the disabled character is blind, family and school are again a point of focus. Initially, the mother cannot accept that the girl attend a school, in the belief that it is dangerous for her to go outside her house. Then, at a certain point, she ends up agreeing to search for a school for her daughter. Some scenes show that the other students do not like playing with the blind girl and they laugh at the way she walks.

In *Malhação*, a series in which the school environment is the main backdrop for plot development, the visually impaired character is a newcomer from another city and causes divisiveness among the students in the new school. While the majority of the students refuses to study with the disabled student, a



small group defends the blind boy and opposes the various students who want to stop him from attending their school. The blind character appears passive throughout the discussion, which only ends with the arrival of the principal, who assumes a staunch posture for the inclusion of the visually impaired student:

PRINCIPAL: Here in school, no student will be discriminated against. The process of inclusion has to start in school. I'm shocked that you young people are so prejudiced.

One result of this lack of alternatives regarding good schools that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities appears to be an early search for information in this regard on the part of the parents of such children. In the telenovela *Vidas em Jogo*, as soon as they discover that their unborn son will have Down's syndrome, the leading couple starts researching for information on schools and kindergartens that are willing to accept the child when the time comes.

## V. FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTION

How are the consumption decisions and practices of people with disabilities presented in Brazilian telenovelas? That people with disabilities are rarely portrayed situations of consumption in telenovelas was discernible. The focus of these characters, for the most part, is on their emotional relationships and in overcoming the difficulties posed by the disability, leaving aside issues involving consumption, seen as the purview of other "perfect" characters without disabilities. Outside of telenovela storylines, the scenario seems to be very similar: much is said of inclusion; however, businesses still do not see people with disabilities as potential consumers. Being an invisible consumer seems to pose problems for the construction of the individual and collective identities of people with disabilities, who, as the telenovelas portray, end up being distanced from the conviviality of others.

The analysis of the telenovelas revealed important aspects of how PwD are treated when they seeking to play the role of consumers. Portrayed in earlier moments of Brazilian political life as alienating and manipulative, telenovelas have become more respected by Brazilian intellectuals, who recognize their power to inform, polemicize and transform when representing—in addition to important national literary works—an ability to transpose scenes, albeit caricatured, of the daily life of Brazilians surrounded by issues ranging from the simplest to the most controversial.

Society seems to suffer from a conscious or unconscious refusal to see those who have some type of disability; however, the barrier appears to be lower when characters with physical or mental disabilities become part of telenovela storylines. Thus, telenovelas seem to be able to make society more aware of itself as

well as of the groups who the targets of prejudices or indifference to people with disabilities.

Despite this important role with regard to the portrayal of persons with disabilities as consumers, the storylines of the telenovela still need adapting. The telenovela *Viver a Vida* is one of the rare examples in which a disabled character was used in scenes with product placement. It should be noted, however, that the character appears linked only to products that are directly linked to their disability. One obstacle for characters with disabilities to lead in scenes with product placement of products unrelated to their disability could be (i) the lack of interest on the part of companies to link their brands to people with disabilities or (ii) the invisibility that this group appears to have vis-à-vis the producers of goods and services.

On the other hand, the vast majority of the texts examined by this research have at the core of the storyline some type of complaint with respect to exclusion, prejudice or the oppression suffered by the disabled. Within that scope and, as we have seen, based on the stereotypes of people with disabilities in cultural texts studied by Barnes (1992) and Cameron (2007), Brazilian telenovelas seem to be more generous than the film industry in relation to representations of persons with disabilities. It should be noted, however, that this study did not seek to evaluate how effective are the attempts of the telenovela authors to denounce the problems experienced by PwD; rather, the work is an invitation to reflect on the public's predisposition to devote attention to such issues. A major challenge seems to be depicting in telenovelas people and problems that society prefers to remain invisible.

