Ano VII, v.1 2026 | submissão: 15/11/2026 | aceito: 22/11/2026 | publicação: 27/11/2026

Emerging adulthood and self-transcendence: a Logotherapy and Existential Analysis approach

Adultez emergente e autotranscendência: uma abordagem da Logoterapia e Análise Existencial

Adultez emergente y autotrascendencia: un enfoque de la Logoterapia y el Análisis Existencial

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Abstract:
Emerging adulthood is characterized by a developmental period marked by identity explorations, instability, multiple possibilities, and challenges related to the construction of life projects. In contemporary society, these experiences may be influenced by social pressures, expectations of achievement, and difficulties in recognizing meaning, potentially contributing to experiences of existential frustration and existential emptiness. In this context, the present study aims to understand how self-transcendence, from the perspective of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, can contribute to the understanding of existential emptiness and the construction of meaning in life during emerging adulthood. This is an integrative literature review, of a basic research nature, with a qualitative approach and exploratory-descriptive design. The discussion is primarily grounded in the contributions of Jeffrey J. Arnett, Zygmunt Bauman, and Viktor Frankl, articulating the characteristics of this developmental stage with the concepts of will to meaning, existential frustration, existential emptiness, and self-transcendence. The reflections suggest that the uncertainties inherent in this period, combined with contemporary social demands, may intensify feelings of inadequacy, disorientation, and lack of purpose. Self-transcendence, in turn, emerges as a possibility for directing individuals toward values, relationships, tasks, and meaningful achievements that go beyond excessively self-centered introspection. It is concluded that Logotherapy and Existential Analysis offer contributions to a broader understanding of suffering in emerging adulthood and to a clinical practice that recognizes not only the difficulties experienced but also the individual's freedom, responsibility, and potentialities in the realization of unique meanings.

Keywords:
Emerging Adulthood; Existential Emptiness; Meaning in Life; Self-Transcendence; Logotherapy.

Resumo:
A adultez emergente caracteriza-se por um período do desenvolvimento marcado por explorações identitárias, instabilidade, múltiplas possibilidades e desafios relacionados à construção de projetos de vida. Na contemporaneidade, tais experiências podem ser atravessadas por pressões sociais, expectativas de realização e dificuldades de reconhecimento de sentido, favorecendo vivências de frustração existencial e vazio existencial. Nesse contexto, o presente estudo tem como objetivo compreender como a autotranscendência, na perspectiva da Logoterapia e Análise Existencial de Viktor Frankl, pode contribuir para a compreensão do vazio existencial e da construção de sentido da vida na adultez emergente. Trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica integrativa, de natureza básica, abordagem qualitativa e caráter

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exploratório-descritivo. A discussão fundamenta-se principalmente nas contribuições de Jeffrey J. Arnett, Zygmunt Bauman e Viktor Frankl, articulando as características dessa etapa do desenvolvimento às concepções de vontade de sentido, frustração existencial, vazio existencial e autotranscendência. As reflexões apontam que as incertezas próprias desse período, somadas às exigências sociais contemporâneas, podem intensificar sentimentos de inadequação, desorientação e ausência de propósito. A autotranscendência, por sua vez, apresenta-se como uma possibilidade de direcionamento do sujeito para valores, relações, tarefas e realizações significativas que ultrapassam a uma hiper-reflexão demasiadamente autocentrada. Conclui-se que a Logoterapia e Análise Existencial oferece contribuições para uma compreensão ampliada do sofrimento na adultez emergente e para uma prática clínica que reconheça não apenas as dificuldades vivenciadas, mas também a liberdade, a responsabilidade e as potencialidades do sujeito na realização de sentidos singulares.

Palavras-chave:
Adultez Emergente; Vazio Existencial; Sentido da Vida; Autotranscendência; Logoterapia.

