FISIÁTRICA

Dehumanization: after all, what does it have to do with the University?

Desumanização: afinal o que isso tem a ver com a Universidade?

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ABSTRACT
Universities have long been considered institutions that promote intellectual growth, critical thinking, and personal development. Nonetheless, beneath the surface, there is a worrying issue of dehumanization that can profoundly impact the well-being of this ecosystem that binds professors, students, and the immense and necessary aggregate of administration staff. Dehumanization refers to the process by which individuals are treated as objects or stripped of their human qualities, leading to a feeling of alienation and disconnection. Exploring the various manifestations of dehumanization in universities and shedding light on their consequences for society is not a new topic. Dehumanization in universities is a pressing issue that requires attention and action. By recognizing the various manifestations of dehumanization and setting up strategies to mitigate their impact, universities can create a more humane and supportive environment for students. Institutions must prioritize the well-being and personal growth of students and professors, ensuring they are not reduced to mere statistics but valued as individuals with unique strengths and aspirations.

Keywords: Dehumanization, Organizational Culture, Universities

RESUMO
As universidades há muito são consideradas instituições que promovem o crescimento intelectual, o pensamento crítico e o desenvolvimento pessoal. No entanto, abaixo da superfície, existe uma questão preocupante de desumanização que pode ter um impacto profundo no bem-estar deste ecossistema que reúne docentes, alunos e o imenso e necessário universo da administração. A desumanização refere-se ao processo pelo qual os indivíduos são tratados como objetos ou despojados das suas qualidades humanas, levando a uma sensação de alienação e desconexão. Explorar as diversas manifestações de desumanização nas universidades e lançar luz sobre suas consequências para a sociedade não é uma temática nova. A desumanização nas universidades é uma questão premente que requer atenção e ação. Ao reconhecer as várias manifestações de desumanização e implementar estratégias para mitigar o seu impacto, as universidades podem criar um ambiente mais humano e de apoio aos estudantes. É essencial que as instituições priorizem o bem-estar e o crescimento pessoal dos alunos e dos docentes, garantindo que estes não sejam reduzidos a meras estatísticas, mas sejam valorizados como indivíduos com forças e aspirações únicas.

Palavras-chaves: Desumanização, Cultura Organizacional, Universidades

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INTRODUCTION

Universities have long been considered institutions that promote intellectual growth, critical thinking, and personal development. Nonetheless, beneath the surface, there is a worrying issue of dehumanization that can profoundly impact the well-being of this ecosystem that binds professors, students, and the immense and necessary aggregate of administration staff. Dehumanization refers to the process by which individuals are treated as objects or stripped of their human qualities, leading to a feeling of alienation and disconnection.[1,2]

Exploring the various manifestations of dehumanization in universities and shedding light on their consequences for society is not a new topic. Humanization, with emphasis on care practices, is a discussion that permeates study groups and teaching standards, especially in health and higher education.[3] This trend echoes possible strategies to diminish dehumanization and promote a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

Dehumanization in Universities

1- Impersonal learning environments

One of the primary sources of dehumanization in universities is the prevalence of impersonal learning environments. Large classes, impersonal interactions with professors, and a target on grades, as opposed to the appraisal of individual growth, can create a feeling of anonymity and detachment.[4] Students may feel like mere numbers in a system rather than individuals with unique aspirations and needs.

2- Administrative Bureaucracy

Universities often have complex administrative structures that can worsen the feelings of dehumanization. Lengthy bureaucratic processes, lack of transparency, and impersonal communication can frustrate professors and students with a sense of powerlessness.[4] The constant need to navigate administrative bureaucracy can hinder the focus on education as a strategy for personal development.

3- Competitive Culture

Many universities foster a hyper-competitive culture prioritizing individual success over building collaborative communities and collaboration itself. This culture can create a dehumanizing environment among professors with severe repercussions for students, creating a feeling of isolation, anxiety, and academic and institutional skepticism.

The pressure to outshine academically, combined with all the administrative requirements, can lead to a loss of empathy and a decline in peer collaborative spirit; dramatic consequences may arise among students.

Consequences of dehumanization

1- Mental health challenges

Dehumanization in universities can bear serious consequences for the mental health of professors and students.[5] The feeling of being reduced to a mere number can contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. The lack of transparent communication, disregard towards institutional values, and diminished technical and scientific support can further exacerbate these challenges, leading to a decline in overall well-being.

2- Decreased involvement, motivation, and institutional alignment

When students and professors feel dehumanized, their motivation and participation in academic activities can be harmed. The lack of personal connection with and between professors leads to a feeling of separation from the teaching program, reducing excitement for learning.[4]

When the technical and operational staff are subjected to inhumane conditions due to a lack of transparency or adverse conditions resulting from the organizational environment, the overall academic performance and the sense of belonging are jeopardized.

Strategies to mitigate dehumanization in the university sphere

1- Foster personal connections

It is crucial to conceive opportunities for meaningful interactions between students and professors. Encouraging smaller class sizes, promoting open dialogue, and providing mentoring programs can help strengthen intrapersonal connections and create a more inclusive learning environment.[3]

2- Improve support services

Expanding support services such as counseling, mental health resources, and student advocacy programs can address mental health challenges endured by the students.[3] These services should be easily accessible and destigmatized to encourage students to seek help whenever needed.

3- Promote collaboration within and outside the academic community

Shifting the focus from competition to cooperation can help mitigate dehumanization. Encouraging group projects, community service initiatives, and extracurricular activities that foster a sense of belonging can create a more supportive and inclusive campus culture.

CONCLUSION

Dehumanization in universities is a pressing issue that requires attention and action. By recognizing the various manifestations of dehumanization and setting up strategies to mitigate their impact, universities can create a more humane and supportive environment for students. Institutions must prioritize the well-being and personal growth of students and professors, ensuring they are not reduced to mere statistics but valued as individuals with unique strengths and aspirations.

Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that the presence of dehumanization routine within professional environments, such as Medicine,[5] may, in part, represent an outcome of the dehumanization modus operandi experienced since higher education. Therefore, managing dehumanization, its roots, and consequences in

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higher education can transform education, professional practice, and social life.

Though it seems trivial, it turns out that respect for human integrity and dignity does not depend on speech. It only materializes through attitudes and behaviors.

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