

Paradigm changes performed by black women in nursing

Mudanças de paradigmas realizados por mulheres negras na enfermagem

Cambios de paradigma realizados por mujeres negras en enfermería

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To speak of nursing is to understand that the meaning of caring is as old as human existence and this concept of existing leads to a reflection on the black "being" in a society. To this end, with regard to his struggle for freedom, in the arduous trajectory for paradigm shifts, the world historical context brings the black struggle against slavery, whose enslaved black was considered as an object, emerging in a scenario of social exclusion, discrimination and intolerance.¹⁻²

Moreover, in the post-abolition period there is a social reconfiguration, whereby, in the thesis, changes in labor relations would take place and freed slaves would become wage earners. However, this panorama did not exist, since the market was already dominated by Europeans. In fact, blacks didn't even get a glimpse of social inclusion, decent work, or education. Not to mention the European eugenics that was hovering across the continents, since racism was widespread in stride and the superiority of the white race was pouted to the detriment of others.²

In this sense, men and women emerged who confronted this system of stereotyping of the black and fought a battle for cultural deconstruction that was imposed. As an example of these achievements, here in Brazil we have the Constitution of 1988. This constituent has been trying to mitigate these existing diversities by dealing with equality and principles such as dignity of the human person, one of its fundamental objectives is to promote the good of all, without prejudice as to race, color or sex, besides being the first legal document to treat racism as an indefinable and unprescribed crime.³⁻⁴

Based on historical reports on the process of nursing history formation, it was rarely explained about the protagonism of black women, even though the context is predominantly centered on the female gender

This fact leaves a gap about their participation in the care provided since long before professionalization, which strongly excludes the experiences of these women in the structuring of the history of nursing.⁵

Among several black nurses who cooperated with nursing, Mary Jane Seacole, Mary Elizabeth Carnegie, Mary Eliza Mahoney, Lydia das Dores Matta, Izabel dos Santos and Ivone Lara are names that may be better known. But when observing the context in which each woman was inserted and had to permeate until obtaining the identity they currently have, it is legitimate to assume that there were marked and significant changes. These changes were generated by an arduous walk, loaded with distaste, discrimination and racism for which they had to break down racial barriers and thus contribute to future professionals, as well as the advancement of nursing.^{1,6-9}

First, a paradigm shift performed by these women was in the sense of self-affirmation as human beings and not objects or exchange utensils, a phrase that could sound sensationalist, but historically it is undeniable. Thus, since blacks were subjected to slavery, they had to fight and change concepts, even regarding their human existence, since they were considered as objects, exchange currency and inferior race, besides savages and devoid of intellectual capacity.^{2,9}

Moreover, black women were coisified, subjected to forced labor and for centuries used for all kinds of exploitation, and were still considered as promiscuous, that is, being a woman and black was not consistent with the established stereotype of feminine ideal and purity, attributes that have always been linked to white women, singularly those of high social group.^{2,9}

This condition did not end with the abolition of slavery, but persisted with the influences of European eugenics, consubstantially racist, of which they proclaimed the inferiority of the black in relation to the white and who saw in racial miscegenation a social disease, and also a predisposition to crime.²

This fact, which later, in Brazil, served as a framework to promote the "bleaching" of the Brazilian nation, in order to promote a transformation in society that, over the years, with miscegenation with people of European origin, would become mostly made up of whites, in order to improve the Brazilian ethnicity and thus disparage blacks in society.²

Therefore, referring to the term woman, although universally used, there is an abyss with regard to race and social class that distinguishes them. Among women, it is worth noting that the struggles and challenges were not and are not the same, so the opportunities were not and are not yet the same, each group of women differs from each other and each has its proper peculiarities.⁹

While white women mobilized in the sense of achieving equal rights between gender, black women struggled, broke standards and obstacles to ensure the right to be recognized as a person as well.⁹