Resumen:
La adultez emergente se caracteriza por un período de desarrollo marcado por exploraciones de identidad, inestabilidad, múltiples posibilidades y desafíos relacionados con la construcción de proyectos de vida. En la sociedad contemporánea, estas experiencias pueden estar influenciadas por las presiones sociales, las expectativas de logro y las dificultades para reconocer el significado, lo que puede contribuir a experiencias de frustración existencial y vacío existencial. En este contexto, el presente estudio pretende comprender cómo la autotrascendencia, desde la perspectiva de la Logoterapia y el Análisis Existencial de Viktor Frankl, puede contribuir a la comprensión del vacío existencial y la construcción del sentido de la vida durante la adultez emergente. Se trata de una revisión bibliográfica integradora, de carácter investigativo básico, con enfoque cualitativo y diseño exploratorio-descriptivo. La discusión se basa principalmente en las contribuciones de Jeffrey J. Arnett, Zygmunt Bauman y Viktor Frankl, articulando las características de esta etapa de desarrollo con los conceptos de voluntad de sentido, frustración existencial, vacío existencial y autotrascendencia. Las reflexiones sugieren que las incertidumbres inherentes a este período, combinadas con las demandas sociales contemporáneas, pueden intensificar los sentimientos de insuficiencia, desorientación y falta de propósito. La autotrascendencia, a su vez, surge como una posibilidad para dirigir a los individuos hacia valores, relaciones, tareas y logros significativos que van más allá de la introspección excesivamente egocéntrica. Se concluye que la Logoterapia y el Análisis Existencial ofrecen contribuciones a una comprensión más amplia del sufrimiento en la adultez emergente y a una práctica clínica que reconoce no solo las dificultades experimentadas sino también la libertad, responsabilidad y potencialidades del individuo en la realización de significados únicos.

Palabras clave:
Adultez emergente. Vacío existencial. Sentido de la vida. Autotrascendencia. Logoterapia.

Introduction

Emerging adulthood, formulated by Arnett, configures an empirically distinct period from adolescence and adulthood, covering approximately 18 to 29 years old, in which young adults often explore a variety of possible directions of life in love, work and worldviews (Arnett,

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2014). It should be noted that this intermediate phase of human development would be a cultural construction, variable between countries at different levels of industrialization, not being universal or immutable.

According to Arnett (2014), young people in emerging adulthood is crossed by five central dimensions: exploration of identity, feeling of instability, focus on itself, feeling of ambivalence or being between worlds and the perception of multiple possibilities. These characteristics show a period marked by transformations and questions about their own identity, choices and future projects. That said, it is relevant to investigate how such dimensions dialogue with the experiences of young people in emerging adulthood in the face of contemporary challenges, especially referring to the insertion in the labor market, the construction of lasting and significant bonds and the search for meaning for life.

The problem that guides this study starts from the understanding that the experiences of emerging adulthood are also crossed by social and cultural issues of contemporary times. Zygmunt Bauman (2001) in its analysis of Liquid Modernity, characterizes a collective experience under conditions of constant uncertainty, in which the search for belonging and emotional solidity becomes increasingly fragile. This analysis is articulated with the current context marked by the overvaluation of performance, the fluidity of relationships and the individual responsibility for success or failure. The constant exposure to idealized standards of personal and professional achievement, intensified by social networks can contribute to the social comparison and feelings of inadequacy. According to Soares & Andrade (2025), there is a growing presence of young adults in the psychological clinic not only with classic clinical presentations of anxiety and / or depression, but with a confusing experience, existential anguish and meaninglessness.

In this sense, Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, developed by Frankl, presents itself as a relevant theoretical perspective for the understanding of the aforementioned existential challenges during the period of emerging adulthood, as it is based on the conception of the search for meaning as a fundamental motivation of existence. In this perspective, the concept of will to meaning is presented, as a "propulsive spring" that would lead the subject to seek, through his own consciousness, a purpose, a purpose and a meaning for life. Likewise, when the subject does not realize this will to meaning, he experiences existential frustration, and at a deeper level, the existential vacuum, when he experiences the lack of this meaning, which may result in noogenic neuroses, psychopathological conditions associated with the noetic or spiritual dimension of the human being (Cobra & Silva, 2026). As a possible response to this

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existential condition of emptiness, it was proposed the self-transcendence, central concept of logotherapy, as a human condition of transcending its own existence, directing itself beyond itself.

The present research is justified by the social relevance to the need to expand the clinical look beyond the symptoms and individual difficulties, also considering the potentialities, values, links and possibilities of meaning of the subject in emerging adulthood, promoting a more ethical, welcoming and assertive professional practice. This proposal also meets the personal interests of reflection in view of the clinical demands observed with this public, seeking to expand the theoretical and investigative knowledge in the field of scientific research. In general, the objective of this research is to investigate how the concepts of self-transcendence, from the perspective of Logotherapy, can contribute to the clinical understanding of the existential vacuum and the construction of meaning of life by young people in emerging adulthood. For this, as specific objectives, we sought to characterize the emerging adulthood in Brazil and its existential challenges; to analyze the concepts of will to meaning and existential vacuum in Frankl's perspective; and to analyze the concept of self-transcendence and its implications for understanding and clinical practice with emerging adults.

