

Liquid modernity and emerging paradigm: reflections on the lifestyle of nursing students

Modernidade líquida e paradigma emergente: reflexões sobre estilo de vida dos estudantes de enfermagem

Modernidad líquida y paradigma emergente: reflexiones sobre el estilo de vida de los estudiantes de enfermería

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to reflect on the lifestyle of nursing students in the emerging paradigm of liquid modernity. **Content:** reflective essay based on 20 articles on the subject critically discussed in dialogue with the concepts of emerging paradigm and liquid modernity. The discussion was organized into two categories: nursing students' lifestyle in the context of liquid modernity: from social reality to psychic suffering; and lifestyle of nursing students and the emerging paradigm: from dominant paradigms to individuation. **Final considerations:** liquid times reverberate in the lifestyle and health of nursing students, aggravating postmodern diseases. It is worth highlighting the way in which these students apprehend the difficulties and the learning they deduce from these opportunities. The lifestyle of these students must consider the scope of the singular and profound perspective of being inserted in the emerging paradigm.

Descriptors: Nursing; Nursing, Students; Life Style; Postmodernism.

RESUMO

Objetivo: refletir sobre o estilo de vida dos estudantes de enfermagem no paradigma emergente da modernidade líquida. **Conteúdo:** ensaio reflexivo alicerçado em 20 artigos sobre o tema discutido criticamente em diálogo com os conceitos de paradigma emergente e modernidade líquida. A discussão se organizou em duas categorias: estilo de vida dos estudantes de enfermagem no contexto da modernidade líquida: da realidade social ao sofrimento psíquico; e estilo de vida dos estudantes de enfermagem e o paradigma emergente: dos paradigmas dominantes à individuação. **Considerações finais:** os tempos líquidos reverberam no estilo de vida e na saúde dos estudantes de enfermagem, agravando as doenças das pós modernidade. Destaca-se a maneira como esses estudantes apreendem as dificuldades e o aprendizado que deduzem dessas oportunidades. O estilo de vida destes estudantes deve ponderar o alcance da perspectiva singular e profunda do ser inserido no paradigma emergente.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Estudantes de Enfermagem; Estilo de Vida; Pós-Modernismo.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre el estilo de vida de los estudiantes de enfermería bajo el prisma del paradigma emergente de la modernidad líquida. **Contenido:** ensayo reflexivo basado en 20 artículos sobre el tema, discutido críticamente en diálogo con los conceptos de paradigma emergente y modernidad líquida. La discusión se organizó en dos categorías: el estilo de vida de los estudiantes de enfermería en el contexto de la modernidad líquida: de la realidad social al sufrimiento psíquico; y estilo de vida de los estudiantes de enfermería y el paradigma emergente: de los paradigmas dominantes a la individuación. **Consideraciones finales:** los tiempos líquidos repercuten en el estilo de vida y la salud de los estudiantes de enfermería, agravando las enfermedades de la posmodernidad. Se destaca la forma cómo estos estudiantes entienden las dificultades y los aprendizajes que deducen de estas oportunidades. El estilo de vida de estos estudiantes debe considerar el alcance de la singular y profunda perspectiva de estar insertos en el paradigma emergente.

Descriptorios: Enfermería; Estudiantes de Enfermería; Estilo de vida; Posmodernismo.

INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle refers to the actions and behaviors performed by individuals, including sports practice, consumption of health-appropriate foods¹⁻³, stress management¹, and the social and historical aspects of a person⁴. Therefore, lifestyle encompasses multiple factors and results from the adoption or choice of a way of living, which embodies values, needs, suitability, and acceptance within social groups, with impacts on self-image and self-acceptance.

The connection and influence of factors such as life choices, ethnicity, age, gender, social, economic, cultural, and technological aspects expressed in local and international policies, and collective actions⁵, are perceived in a particular way by each individual, characterizing the subjective dimension of being from their totality⁶. This reflects the sensation

of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the adopted lifestyle, being considered an influential factor on the quality of the years lived^{6,7}, a valuation attributed to self-assessment regarding health, perception of autonomy, and control over one's life, making the individual proactive or passive in relation to their health⁷.

Currently, the aim is to achieve a lifestyle based on inherent aspects of being and the principles of the individual⁸. This new perspective aligns with the Emergent Paradigm concept, which involves contemplating science based on common sense and a humanistic perspective⁹.

In this context, liquid modernity emerges as an important concept related to lifestyle, as it considers current times as liquid moments that exacerbate the manifestation of freedom in human beings and, consequently, egocentrism, thus triggering transformations in social patterns¹⁰.

Life transitions represent periods of lifestyle changes, such as the transition from adolescence to adulthood, which involves physical, psychological, cultural, social, and economic transformations, especially when associated with entering university life. For students in the health field, particularly undergraduate nursing students, there are several additional changes that occur. These changes involve broadening their social network, experiencing the distinctive values found in a university setting, and engaging with healthcare service users through practical activities and professional training internships. These experiences enable them to understand the causal relationship between one's lifestyle choices and their desirable and undesirable consequences¹¹.