Regarding the issue of education, another great barrier is being transposed, but there are still many challenges to be dispelled in this area, since the relationship between education and women, previously configures an extensive process. By the way, when it comes to women and women and women, the route was even slower and more painful, due to social exclusion. In addition, the university itself was one of the venues that was denied to them and thus extends to the present day, because it is still alarming the contingent of black women who do not have access to universities if compared to white women.⁹⁻¹⁰

Moreover, despite the discrimination and racism involved in the scenario of preparatory schools at the time, where it was implied that black candidates

should be avoided, since they did not meet the established white model, courageous women dared to deconstruct this concept and not only the documents recorded the permanence of these black women in institutions but also proved that they had all the necessary requirements to become a nursing professional. Not to mention that these evidences put on the ground exclusionary narratives that characterized black women as ignorant and without intellectual capacity, motivation that added to the pretexts that were used to disqualify them in a natural way.⁵

Unfortunately, entering the field of knowledge is something powerful that breaks down barriers and opens new horizons, once reflecting, questioning, building knowledge and propagate it, are factors that integrate the construction of an identity, unbuilding the entire racial/racist framework. And education is a basic premise for access to a better job or position, to gain space in the job market that was undoubtedly a great challenge for black women.⁹⁻¹¹

Of course this development is not something immediate, gaining knowledge and reproducing it is a time-consuming process that takes time and requires opportunities. In this regard, although not fully, it can infer that has progressively increased the access of black intellectuals to academies as well as gradually black writers have had more visibility and presence in the literary field, which is valuable and configures indications of transformations in the market.¹²

Due to this relevance, social movements have played a leading role in the role of education. In this sense, black feminism stands out, which diverges from the white feminist movement, while it is dedicated to causes linked to gender, defining the female cause as universal, which is guided to the collectivities of black women, in the search to develop an awareness of their capacity and virtues, of their history, their social and political conjuncture, necessary for their self-affirmation and overcoming the challenges attributed to them..^{3,13,9}

Thus, black feminism is the result of this attempt to unlink this generalization of women, since they have never occupied the same level. In fact, a question of logic, if both have different demands, there is no way to encompass only the gender item to try to solve all the existing demands of groups that have such intrinsic particularities.^{3,13,9}

Another great challenge was to break the stereotype of the standard nurse, since the professionalization of nursing in Brazil happened in the first half of the 20th century..¹⁴

Under this bias, the formation of a number of nurses became a priority for public health policy at the time, so to meet this need an agreement was made between the National Department of Health and the Rockefeller Foundation (a North American institution that had a large participation in the institutionalization of nursing in Latin America, acting in the granting of scholarships for medical and public health, contributing to the training of nursing professionals).¹⁴

Soon came to Brazil the mission directed by Ethel Parsons, American nurse responsible for the creation of the School of Nursing Ana Nery, which later became a reference for the other nursing schools after 1930. It was called a mission, because thus, the researchers called it when they referred to technical cooperation for the development of nursing in Brazil (1921-1931).¹⁴

However, the intention established by this and other institutions that would arise was to reformulate and raise nursing standards, making it more elitist. To this end, they used strict selection criteria, the candidates should be of

good family, religious, of an unblemished character, endowed with social culture, good posture in society, belonging to the urban high class and having educational training in normal school, that is, primary teachers, which in a way favored white women.^{14,5}

However, even if she tried in a veiled way to exclude women by the fact of color, institutional racism was already manifest, since they even accepted the "standard nurse" who was financially devoid, but black women were not accepted.^{14,5}

Given the composition of the Brazilian population and such rigorous and excluding criteria, obviously it would result in a deficit in the composition of nurses, which was in fact an opportunity for women with other sociocultural attributes, that is, black and mixed race obtained the possibility of performing a change of status within society, since the technical higher level for women even more non-white women was very rare.¹⁴

Therefore, with racial diversity becoming increasingly present, health collapsing, selection criteria were expanded and then candidates of color enter the institutions. Certainly that segregations continued, now veiled racism was making more explicit, however, the fact that black women had broken the system, constitutively excluding, was in fact a rupture of a prejudiced hegemony, broke with the stigma of the standard nurse.¹⁴

By drawing an analogy, merely symbolic, with regard to such significant contribution and nursing care, it can be inferred that they exemplified something beyond their time, since neither people nor nursing care can be standardized.