Methodology

This study is an integrative literature review of a basic research nature, using a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive approach. The chosen methodology responds to the need for broader, more interactive dialogue between theoretical frameworks, focusing primarily on Jeffrey J. Arnett and Viktor Frankl. It connects emerging adulthood and its existential challenges with theoretical perspectives on the will to meaning, existential vacuum and self-transcendence in Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, including their implications for clinical practice. Classic and foundational texts by Jeffrey J. Arnett, Zygmunt Bauman and Viktor Frankl were initially included. Among the works examined are Arnett's (2014) Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties (a free translation in the source); Bauman's (2001) Liquid Modernity, translated by Plínio Dentzien; and Viktor Frankl's (1987) Man's Search for Meaning: A Psychologist in a Concentration Camp, translated by Walter O. Schlupp and Carlos C. Aveline, as well as Viktor Frankl's (2021) The Will to Meaning, translated by Ivo Studart Pereira. Articles and academic constructs were searched in the CAPES Periódicos and SciELO databases and in the journals Revista de Pesquisa Qualitativa, Revista Latino-Americana de Psicologia Corporal, Revista Subjetividades and

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Brazilian Journal of Development. The following descriptors and keywords guided selection: “emerging adulthood”, “logotherapy”, “existential vacuum”, “will to meaning” and “self-transcendence”.

Results were subsequently refined using the following inclusion criteria: publication year, covering a 7-year period from 2020 to 2026; relevance, with at least two research-related descriptors in the title or abstract; citable, peer-reviewed articles; and language, including Portuguese and English. A total of 5 articles were selected. Publications with diffuse themes of little relevance to the study and duplicate articles were excluded. Literature available on the Everand digital reading platform was also used, including the works by Dutra-Thomé & Koller (2017; 2018), Adultez emergente no Brasil and Brazilian Version of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood: Investigating the Current Transition to Adulthood, published in Trends in Psychology, respectively, as well as Viktor Frankl’s previously mentioned foundational works.

Discussion

Based on the aforementioned methodology, the discussion was organized into four categories: Emerging Adulthood in Brazil and its existential challenges; Will to meaning and the existential vacuum in Frankl’s perspective; Self-transcendence and its implications for understanding and clinical practice with young adults.

Emerging adulthood in Brazil and its existential challenges

Human development is a continuous process, although not linear, marked by biological, psychological and social transformations that accompany the individual throughout its existence. These transformations do not occur in isolation, as they are influenced by the historical, cultural and socioeconomic conditions in which each individual is inserted. Thus, understanding human development requires considering not only the characteristic changes of each stage of the life cycle, but also the different experiences and possibilities that cross the trajectory of the subjects.

In his extensive research on young people aged 18 to 29, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2014) identified a period of development distinct from adolescence and mature adulthood: something “in-between” these two worlds, for which he proposed the term “Emerging Adulthood”, translated into Portuguese as Adultez Emergente. In his foundational work, Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties (Adultez Emergente:

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A Estrada Sinuosa do Final da Adolescência aos Vinte Anos, a free translation in the source), Arnett (2014) examines how young Americans in the twenty-first century postpone traditional milestones of adulthood, such as marriage, parenthood and long-term employment, at least until their late twenties. They prefer to explore the possibilities available in love and work, gradually moving toward more lasting choices. Alongside freedom, hope, enthusiasm, the projection of dreams and desires and the prospect of a world to be conquered, they may experience fear, anxiety, frustration and restlessness in the face of an uncertain future.

According to Arnett (2014), young people in emerging adulthood are crossed by five central dimensions:

a) exploration of identity;

b) feeling of instability;

c) focus on themselves;

d) feeling of ambivalence or being between worlds;

e) perception of multiple possibilities.

