



THE ART OF LIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF UNIVERSITY RESIDENCE HALLS A ARTE DO VIVER NO CONTEXTO DAS REPÚBLICAS UNIVERSITÁRIAS EL ARTE DE VIVIR EN EL CONTEXTO DE LAS RESIDENCIAS UNIVERSITARIAS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to understand the interrelationships among undergraduate students from cohabitation in university residence halls. **Method:** qualitative study, with 20 undergraduate students from five university residence halls in cohabitation system, over 18 years of age and without consanguinity ties. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview and Thrower's Family Circle method, and were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, in the light of the sociopoetics from its four pillars: micropolitics; ethics; hermeneutics; and aesthetics, and literature review. The data were submitted to content analysis after the project approval by the Committee of Ethics on Research of the State University of Sudoeste da Bahia, under Protocol No. 210/2009. **Results:** in the light of sociopoetics, the following categories emerged: university residence hall - cohabitation family; living-cohabitating - interpersonal relationship; and roles vs. power relations. **Conclusion:** cohabitation of undergraduate students is based on a pendular balance between stability and change, as it matures to a socio-affective family interaction permeated by power relations. **Descriptors:** Student; Family relationships; Cohabitation; Nursing; Teaching.

RESUMO

Objetivo: compreender as inter-relações de acadêmicos a partir das con-vivências nas repúblicas universitárias. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, com 20 acadêmicos de cinco repúblicas universitárias em sistema de coabitação, maiores de 18 anos e sem laços de consanguinidade. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevista semiestruturada e do Círculo Familiar de Thrower e foram analisados pelo modelo interativo proposto por Miles e Huberman, à luz da sociopoética, em seus quatro pilares: micropolítica; ética; hermenêutica; e estética, e pela revisão de literatura. Os dados foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo, após a aprovação do projeto pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia, sob Protocolo nº 210/2009. **Resultados:** à luz da sociopoética, emergiram as seguintes categorias: república universitária - família de coabitação; viver-con-viver - o relacionamento interpessoal; e papéis versus relações de poder. **Conclusão:** a convivência dos acadêmicos baseia-se numa balança pendular entre estabilidade e mudança, na medida em que amadurece para uma interação familiar socioafetiva permeada por relações de poder. **Descritores:** Estudante; Relações Familiares; Convivência; Enfermagem; Ensino.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: comprender las interrelaciones entre estudiantes universitarios a partir de las convivencias en las residencias universitarias. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, con 20 estudiantes universitarios de cinco residencias universitarias en el sistema de convivencia, mayores de 18 años y sin lazos de consanguinidad. Los datos fueron recogidos a través de entrevista semiestructurada y el método del Círculo Familiar de Thrower y se analizaron por el modelo interactivo propuesto por Miles y Huberman, a la luz de la sociopoética, en sus cuatro pilares: micropolítica; ética; hermenéutica; y estética, y por medio de revisión de la literatura. Los datos fueron sometidos al análisis de contenido, después de la aprobación del proyecto por la Comisión de Ética de la Investigación de la Universidad Estatal del Sudoeste da Bahia, bajo el Protocolo N° 210/2009. **Resultados:** a la luz de la sociopoética, surgieron las siguientes categorías: residencia universitaria - familia de convivencia; vivir-con-vivir - la relación interpersonal; y roles versus relaciones de poder. **Conclusión:** la convivencia de estudiantes universitarios se basa en una balanza pendular entre estabilidad y cambio, en la medida que madura hacia una interacción familiar socio-afectiva atravesada por relaciones de poder. **Descriptores:** Estudiante; Relaciones Familiares; Convivencia; Enfermería; Enseñanza.

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INTRODUCTION

Living-cohabitating in a university residence hall implies living on a cohabitation-family basis. This system requires interpersonal relationships of students, in which learning and experiences are shared from the interrelations developed on a daily basis, allowing to know each other in order to deal with the varied relationships and values that each subject expresses in the interactions with one another in the living context of the residential hall—understanding that meets other scholars' studies on the family-student context.¹

Family can be understood as a complex system of relationships in which its members share the same social context.² The bond of cohabitation between people based on trust, mutual support and common ideals should be considered as family, not being limited only by consanguinity, marriage, partnership or adoption.³ This understanding results from transformations that have occurred in our society and influenced the worldview of individuals in relation to several aspects, even regarding the understanding of family dynamics.⁴ This fact contributed to the perception of the new family configurations.