Not infrequently, another obstacle that was overcome was in relation to the position that black women would occupy in society, which often seemed to be predetermined. Factually, after the end of racial exploitation, the offices that were intended for them were only the domestic.⁹⁻¹¹

Also, nursing itself permeated this path, since care and care were linked to domestic work, it was necessary to unlink this relationship. These difficulties were faced even after professionalization, a scenario that was overcome with positioning and resilience by these emblematic nurses. Even though it was a project that had to be traced in the long term, it was not in vain, since from these milestones, the standard was raised, such as the recognition of nursing and thus the valorization of nurses.⁶

However, in data obtained in the final report on the profile of nursing in Brazil, a research conducted by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation and the Federal Nursing Council produced in 2016 and published in 2017, reports that of the total of 1,804,535 professionals surveyed, there is a predominance of women.^{15,16}

Statistics confirm this assertion of which 85.1% are women and referring to the composition of the team 23% are nurses, 77% are nursing technicians and/or auxiliaries. Regarding the color or race profile of nurses, 57.9% consider themselves white; 31.3% brown and 6.6% black. And, as for the color or race of technicians and/or auxiliaries, 44.5% consider themselves brown, while 37.6% consider themselves white and 12.9% black.^{15,16}

In a view, when performing a division of the team that composes nursing, it is possible to verify that the black representation is still higher among technicians and auxiliaries than among nurses.^{15,16}

Therefore, it must be reflected that the professional environment is still hostile to black women and concerning this, even today they occupy less space in prominent positions and power, however, in view of the prejudice and

discrimination that involve them both in relation to gender, as race and class since historical times is a great advance the fact of finding black women occupying some of these positions that would once be unimaginable. These achievements break invisibility, even if they do not make them any less painful. That's resilience, it's breaking with stigmas and creating connections that inspire generations to come.⁹

Given so many historical facts, it is undeniable that blackpeople played an important role in the construction and consolidation of society, it is also known that professions are structured with the evolution of time, with the transformations of their actors, but in the case of these illustrious nurses, who did not have the right notoriety, it can be inferred that they had their voices and their protagonism silenced, made invisible, therefore, his contribution in the historical context of nursing to the profession was neglected.^{2,5}

By virtue of all the points that have already been explained, it is noticeable that all the achievements that these women have obtained were involved with much struggle and resistance. Thus, spaces and reaffirming themselves in society as an integral part of history were won, but such progress did not exempt them from still living with the structural racism that still permeates the atmosphere of many institutions and continues to be reproduced. It is said structural racism, because it is structured, comes from a composition that has been built over the years, which is part of the social structure, of social subjects.¹¹

It is noteworthy that there is an illusory element that wanders in the common understanding that in Brazil, for example, for not having had a racial segregation in a radical way, as in the case of apartheid (segregationist political regime of race, it was different whites and blacks, implanted in South Africa by direct descendants of the colonizers among them Dutch, Germans and French, in order to create a perfect society, of which they were the race chosen by God) there is no racism.²

This fact generates discomfort in the population that consequently does not frequently address this problem and sometimes, when facts are exposed in the media they believe that they are specific cases, which makes the subject difficult to perceive and face, because it finds in subtlety a way to camouflage itself.²

However, there have been and still characters such as those who have been mentioned, who have extraordinarily overcome racism, prejudice and discrimination, and today, gradually have their stories reported and their voices begin to echo in environments that would not even reverberate before, thus contributing to nursing history. Of course, they have been victims of racism and invisibility both in their professional training and in historiography, but still, it transmits a teaching with their stories, emphasizing that diversities exist, but they must be faced consciously by each one, breaking paradigms.^{11,17,18}

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