In the exploration of identity, emerging adults consolidate the sense of who they are and what they aim for their lives. According to the author, it is possible to highlight three main areas in which identity issues are worked on in emerging adulthood: affective relationships, work and worldview (Arnett, 2000 apud Felinto et al., 2020). In order to integrate personal interests and preferences with the opportunities available, young people in emerging adulthood experience various types of affective relationships, changes in direction in educational and professional training, taking into account that most of them still live with their parents and have financial support (Arnett, 2000, 2004 apud Gobbo & Dellazzana-Zanon, 2023). In this period of self-discovery, they also seek to weave guiding purposes for life, something that impels them and generates meaning to their own existence.

The feeling of instability is due to the experiences of inconstancy and uncertainties throughout this trajectory, given the changes and life events marked in this period, such as not being a teenager anymore, while seeking to consolidate itself as an adult, the conclusion of studies, the permanence in the labor market and long-term jobs, financial stability, leaving the home of the parents, in addition to the elaboration of more concrete life projects, such as marriage and parenting. In relation to the name or focus on itself, that because it does not have many obligations, social duties and commitment to others such as childhood and adolescence, it is allowed for young people to have greater autonomy in the management of their lives.

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The feeling of ambivalence means feeling between two worlds: adolescence and adult life. Not that emerging adults do not seek for the traditional milestones of adult life, such as consolidating themselves in the labor market, having autonomy, getting married and having children, it is as if "still" were not the time or "still" there were steps to be fulfilled. According to Arnett (2014), the feeling of being between two phases is given by the very conceptions of emerging adults about the criteria they establish as being true characteristics of adult life, defining by "Big Three" the three major criteria taken: taking responsibility for yourself; making decisions independently; and achieving financial independence. Such criteria are gradually achieved, bringing the feeling of becoming an adult too gradually.

The perception of multiple possibilities is given to the fact that, due to the greater freedom to make profound changes in their lives, emerging adults believe that they will conquer the life they idealize (Gobbo & Dellazzana-Zanon, 2023). In this sense, this period is also marked by positive expectations such as acquiring the employment of dreams, being successful, having a structured family, a lasting marriage with the love of your life, happy children, well educated and above average (Arnett, 2014). According to the author, even if young people have had positive or negative experiences in their families, they still cultivate the perception of weaving a different and improved path from that experienced previously in childhood and adolescence. Arnett (2014), states that such characteristics are not "universal" in young people aged 18 to 29 years, regardless of their contexts of origin. On the contrary, it expects other characteristics to be considered more important in different cultural and economic contexts around the world, contributing increasingly to the understanding of this period.

Dutra-Thomé & Koller (2017), responsible for the Brazilian adaptation of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA), empirically verified the presence of the dimensions proposed by Arnett in young people in the Brazilian context. The authors highlight that, in the country, social factors such as inequality, prolonged permanence in the parents' homes and late work insertion, have a significant impact on the experience of emerging adulthood. Dutra-Thomé & Koller (2017), identified that young people in emerging adulthood perceive the feeling of ambivalence between being or not adult, but young people of high socioeconomic level have been pointed out as more ambivalent than young people of low socioeconomic level. This is due to the fact that young people of low socioeconomic level tend to assume roles of adult life early, which leads them to perceive themselves as adults earlier, in view of the responsibilities they assume and less opportunity to experience a prolonged period of exploration of identity. These observations show that, in fact, the initial model proposed by

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Arnett can be used to map this period, but so that it is possible to dialogue with the Brazilian context, it cannot be understood in a detached way from the socioeconomic reality of the country.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015) Brazil is not considered a developed country, however, it is not characterized as a developing country, because it is richer than most developing countries. Based on this perspective, Souto (2020) considers in his research "Emerging Adulthoodity and Meaning of Work in the Transition of the University-Market", some relevant data:

> According to the Institute, in the first quarter of 2020, the increase in unemployment affected more strongly the young population, reaching 27.1% among young people aged between 18 and 24 years, being more affected the group that has less education. It should also be considered that about 54.8 million Brazilians live in the poverty line and have family income per person, equivalent to R$ 406.00 per month. With this, it can be concluded that a large part of the young population is among the Brazilians who live in the poverty line, affecting the way this group experiences the transition process to adulthood (Souto, 2020, p. 63)