In this study, the understanding of families constituted within university residence halls is based on the definition of cohabitation-family and, as such, full of affection, exchanges of experiences, conflicts, singularities and specificities inherent to each member.

Due to the importance we attach to this approach, its justification is based on knowledge-sharing to the scientific community, and, in general, the difficulties/needs of students living together in the residence halls and how their interrelationships take place. Also, we consider how this process influences their personal and academic lives—vocational training—thus allowing the academic community (professors, students, administrators, servers) and the community at large understand the complexity that involves the interrelation context of living-cohabitating in residential halls. This way, it will prompt broader looks to the context of cohabitation-family, regarding it as a unit of human development that needs care and attention to the promotion and maintenance of health of young university students.

In addition to what has already been exposed, the relevance is based on the review of literature on the subject retrieved from the 'Portal de Periódicos CAPES' (*Journals published by CAPES, a government agency*

linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Education in charge of promoting high standards for post-graduate courses in Brazil) with the following keywords: student housing; university housing; university residence halls; experiences in residence halls; university families; academic family; and student family. The studies found addressed specific aspects of undergraduate students, such as adaptation, crises and conflicts. The use of drugs, alcohol and depression is highlighted, revealing a gap in studies concerning the understanding of the family interrelationships established by cohabitation in residence halls. This concerned us in such a way that we formulate the following question/problem of this study: How does the process of living-cohabitating in university residence halls develop, away from the relational parental/family context in the city of Jequié, State of Bahia, Brazil?

Thus, this study aims to:

- To understand the interrelationships between undergraduate students from their co-experiences in the context of university residence halls.
- To identify the types of relationships between students in the university residence halls in the process of living-cohabitating.
- To understand the meaning that students give to the family constituted in a university residence hall.
- To know the needs experienced by students cohabitating in a university residence hall.

METHOD

This is an exploratory and descriptive study of qualitative approach carried out with undergraduate students over 18 years of age, cohabiting in university residence halls and without consanguinity ties, since, in this case, the meaning of 'family' experienced by these students would suffer interference.

The scenario was the city of Jequié, State of Bahia, central university city in the southwestern region of Bahia. The sample was selected by non-probabilistic convenience means (for accessibility) and enclosed by the saturation of data.

We applied semi-structured interviews and Thower's Family Circle method, which is an instrument for family assessment consisting of a circle in which participants choose positions for the names of significant people, distributing them from the center to the edge of the circle and out of it, according to the degree of link established with these people. The circle was adapted by overlapping

concentric and gradually smaller circles on the original model to facilitate its preparation and the identification of links built by the students, from strong to superficial within the circle, and from distant to negative out of it.

The subjects of the research were 20 undergraduate students from five residence halls attending the following undergraduate courses: Nursing; Physical Therapy; Dentistry; and Physical Education and they signed an Informed Consent Form. The residence halls were named by their members, who also chose their codenames in the study. They were distributed as follows: Frustrated Residence Hall (three members: Trabalho, Dado and Pedro); Miseravões Residence Hall (five members: Eduardo, Nike, Dajjer, Zorba and Carlos); Melhor de Três Residence Hall (three members: Rosa, Florzinha and Menina); Fisiocats Residence Hall (five members: Flor Branca, Flor, Diamante, Princesa and Mine); and Singelos Residence Hall (four members: Alice, Luz, Eloisa and João). Data collection was carried out in the residence halls, from February to March 2010.