In this sense, it is important to reflect on the lifestyle of nursing students in the context of liquid modernity, considering the gap in knowledge production on this subject, contemplating the abrupt changes in habits and interpersonal relationships experienced by this university group^{10,12}. Furthermore, this approach is relevant because lifestyle is directly related to health⁶, which is one of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda¹³.

Based on the above, the following question arises: How is the lifestyle of nursing students configured in the emergent paradigm of liquid modernity? Given the relevance of this approach, this article aims to reflect on the lifestyle of nursing students in the emergent paradigm of liquid modernity.

CONTENT

This is a reflective essay with an analytical and deductive nature derived from the integration between the lifestyle of undergraduate nursing students and the concepts of liquid modernity by Zygmunt Bauman¹⁰ and the emergent paradigm by Boaventura de Sousa Santos⁹.

Accordingly, the study began with a narrative literature review, using the descriptors and MESH terms "*Estilo de vida*", "*Estudante de enfermagem*", "Lifestyle," and "Nursing student", adopting a temporal cutoff based on the 2030 Agenda¹³. This process resulted in the selection of 20 national and international scientific articles that addressed the research question: How is the lifestyle of nursing students configured in the emergent paradigm of liquid modernity? The results were organized into two categories, defined based on the theoretical reflection of the findings with the theoretical constructs of both sociologists: "Lifestyle of nursing students in the context of liquid modernity: from social reality to psychic suffering" and "Lifestyle of nursing students and the emergent paradigm of Boaventura: from dominant paradigms to individuation".

Lifestyle of nursing students in the context of liquid modernity: from social reality to psychic suffering

Contemporary times, conceived as liquid moments, are characterized by less durable human relationships, the presence of insecurity and fear when people reveal their "selves". To fill this relational void, pleasure is accessed immediately, resulting in a transformation in social patterns, expressed through voluntary isolation, polarization of like-minded individuals, superficiality of social relationships, low tolerance for opposing thoughts, and intolerance towards those who adopt different life paradigms to the point of curtailing their desires and values. This phenomenon is known as the liquefied profile of today's times, through analogy with water that slips through one's fingers, in the pursuit of a utopian freedom based on egocentrism, with impacts on collective, political, and personal relationships^{10,14,15}. The frantic pursuit of this freedom leads to the emergence of disorders such as anxiety, phobias, depression, anguish, and isolation, characterizing a pattern of diseases and situations particular to the postmodernity era^{10,12}.

The integration of nursing students into this liquid modernity is accompanied by a series of social shifts¹⁰, accumulation of activities, pressure to fulfill their basic needs, urgency to promptly respond to various demands they encounter, and quest for social space and reaffirmation of their self-image and self-esteem. In this context,

students may resort to defense mechanisms and concealment of their inner challenges¹¹. This favors the emergence of rapid and superficial interactions that characterize the fluidity of liquid modernity¹⁰.

On the other hand, during their professional training, nursing students have the opportunity to experience, whether in the Brazilian National Health System and/or private institutions, the complexity of the health-disease process in users, identifying its manifestations and correlations with the adopted lifestyle. These experiences are remarkable and require students to have sensitivity for active listening and maturity in life when aiming for individualized care and respect for human dignity.

The convergence of personal demands and the desired profile in professional training leads to a clash between liquid values¹⁰ (transitory) and the necessary sensitivity for the development of essential communication and relational skills in facing the reality of situations involving the population they encounter. These are moments in which they construct or reaffirm their concept of health-disease based on what they observe in the individuals they care for during their professional training. It is within this context that the correlation between lifestyle and the health-disease process of students is established. For these reasons, it is believed that liquid modernity favors the emergence of psychic suffering as a postmodern disease among university students^{10,12}.

From this perspective, it should be emphasized that during the COVID-19 pandemic, psychic suffering among undergraduate health students intensified, with impacts on the health of this group. A study conducted in Portugal found an increase in mental disorders, with anxiety and stress being more frequent among female students and depression among male students, highlighting the importance of preventive actions¹⁶.

The prevalence of common mental disorders among Brazilian nursing students of both sexes¹⁷ may be related to factors such as reduced leisure time, many hours of extracurricular activities, competition among students to achieve the best academic performance, extensive explicit and hidden curricular hours, pressures arising from high competitiveness, the pursuit of building a distinct curriculum, and the adoption of a professional persona¹⁸.

Another concern is the prevalence of depression among nursing students, reported in national and international literature^{19,20}, emphasizing the need for early identification of symptoms to prevent the disease and promote mental health²⁰. According to a study conducted in Ethiopia, 10% of the participants had minimal depression, 12% mild depression, 4% moderate depression, and 1% severe depression¹⁹. These findings are even more serious in the Brazilian context, with evidence of moderate to severe depression in 19.2% of students²⁰. Anxiety is also a prevalent disorder, identified in 60.4% of nursing students in Minas Gerais, of which 60.4% were considered normal/mild, 6.9% minimal, 11.4% moderate, 4.5% severe, and 13.4% very severe²¹.