A complaint often portrayed in telenovelas, and that deserves mention, is with regard to the lack of investment in public policies for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. In the present article the discussion surrounding urban mobility presents several aspects that should be considered by the public sphere. Importantly, even with the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics Games in 2014—moments of major global visibility in which tourists and athletes with disabilities will be commonplace in Brazilian cities—still rare are discussions regarding necessary investments in urban mobility in Brazil's metropolises. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, which will host the Olympics in 2016, although proposals do exist to improve urban mobility, these still appear to fall short of meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

The findings of this analysis of cultural texts based on telenovelas can assist companies producing goods and services as well as the institutions responsible for public policies to reflect on the needs of people with disabilities. Through the demands alluded to in the telenovela scenes, it is hoped that these consumers and citizens can be better served, without

their rights being construed as favors or acts of charity. It is believed that this analysis can contribute to improving the well-being of people with disabilities by denouncing the fact that they are not seen as consumers even though their desires and frustrations are represented in telenovelas in terms of such simple everyday practices such as, for example, the ritual of exchanging gifts.

Also befitting is a reflection on the possible roles to be performed by telenovelas in order that they can contribute to a reassessment of meanings and values in a society in which watching and accompanying these storylines seems to be a national ritual. It is believed that the findings of this analysis of telenovela scripts that include characters with disabilities can serve as a starting point for further studies that make use of other methodologies. Questions regarding, for example, urban mobility, the importance of the family in the decisions of consumption of people with disabilities, and the act of giving gifts to people with disabilities, which were highlighted in the results of the study, deserve to be more fully explored.

## REFERENCES RÉFÉRENCES REFERENCIAS

- Anhão, P., Pfeifer, L., & Santos, J. (2010) Interação social de crianças com Síndrome de Down na educação infantil. *Revista de Educação Especial*, 16(1), 31-46.
- Arnould, E., & Thompson, C. (2005) Consumer Culture Theory (CCT); Twenty Years of Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868-882.
- Askegaard, S. (2010) Experience economy in the making: Hedonism, play and coolhunting in automotive song lyrics. *Consumption Marketing & Culture*, 8(2), 153-182.
- Baker, S. (2006) Consumer normalcy: Understanding the value of shopping through narratives of consumers with visual impairments. *Journal of Retailing*, 82(1), p. 37-50.
- Barnes, C. (1992) *Disabling imagery and the media: an exploration of the principles for media representations of disabled people*. Halifax: The British Council of Organizations of Disabled People and Ryburn Publishing.
- Burns N., Paterson, K. & Watson, N. (2009) An inclusive outdoors? Disabled people's experiences of countryside leisure service. *Leisure Studies*, 28(4), 403-417.
- Cameron, C. (2007) whose problem? Disability narratives and available identities. *Community Development Journal*, 42(4), 501-511.
- Coelho, M. (2006) *O valor das intenções: dádiva, emoção e identidade*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV.
- Darke, P. (1998) Understanding cinematic representations of disability. In: Shakespeare T (Eds.). *The disability reader: social science perspectives* (CHAP. 12, pp. 181-200) London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- DePoy, E., & Gilson, S. (2010) Disability by design. *Review of Disability Studies - An International Journal*, 6(3), 54-63.
- Doessel, D., & Williams, R. (2011) Disabled people's living standards: filling a policy vacuum. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 38(4), 341-357.
- Douglas, M., & Isherwood, B. (2009) *O mundo dos bens: para uma antropologia do consumo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ.
- Emira, M., & Thompson, D. (2011) In the quest for their trust: the perceptions of families on accessing leisure services for disabled children. *Leisure Studies*, 30(1), 33-48.
- Epp, A., & Price, L. (2008) Family Identity: A Framework of Identity Interplay in Consumption Practices. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(1), 50-70.
- Faria, M., & Carvalho, J. (2010) Uma Análise Semiótica do Potencial Mercadológico da Imagem de Atletas Paraolímpicos. *Gestão e Sociedade*, 4(9), 657-688.
- Faria, M., Silva, J., & Ferreira, J. (2012) The Visually Impaired and Consumption in Restaurants. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 24(5), 721-734.
- Fournier, J. (2008) *Aonde a gente vai, papai?* Rio de Janeiro: Intrínseca.
- Goodley, D., & Bolt, D. (2010) Introduction to the Special Issue: theorizing culture and disability - interdisciplinary dialogues. *Review of Disability Studies - An International Journal* 6(3), 2-3.
- Hamburger, E. (2005) *O Brasil antenado: a sociedade da novela*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- Harris, L. (2002) Disabled sex and the movies. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 22(4), 144-162.
- Hartley, J. (2009) from cultural studies to cultural science. *Journal of Cultural Science*, 2(1), 1-16.
- Hirschman, E., Scott, L., & Wells, W. (1998) A model of product discourse: linking consumer practice to cultural texts. *Journal of Advertising*, 27(1), 33-50.
- Iarskaia-Smirnov, E., & Romanov, P. (2007) Perspectives of inclusive education in Russia. *European Journal of Social Work*, 10(1), 89-105.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2010) *Censo Demográfico*. Retrieved 8 July, 2012, from [www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/censo2010](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/censo2010)
- Irigaray, H., & Vergara, S. (2011) O tempo como dimensão de pesquisa sobre uma política de diversidade e relações de trabalho. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, 9(4), 1085-1098.
- Jain, S. (2002) Urban Errands: The means of mobility. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2(3), 385-404.