Given the data, it is important to understand how young people in emerging adulthood attribute meanings to work, since labor activity plays a central role in social and human life. Nowadays, the labor market is more demanding of professional qualification, valuing concrete experiences and technical and social skills. In this sense, to be able to at least enter the labor market, the young person starts to invest more in the continuity of studies, and / or is linked to said underemployments, or temporary jobs, in order to acquire professional experience while improving. The succession of employment bonds and even the experience of unemployment prolong the passage of the emerging adulthood period, due to delaying autonomy, financial stability, execution of more concrete projects and the achievement of personal fulfillment. It is considered a scenario of profound social changes that marked the last decades, such as the rise of women in the labor market, the growth of their own enterprises, the new family configurations, the choice of getting married later, and having children closer to 30 years or not having them, the advancement of technology, and the massive search for something that brings meaning and purpose of life. Zygmunt Bauman, when it characterizes contemporaneity as a space of insecurity and precariousness. In his analysis of liquid modernity, he states that "nothing is done to last" and that, in a world marked by the fluidity of relationships, identities and bonds, the subject finds it difficult to sustain stable life projects (Bauman, 2001). Recent literature has also highlighted the impact of social networks in this period. The curation of self-images, the performativity of happiness and the consumption of successful narratives generate constant social comparison, feeding feelings of inadequacy.

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From the existential point of view, this intense social comparison can reinforce the alienation of oneself, moving the young person away from his lived experience and projecting it in external expectations. This conception helps to understand why many young people report a feeling of stagnation or delay. In this transition scenario, anguish appears as a legitimate manifestation of the subject's confrontation with its possibilities and uncertainties. National surveys point to an increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms in this period. Dutra-Thomé and Koller (2017) report that emerging adulthood is the moment of the life cycle with the highest incidence of emotional suffering, as a result of the interaction between external pressures and internal needs of identity definition. It is common for young people in emerging adulthood to report: fear of choosing the wrong path; feeling that "everyone already knows what they are doing, except me"; experience of inadequacy before social comparisons; doubt about the legitimacy of their own desires. Psychological suffering, therefore, is not a mere clinical symptom, but existential expression in the face of a world that requires constant definition, while the young person lives the experience of between-places. Recognizing this unique temporality becomes fundamental for a more humanized understanding of emerging adulthood.

Will to meaning and the existential vacuum in emerging adulthood: an approach based on Frankl's Logotherapy and Existential Analysis

In order to broaden the discussions about emerging adulthood, we seek to understand the challenges experienced in this period of development by integrating the concepts of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis proposed by Viktor Frankl, being part of the same theory. According to Frankl (1987), Logotherapy is, in fact, a meaning-centered psychotherapy. The vision of being human in logotherapy crosses the biopsychosocial understanding, going beyond the existence itself, in order to understand how the subject experiences and appropriates this existence, how it responds to the events and what the meanings attributed by him. For this, the following concepts are considered: Meaning and Existential Empty (Frankl, 1987).

Considering the context of the emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett, it recalls the perception of multiple possibilities, about which it points out:

> During adulthood, individuals have an exceptionally large range of possibilities to make their own decisions. Eventually, almost all emerging adults will take on new long-term commitments in love and work. Once established, these new commitments will put them in more resistant ways to change, which may remain throughout the rest of their lives. However, as long as the emerging adulthood lasts, they will have the opportunity to transform their lives in deep ways [free translation] (Arnett, 2014, p. 30)

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In the perspective of logotherapy, the emerging adult can be considered as the protagonist of his own existence, even when faced with elements and situations of life that he cannot control or choose, has freedom, responsibility and conscience to position himself in the face of contemporary challenges and direct his own existence. On the Will of Meaning, it can be defined as the most basic effort of man in the direction of finding and realizing meanings and purposes (Frankl, 2011 apud Lima et al, 2020). Although the trend is to pathologize the experiences of undefinition, anguish and ambivalence of young people in emerging adulthood, the existential perspective recognizes them as fundamental aspects of meaning construction. Viktor Frankl (2021) When discussing the concept of will to meaning, it defines it as a driving spring, which would lead the subject to seek, through his own consciousness, a purpose, a meaning for life, which is intransferable, since it comes from each consciousness in a unique way. It is considered that the will to meaning in emerging adulthood is not exclusively related to the pursuit of socially established objectives, such as the conclusion of studies, professional stability, financial independence or the constitution of a family. Although these achievements may represent significant sources of satisfaction, the meaning of life is not restricted to the fulfillment of external expectations. It is a singular construction, related to the way each individual responds to the possibilities that are presented throughout its existence.