For content analysis, data were previously reduced and arranged from the interactive model, which allows the interaction between its components: data reduction, presentation/organization and interpretation/verification of the conclusions.⁶

The search for understanding how the process of living-cohabitating develops in university residence halls referred to the sociopoetics approach,⁷ because it has a critical-reflective, participatory and contextual character, that focuses on the social interrelationships of a certain group.⁸ Sociopoetics has been widely developed and implemented as research method in Brazilian nursing a decade ago. In addition to this area of knowledge, "it is applied in the fields of education, psychology and sociology, through investigations covering the theoretical foundations and interpretation of data production, thus, epistemologically differentiated from approaching man scientifically as a social and political being".⁷

The survey was developed in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approval by the Committee of Ethics on Research of the State University of Sudoeste da Bahia, Protocol No. 210/2009, in accordance with Resolution 196/96.⁹

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data followed a diligent effort of comings and goings in the mainstreaming of

the instruments used, seeking to understand the dynamics of family relationship of cohabitation from the frames of sociopoetics and its four pillars: micropolitics, hermeneutics, ethics, and aesthetics; systemic thinking, power relations and nursing theories: interpersonal relationship and transpersonal care, which intervene along the categories and subcategories shown from the interactive data reduction.

Three categories emerged: university residence hall - cohabitation family; living-cohabitating - interpersonal relationship; and power relations - 'my' and 'your' role. These categories were subdivided into seven subcategories: motivation for collective cohabitation; inter-relational link; meaning of the residence hall; transpersonal interfaces in the collective context; looking for my space and individuality - setbacks and biases of cohabitation; assuming new roles, in the path of maturity; and cultural mosaic - the system hierarchy. The categories and their dimensions are shown in the subjects' statements, theoretical discussion and interpretation.

• Category I: University residence hall - cohabitation family

This category comprised the presentation of the residence hall as a family space of cohabitation and affectivity sharing, experiences and maturation by means of motivation interfaces, link and meaning that the residence has for university students. It is worth mentioning that in spite of the fact that the group dynamics has a characteristic of family relationship, the way through which it begins, the type of link and the time of staying are circumstanced by an academic context, which is ephemeral, but has a level of relevance.

♦ Subcategory I: The motivation for collective cohabitation

[...] bills come cheaper, here they are five, so we split the bills. (Mine) Survival. (Zorba) (Ipsis litteris)

[...] you arrive, there is someone to talk to, [...] to tell your problems, to get support, to get an incentive, to watch movies, to share the daily life (Rosa) (Ipsis litteris)

Companionship, jokes, mess, how can I put that? Friendship. [...] Freedom. I think you're more at ease in the environment with respect to everything, to time, to friendship [...] (Carlos) (Ipsis litteris)

The statements reflect motivation in cohabitation with the reduction of expenses, company and freedom, motivating factors to the organization and collective experience. This process is marked by a socio-economic

dependency relation, a relational micropolitics evidenced in the reduction of expenses, the need for interaction and the conquest of autonomy.

The young student, when inserted in the university context, faces an environment that will require adaptations to its formative process and improvement of moral and ethical values by processes that will be experienced. Given this, there is the need to pay attention to this population due to its vulnerability to stressful situations, that can lead to behavioral disorders, use of alcohol and illegal substances, learning and interpersonal relationships disabilities, and loneliness, among others, which requires a shared responsibility—while 'student family'—regarding experiences and support in the residence halls.¹⁰

♦ Subcategory II: inter-relational link

[...] they are people who I trust and I have support [...] whether or not we're now spending more time living among us than with our own families [...] (Carlos) (*Ipsis litteris*)

[...] everybody's away from the parents and ends up creating a friendship link, a bond of cohabitation [...] a family link really, I consider it as a family. (Princesa) (*Ipsis litteris*)

[...] it is a family of friends that constitutes itself within an academic environment, in which people begin to interrelate, so that there is a better cohabitation within a city that is unknown to them. (Dajjer) (*Ipsis litteris*)

In these statements, it is possible to observe the recognition of the proximal link that expresses the family shape of the residence hall. In this direction, a study on the nursing students' understandings about family found that there is a (re)adaptation and (re)structuring of the meaning of this human group, that considers families as dynamic, plural and multi-faceted structures formed by individuals, not only with consanguinity ties, but by strong emotional ties. For them, family is a group or set of people belonging to a social-historical context.¹¹

Complementing the findings of the aforementioned authors on a study conducted with adolescent students, the meanings and dimensions of family are directly related to the field of human subjectivities, corresponding to capacity, quality and intensity of the affective links established and fed one another in the relationships between individual/individual as well as individual/collective.¹²

The understanding of this relational experience is based on the importance of recognizing the various family organizations, their cultural and social context, and commitment and responsibility for collective structuring of its members, as strongly emerged in the subcategory 'the meaning of the residence hall'.