International evidence reveals that professional training itself can trigger anxiety among nursing students, due to weaknesses in the necessary foundation for carrying out practical activities, whether related to theoretical knowledge or technical skills. The same can occur in clinical placement settings, where techniques and procedures are contextualized in nursing care²². Therefore, clinical practice is believed to be one of the factors contributing to stress among nursing students²³.

Lifestyle of nursing students and the emergent paradigm of Boaventura: from dominant paradigms to individuation

The emergent paradigm stands out with its distinctive character, capable of reconciling common sense with humanistic aspects, reflecting the inseparability of natural science and social science, with the individual as the key to knowledge⁹, i.e., "All scientific-natural knowledge is scientific-social [...]"^{9:61}. From this perspective, knowledge is based on three assumptions: being local and total⁹, as it should be expanded and not singular (with exceptions)¹²; being self-knowledge⁹, as it must be evidenced from the object and the subject; and aiming to construct common sense⁹, reflecting the possibility of the social transformation of knowledge⁹.

This paradigm refers to the need for the concept of lifestyle to be understood based on interconnected elements, such as feelings, culture, beliefs, financial, social, and political aspects, among others, as well as its close correlation with health⁸. Therefore, a deeper and differentiated understanding of the concept of lifestyle is necessary, based on subjective, human, and social contexts, and the fundamental premises of the Emergent Paradigm.

From this perspective, when considering the lifestyle of nursing students this paradigm must be approached from a differentiated perspective that encompasses the subjective and human aspects, embracing the life history, precepts, experiences, and principles of each individual⁶.

Among the strategies to achieve a singular and profound perspective of being, individuation stands out, which involves the development, maturation, and transformation of the psyche, enabling individuals to use reason to expand their consciousness to the point of identifying with their essence—their own Self. This process is slow, progressive, and difficult to achieve, requiring effort and self-awareness for individuals to free themselves from the dominance of ego-consciousness²⁴⁻²⁷.

In psychologically mature and adapted individuals, the connection between Ego and Self arises from a balance between societal values and those of an intimate nature, resulting in the reconciliation of the conscious and unconscious in a natural and non-conflicting manner. However, in the case of nursing students, with them being in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, this maturity has not yet been achieved as they are still in the process of maturation and transformation of the psyche. Therefore, the coexistence of values of contemporary society with values consistent with their essence (Self) leads to a greater adherence to conduct and values emanating from their context and, consequently, a lesser acceptance of those that are in coherence with their unconscious and totality (Self)²⁴⁻²⁷. This makes them products of a liquid society and, as a result, incapable of expressing their deep singularity¹⁰.

On the other hand, the demands arising from professional training serve as a catalyst for encountering one's totality, as the experiences of complex and serious problems related to the health-disease process of users foster the process of individuation and, therefore, psychological maturation. This is because any resistance to reaching totality and the process of individuation becomes a motivating factor for psychic suffering, considering that the unconscious acts according to the principle of enantiodromia, attempting to compensate for the opposite pole (consciousness)²⁴⁻²⁷.

Therefore, there is a need to seek self-knowledge and adopt habits of self-reflection regarding one's own behavior, attitudes, reactions, and emotions, as individuation, according to Jung, is derived from four functions (sensation, thinking, intuition, and feeling) and is a strategy that, when persistently used, enables the overcoming of liquid values and the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle²⁴⁻²⁷.

In addition to the aforementioned elements determining lifestyle, it is pertinent to associate it with *habitus*⁵, which, over time, incorporates external social content into an individual's mind as guiding factors for their practices^{5,28}. Determining freedom of action, *habitus* can have positive or negative repercussions on an individual's life⁵, under the direct influence of the areas they navigate and interact with²⁹.

Seeking this new perspective on lifestyle, Brazilian public universities offer social and psychological resources to support students in a more comprehensive understanding, as well as providing access to housing assistance, financial support for public transportation, and university residences during undergraduate studies³⁰, although budget limitations exist.

A limitation of this study is the scarcity of publications found on the lifestyle of Brazilian nursing students focused on health, well-being, and, particularly, the subjective aspects of being in dialogue with the emergent paradigm and individuation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Liquid times reverberate in the lifestyle and health of nursing students, and as a result, the prevalence of postmodern diseases is increasingly identified. Considering that vicissitudes and difficulties are inherent to human conditions, and everyone will face them in life, it is essential to contemplate how students perceive and cope with these difficulties and what kind of learning (growth or stagnation) they deduce from these opportunities.

When addressing the lifestyle of these students, it is crucial to also involve subjective and human aspects in order to achieve profound singularity in accordance with the emergent paradigm, for the sake of well-being and health.

The lack of new studies related to the theme, especially focusing on the emergent paradigm and liquid modernity, is evident. It is recommended to produce further studies that address these subjects.

This reflection has implications for nursing, as discussing this context requires attention to the health of these future adults, with a focus on preventing problem situations and promoting health. Educational interventions aimed at fostering a favorable lifestyle, particularly during undergraduate studies, are recommended.

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