On the other hand, when the will to meaning is not realized, a sense of futility is generated, which Frankl (1987) It calls existential frustration. However, there is a distinction between making a sense and thus achieving self-fulfillment and personal satisfaction, and the worrying and incessant search for self-realization as an end in itself, without meaning as an anchor.

> Like happiness, self-realization appears as an effect, that is, the result of the focus of a goal. Only when man fulfills a meaning outside, in the world, will he realize himself. If it starts to realize itself, instead of filling in a sense, self-realization loses, immediately, its reason to be (Frankl, 2021, p. 63).

Existential frustration can be experienced by the subject in a deeper proportion, in which there is the presence of existential boredom, absence of meaning, and conformism in the face of external expectations, being away from its authentic possibilities. To this condition, Frankl calls Existential Void. According to Frankl (2021) This emptiness is the result of the frustration of the will to meaning, a fundamental tendency of the human being, and manifests itself as apathy, boredom, lack of direction and persistent feeling of inutility.

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> If we ask ourselves what produces the existential vacuum and what may have caused it, we have the following explanation: unlike animals, it is not the instincts and the impulses that tell the human being what he has to do. And, contrary to what happened in the past, traditions also do not tell him what to do anymore. Without knowing what is imperative to do and without knowing what to do, he does not know what he wants anymore. And what is the consequence? Either he wants only what others do, and this is conformism, or the opposite: he only does what others want - want him. (Frankl, 2016 apud Lima et al., 2020 p. 10)

Frankl (2021), identifies three structural roots: loss of instincts; loss of traditions; and excess of unoriented freedom. Instincts are related to solid traditions from ancient times, which guided the behavior, moral and existential orientation of the subject. In modernity, there is a completely different philosophy of life, which seeks to break with the old conceptions and create new concepts, new ways of seeing the world.

> This does not mean that our contemporaries are guided only by their own imagination and resolution and are free to build their way of life from scratch and according to their will, or that they are no longer dependent on society to obtain the plants and construction materials. But it means that we are moving from an era of "reference groups" predetermined to another of "universal comparison" (Bauman, 2001, p. 11)

It is, therefore, a society that values freedom, but without solid bases that guide it. According to Frankl (2010 apud Soares & Andrade, 2025), the man does not have any instinct that tells him what to be, and there is no more tradition that indicates what should be. He only wants what others do or do what others expect from him. As a result, the subject experiences the intensification of responsibility for his own life, and instead of authentic freedom, an anguished freedom emerges, marked by the excess of possibilities and the absence of criteria to order them (Soares & Andrade, 2025). Existential frustration and existential vacuum itself are not considered pathological phenomena, but may affect a deeper condition of being, triggering noogenic neuroses, characterized by conflicts in the spiritual sphere, implying ethical and moral conflicts, which can manifest pathological reactions (Frankl, 2021). Dialogue with this perspective, on young people in emerging adulthood, the responsibility for their own successes and failures, uncertainties, risks and frustrations regarding the expectations of carrying out their life projects is concentrated. This public is affected by high levels of depression, anxiety and substance abuse in the context of uncertainty, demands, expectations and frustrations (Guimarães, 2006; Pereira, 2019 apud Souto, 2020). From these findings, we seek to understand that suffering is not on the surface of the symptoms presented, but in the lack of meaning that supports the existence.

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RCMOS – Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O Saber. ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo-SP.

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Self-transcendence and its implications for understanding and clinical practice with emerging adults

Self-transcendence is one of the fundamental concepts of Frankl's Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, expressing the human ability to be guided beyond himself, towards the realization of a sense that supports him, concretization of values, construction of bonds and projects by which he dedicates himself. For Frankl (2021), the human existence is not accomplished exclusively by the introspection or the search for personal satisfaction, but by the opening to the world and by the direction to something or someone that transcends the individual himself. In this sense, the human being finds possibilities of meaning not only by asking what he expects from life, but by recognizing and responding to what life presents.