♦ Subcategory III: The meaning of the residence hall

[...] the significance of the residence hall that I see is family meaning, it is a meaning of union, alliance itself. You feel less alone, because here where you are an outsider, you are a little abandoned [...] then you end up meeting people who have the same problems as yours, that may suffer the same things [...] the residence hall, it helps you to feel less alone in this college environment in which you're quite troubled, also with the distance of the family [...] When you're sad, a colleague of yours is animated, and arrives, and tells you a review, something that happened, so you are never alone. (Flor) (*Ipsis litteris*)

To me, residence hall means a house, a home, a dwelling [...] there are arguments, there are reviews, joy, what happens as if you are in your family itself [...] (Pedro) (*Ipsis litteris*)

Fellowship and solidarity. (Menina) (*Ipsis litteris*)

The meaning attributed to the residential hall in the statements meets the understanding highlighted by scholars who point out the family as the union of individuals linked by bonds of ownership and participation in the life of each other.¹³ The living-cohabitating of these students, outside their family context of societal consanguinity, made them construct a new family support and inclusion setting, so that the new conformation would give them safety and comfort for the well-living within a professional training process.

• Category II: Living-cohabitating - interpersonal relationship

This category comprised the discussion of complexity that pervades the interpersonal relationship in the context of the residence hall, also an area of conflict with the 'I-self' and the 'us', in a recursive collective (re)adjustment that is oriented in the dialectic between the self- and hetero-knowledge.

♦ Subcategory IV: Transpersonal interfaces in the collective context

You have to live with different people, and for that you need to give up your own habits, which you have in your house, that you bring [...]. Adapting is difficult, but it

is important, I saw this on me, I managed to evolve [...] I started to live with different people, if I had been in my house, it wouldn't be so [...] I would be unable to make concessions on my own environment [...] the residence hall generates a more adaptive cohabitation, you cease to be that spoiled person and manage to live with different people. (Eduardo) (Ipsis litteris)

The difficulties are many, living with people who you have never seen, each one has a habit [...] you end up having to respect the other, the difficulty is just that: they are the differences. I learned a lot because I've always been an only child [...] I always had everything [...] everybody pampered me all the time, then when I came to live outside, I had to get used to respect the time of others, to know where my duty is where their right is [...] (Alice) (Ipsis litteris)

Some have more affinities that others [...] each one has his/her way, he/she came from a different family, each one has his/her obsessions, their ways of living differently, so we try to fit, to frame each one within this perspective to always have a better cohabitation. (Dajjer) (Ipsis litteris)

The multifaceted characteristic of this cohabitation is evident, with the clear presence of hermeneutics, which appears in the phenomenon of interpretation that someone directs to the behavior of another, and reflexively to his/her own self, in the search for adapting to the new family system of cohabitation. In this quest, the mental models of each individual suffer impacts and develop their resilience to deal with what bothers and afflicts in an adaptive process, mediated by the understanding/interpretation of the other and oneself.

The influence of parental bonds is highlighted on the need to leave the family environment and migrate to other cities, where they run into various problems and realities distinct from those previously known. In this experience, it is possible to construct new significant links, but it is also possible to experience conflicts of values, leading to emotional problems, identity disorders, adaptation difficulties, loss of quality of life and academic performance deficit, among others.¹⁴⁻¹⁵

Through interacting, the communicational process takes place between people, allowing the expression of the symbolism of their self enunciated in their needs, distress and satisfaction. Such interaction can influence the behavior of individuals, providing reactions subsidized in beliefs, values, expectations, habits, life history and culture.¹⁶

This interactional process permeates through care/carelessness actions in the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Care and commitment to each other provides favorable conditions for dialogue and understanding of my and other's multi-dimensions within the relationship, enabling a transpersonal interaction that originates itself in the bonds of care, connoting value to cohabitation through loveliness and compassion (human essence).¹⁷

From this perspective, in the look of transpersonality, care emerges as caritas, cultivation and practice of love-kindness and equanimity; authentic presence - hosting; spirituality and integration with the environment.¹⁷ Experiencing caritas within residence hall relations assists in the path of self-knowledge. This promotes better interpersonal relationship, unveiling the potential 'I' in a more satisfying way, dealing with the various moments of cohabitation in life with other subjects, in the web that involves the complexity of human living.