27. Joyce, S. (2012) *Brazilian Telenovelas and the Myth of Racial Democracy*. United Kingdom: Lexington Books.
28. Kozinets, R. (2001) Utopian enterprise: articulating the meanings of Star Trek's culture of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(1), 67-88.
29. Mansfield, P., & Pinto, M. (2008) Consumer vulnerability and credit card knowledge among developmentally disabled citizens. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 42(3), 425-438.
30. Menescal, J., Michalawski, R., Lemos, E. & Monteiro, B. (2010) Viver a nova vida. *Na Luta*, 4(13), 12-14.
31. Mertens, D. (2009) *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. Califórnia: SAGE.
32. Mertens, D. (2007) Transformative Considerations: Inclusion and Social Justice. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 28(1), 86-90.
33. Mick, D. (2006) Meaning and mattering through transformative consumer research. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 33(1), 1-4.
34. Mikos, L., & Perrotta, M. (2012) Traveling style: Aesthetic differences and similarities in national adaptations of Yo soy Betty, la fea. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(1), 81-97.
35. Nelson, A. (2003) the invisible cultural group: images of disability. In: Lester P and Ross S (Eds.). *Images that injure: pictorial stereotypes in the media* (CHAP. 6, pp. 176-192). Westport: Praeger Publishers.
36. Nichoson, J., Kulyukin, V., & Coster, D. (2009) ShopTalk: Independent blind shopping through verbal route directions and barcode scans. *The Open Rehabilitation Journal*, 2(1), 11-23.
37. Norden, M. (1994) *the cinema of isolation: a history of physical disability in the movies*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
38. Oguri, L., Chauvel, M., & Suarez, M. (2009) O processo de criação das telenovelas. *Revistade Administração de Empresas*, 49(1), 38-48.
39. Pallottini, R. (1998) *Dramaturgia de Televisão*. São Paulo: Editora Moderna.
40. Pinto, M., & Lara, J. (2011) as experiências de consumo na perspectiva da teoria da cultura do consumo: identificando possíveis interlocuções e propondo uma agenda de pesquisa. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, 9(1), 37-56.
41. Poria, Y., Reichel, A., & Brandt, Y. (2011) Dimensions of hotel experience of people with disabilities: an exploratory study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 23(5), 571-591.
42. Postal, J. (2008) Cadeirantes em ação: uma abordagem semiótica da inclusão social do deficiente nas narrativas ficcionais. *Cadernos de Pós-Graduação em Letras*, 4(1), 1-10.
43. Sandlin, J., & Maudlin, J. (2012) Consuming pedagogies: Controlling images of women as consumers in popular culture. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 12(2), 175-194.
44. Sassaki, R. (2003) *Inclusão e no lazer e turismo: em busca da qualidade de vida*. São Paulo: Áurea.
45. Sherry, J. (1983) Gift Giving in an Anthropological Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(2), 158-168.
46. Silveira, B. (2010, September). Porque estudar a representação das pessoas com deficiência na teledramaturgia brasileira. *Proceedings of International conference on communication research*, Santa Maria, Brazil, 4.
47. Souto Maior, M. (2006) *Almanaque da TV Globo*. Rio de Janeiro: Globo.
48. Vehmas, S. (2008) Philosophy and science: the axes of evil in disability studies? *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 34(1), 21-23.
49. Wanderley, M. (2008) Refletindo sobre a noção de exclusão. In: Sawaia B. (org.). *As artimanhas da exclusão: análise psicossocial e ética da desigualdade social* (CHAP. 1, pp.16-26). Petrópolis: Vozes.