This conception becomes particularly relevant when articulated to the emerging adulthood, a period in which the construction of identity and the exploration of possibilities often occupy a central place in the experience of young people. Although self-discovery is an important dimension of development, an orientation exclusively centered on itself, achieving self-realization as an end in itself or meeting social expectations to the detriment of a sense of its own, can intensify the feeling of insufficiency when such goals are not achieved. Frankl (2015 apud Soares & Andrade, 2025) describes that the human tendency to leave oneself is the foundation of emotional and spiritual health. When this capacity is blocked, symptoms such as apathy, stagnation, compulsion and aggressiveness appear. According to Frankl (2010 apud Soares & Andrade, 2025) Man is only realized insofar as he forgets himself, dedicating himself to a cause or someone, although he does not represent the abandonment of himself, the disregard of his own needs or the submission to external demands, but a fundamental possibility of human existence to be directed to something that exceeds the exclusively self-centered concern.

In the clinical field, this understanding offers contributions to a psychological practice with young people in emerging adulthood that is not limited to the identification and reduction of symptoms, but also considers the existential issues present in this period. Favoring the reflection on choices, expectations, values, responsibilities, bonds and projects, seeking to understand how the subject attributes meaning to their experiences and what possibilities of meaning recognizes or ceased to recognize in their trajectory.

The perspective of Logotherapy thus allows us to understand the patient not only from its limitations, but also from its potentialities and the ability to position itself in the face of circumstances. Soares & Andrade (2025), through simulated case studies, demonstrated that

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self-transcendence works as a central therapeutic axis, addressing dereflection, as a technique that redirects the attention of the saturated self to a task, person or value. By shifting attention to something that transcends the individual himself, internal space is opened for consciousness to rediscover freedom and recover the responsiveness.

Therefore, self-transcendence presents itself as a relevant contribution to the understanding of emerging adulthood, especially when this period is crossed by uncertainties, charges and difficulties in recognizing meaning in its own existence. When considering the ability to direct itself beyond itself, Logotherapy and Existential Analysis enables an understanding of adult development that is not restricted to the consolidation of an identity or to the achievement of social expectations, but contemplates the realization of singular meanings through values, relationships, tasks and positions before life. For clinical practice, this perspective favors a look that recognizes suffering, without reducing the subject to it, and that considers the possibility of building meaning as an important dimension of human existence.

Final considerations

The present study aimed to investigate how the concept of self-transcendence, from the perspective of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis of Viktor Frankl, can contribute to the clinical understanding of the existential vacuum and the construction of meaning of life by young people in emerging adulthood. From the articulation between the theoretical references discussed, it was possible to understand that this period of human development, although marked by possibilities of exploration, identity construction and autonomy, can also be crossed by instabilities, conflicts, expectations and questions about the future and the place itself in the world. In the Brazilian context, these experiences assume particularities in the face of social inequalities, the demands of professional insertion and the different conditions of access to autonomy and the realization of personal projects. Thus, it is essential to recognize that the process of becoming an adult does not occur in a linear, homogeneous or independent way of the concrete conditions of existence.

The articulation with Bauman's perspective made it possible to reflect on how the fluidity of relationships, the instability of projects and the valorization of performance in contemporary times cross the experience of young people. The constant need to meet expectations of success, stability, personal and professional achievement can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and social comparison. In this scenario, emerging adulthood can be experienced not only as a period of freedom and possibilities, but also as a stage

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permeated by anxieties in the face of the need to choose, take responsibility and build paths in the midst of increasingly unstable references.

In the light of logotherapy, when the subject encounters difficulties to recognize or realize meanings in his life, he can experience existential frustration and, in a deeper way, the existential vacuum, characterized by feelings of lack of direction, purpose and meaning. In this sense, the existential vacuum should not be understood automatically as a psychopathological condition, but as an experience that demands listening, understanding and attention to the singularity of the subject, considering its circumstances, values and its relationship with its own existence.

From these reflections, self-transcendence presents itself as a central concept to broaden the understanding of the existential challenges experienced in emerging adulthood. The possibility of directing itself beyond itself, dedicating itself to a person, cause, task, value or significant project, allows us to understand that human achievement is not limited to the pursuit of personal satisfaction, to the achievement of socially established goals or to the consolidation of an identity. It is about recognizing that meaning can be found in the opening to the world, in the established relationships and in the answers that the subject offers to the concrete situations of life, including in the face of circumstances that cannot be modified. However, it is necessary to recognize that self-transcendence does not represent a universal response to the existential vacuum. Thus, it is suggested the continuity of future studies in order to investigate the experiences of existential vacuum, the construction of meaning and the possibilities of self-transcendence among young Brazilians, as well as to deepen the contributions and applications of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis in the context of psychological clinical practice.

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