♦Subcategory V: Looking for my space and individuality - setbacks and biases of cohabitation

[...] some people failed to adapt themselves yet [...] and there is some turmoil, there is some confusion that occasionally causes stress, it is more complicated even to study, because there are people who can't see the environment as a collective thing, only individual, they have their habits and they want to keep them and it creates confusion. [...] you're limited all the time, you can't let things go so loose because you're not alone, you live with different people and you have to respect yourself and respect people too, because they don't have to put up with your moods, your breakdowns, your pampering. (Eduardo) (Ipsis litteris)

[...] there are some situations which are complicated, you have to breathe a couple of times because you're not at home, right? So if you were in your house with your family, whatever, I could understand you, this is tricky because you create a daily family link, but you know it is not your family, then you have to become more flexible [...] nobody here is your mother, no one will cover up your errors, if you commit an error, he/she will point at you, will say you committed a mistake [...] (Princesa) (Ipsis litteris)

My main difficulty is the excess of cohabitation, we do the same course [...] it ends up being a little tricky [...] you leave at the same time, come back at the same time, go to the same class, to the same place, then this sometimes gets very tiring [...] sometimes you want to be alone and sometimes you wear yourself a little with

the excess of company, excess of cohabitation with your colleagues (Dado) (Ipsis litteris)

Relationships of conflict are highlighted in the statements and present in the search of individual space, in a fluent continuum of living by sharing space and moments of life. In this experiential process, cohabitation ethic is enunciated in close relationship with the aesthetics, the art of knowing how to live with the differences that permeate the interrelationships,¹⁹ on a mixture of love and hate merged into the 'diplomacy of survival' and human experience.

The interpersonal relationship theory holds that when the individuals react to environmental stimuli, they establish and share common goals until the resolution of the problem, allowing growth within interpersonal relationships.²⁰ Similarly, as observed in the statements, in the creation of links within the environment of a residence halls, there is a learning experience for the subjects, in which they learn from the stimuli—positive or negative—reacting to them in a process of constant adaptation. At the same time, these adaptations create changes that provide strengthening or deviation of the self, i.e., the moments of weakness and social loneliness in the group.

• Category III: Power relations - my and your role

This category deals with the remodeling of the subjects regarding their roles in the new family system—the residence hall. The understanding of family as a system, i.e., all integrated and interdependent, is supported by the systemic thinking, originated in the study conducted by Bertalanffy.²¹ This family system is vulnerable to the demands that can generate a mechanism of adaptability for reorganization in the group, as observed in the subcategory previously discussed. Thus, the system will seek to organize itself according to its autonomy and conformation, swapping a feedback mechanism with the environment, inputs and outputs of information-experiences—in accordance with its needs—²²⁻³ while respecting the hierarchy established in the life of the residence hall (roles), in which relational boundaries are blurred with respect to the interrelation of 'I' and 'we' in cohabitation.

♦ Subcategory VI: Assuming new roles, in the path of maturity

[...] maturity, in this case, we create more responsibility, because I myself, only child, comes to a boarding school for convenience, to have everything you need, and when you arrive here you have your responsibilities,

you have to go to the fair, you have to wash your dishes, wash your clothes, so I think it is a preparation, in the case when you have your home. (Heloise) (Ipsis litteris)

Ah! You mature a bit, you mature in every way, from cooking, a lot of people arrive to the residence hall and doesn't know how to use the stove. Even experiences that you have [...] talking, exchanging experiences, such things like those, I think the person matures a bit. (Flor Branca) (Ipsis litteris)

When undergraduate student sets foot into this new universe of family relationships-cohabitation, he/she realizes the need to adapt him/herself to the environment in which he/she is 'one' in the configuration of the 'whole' in that environment, i.e., an individual who needs to respect and be respected, share and so on. Thus, he/she assumes a role of complementarity and interdependence in the inter-relational context of living-cohabitating.

Life in university residence halls represents a moment of transition to the young, in order to be assumed as an adult,²³ featuring a search for personal and professional autonomy. Many students, once graduated, do not return to live with their parents, because they obtain their own support; while others, by economic issues and linkages with the consanguinity family, return home.

♦ Subcategory VII: Cultural mosaic - the hierarchy of the system

I and my colleague we turned a kind of leadership, the older ones took on the roles of father and mother here in the residence hall, because the younger ones, cannot be independent from us, [...] to go to the fair they don't go alone, we have to go because so far they did not learn, if the bill came, we have to warn them [...] I think it was our fault, that we gave freedom to do this, it created such a great dependency [...] it created a situation of comfort for them that will be broken now, because we're about to graduate and there is an uproar now in the residence hall because nobody knows who is going to replace, we tried to make the transfer of roles, but they didn't manage it yet. (Eduardo) (Ipsis litteris)

[...] within a residence hall the system works like this: each one has his/her duty and also his/her right [...] it's a mini-society, so what happens if you don't fulfill certain task or certain goal of this residence hall, you end up creating disharmony. [...] If I don't have communication with my colleagues it ends up generating a friction [...] the essential in the residence hall is the issue of dialogue, of communication, if I can't do something I go there arrive and communicate: listen, I can't do certain type of thing, then from there you create a

communication link and you allow, so to say, improving this harmony. (Flor) (Ipsis litteris)

[...] there is a colleague in the residence hall that has the spirit of leader, faces everything, if there is a bill to pay, she splits, if we have to go to the fair, she says: you go, she is the one that controls it, she is the leader [...] sometimes it is good because it is organized, but sometimes it's very boring, very boring to have that person nagging at you, you know? (Princesa) (Ipsis litteris)

Seeking/effort to 'harmonize' the collective cohabitation denotes a new formation in each member of this cultural syncretism that results in social esthetics accepted and/or historically advocated for social suitability.

Power relations emerge among the members that compose the family system of the residence hall. These relations occur in the performance of human cohabitation, at all times and in all spaces of everyday social life, where the individuals live, where their discourses and living practices take place.²⁴ Power exists in all human relationships, in different games and fights in which the human being is immersed.²⁵

Power is something that moves around working in chains and networks. Individuals not only move, but are always in a position to exercise this power and suffered from it. Individuals are not inert, they are always power transmission centers.²⁵ This statement demonstrates that each member of the residence hall has the potential to exercise power and suffer from its action, and that this interaction outlines the interrelationships in the student family context. However, as noted in the students' statements, there are those who exercise power because it is allowed by others; there are those who assume power because of others' convenience; and there are those recognized as holding power and named as leaders of the residence hall. In this tangle of relationships, there are those who accept and those that question, because they feel intimidated with the power that is given to others.

FINAL REMARKS

The considerations that can be taken into account from this study fall within the reflections that were seized emerging from living-cohabitating in university residence halls, which foresee new challenges for the amplitude of looking about the need of these young students in constant social and individual confronting for the vocational training process. The above discussed regards residence halls as a complex family system of

cohabitation. The presence of links proven by the students' statements and circumscribed in the relationships within Thrower's Family Circle is evident, demonstrating that there are conflictive and comfortable relationships, in a pendular balance between stability and change, since undergraduate students develop into a socio-affective family cohabitation and in a recursion between the 'I' and the 'we', merging in the whole inter-relational systemic globalization of living together.

It was possible to understand the interrelationships that exist within cohabitation in the residence halls, which is not restricted only to a dwelling place, but to a peculiar form of group relationship that can be called a family, involving the social roles of subjects, power relationships, cooperation, conflicts and distinct meanings that students produce.

Studies that portray the academic cohabitation and its crossings involved with training should be deepened and expanded in order to know the levels of realities established by the students and their impact on university education.

Indeed, the results of this study contribute to a new way of understanding the students in their social, territorial and psycho-affective context, which involves the academic formation and deserves to be considered.

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