

RECREATING LIFE THROUGH CLOWN: A STUDY WITH SENIORS AT A SOCIAL CENTER IN PORTUGAL¹

Received on: December 09, 2023

Passed on: February 02, 2024

License: 

*Kleber José dos Santos*²
Universidade de Aveiro (UA)
Aveiro – Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6991-783X>

*Laís Duarte de Moraes*³
Universidade do Minho (UMinho)
Braga – Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0790-2106>

*Francisco Welligton de Sousa Barbosa Junior*⁴
Universidade de Aveiro (UA)
Aveiro – Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1513-236X>

*José Clerton de Oliveira Martins*⁵

¹ Article resulting from the Ph.D. thesis entitled “Clownear as a playful-creative experience that enhances senior’s life”, financed by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and defended at the Universidade de Aveiro.

² Ph.D. in Cultural Studies from the Universidade de Aveiro/Portugal. Master’s Degree in Dramar from Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa/Portugal. Bachelor’s Degree in Performing Arts from Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto/Brazil. OTIUM/Multidisciplinary Study Group on Leisure and Free Time of the Postgraduate Program in Psychology at Universidade de Fortaleza.

³ Master’s Degree in Psychology from Universidade do Minho/Portugal. Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology from Universidade de Fortaleza/Brazil. OTIUM/Multidisciplinary Study Group on Leisure and Free Time of the Postgraduate Program in Psychology at Universidade de Fortaleza.

⁴ Ph.D. student in Cultural Studies at Universidade de Aveiro/Portugal, with a Ph.D. Internship completed at the University of Lancaster/England. Master’s Degree in Literature from Universidade de Évora/Portugal and in Psychology from Universidade do Minho/Portugal. Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology from Universidade de Fortaleza. OTIUM/Multidisciplinary Study Group on Leisure and Free Time of the Postgraduate Program in Psychology at Universidade de Fortaleza. Center for Studies in Culture and Leisure, of the Center for Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the Universidade de Aveiro.

⁵ Ph.D. and Master’s Degree in Psychology from Universitat de Barcelona/UB (Catalunya/Spain). Post-doctorate (CAPES) in Leisure and Human Development carried out at Universidad de Deusto/UD (Basque Country/Spain). Post-doctorate in Cultural Studies carried out at Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal). Master’s Degree in Performing Arts from Escola Superior de Artes Célia Helena/Brazil. Bachelor’s Degree Degree in History and Psychology. Training in Energy Dynamics of the Psyche (IPCDEP-SP) and Integrative Psychology (CDH). Coordinator of OTIUM/Multidisciplinary Study Group on Leisure and Free Time of the Postgraduate Program in Psychology at Universidade de Fortaleza.

Universidade de Fortaleza (UNIFOR)
Fortaleza – CE – Brazil
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8229-0915>

RECREATING LIFE THROUGH CLOWN: A STUDY WITH SENIORS AT A SOCIAL CENTER IN PORTUGAL

ABSTRACT: This article aims to present part of an empirical investigation that aimed to: verify how a clown creation process applied to the elderly can contribute to well-being and quality of life. In this sense, guided by a qualitative approach, an action-research was carried out with a group of elderly residents in a center for the conviviality of the elderly in the city of Porto/Portugal. Thus, a set of activities was carried out with the elderly: relaxation activities; bodily activities; and body expression activities. This contributed to greater bodily vitality, acquisition of greater ease of movement, greater security in relation to one's own body, greater personal independence, and better breathing, interaction, creation, communication and bodily disinhibition. Thus, generating impacts on their well-being and improving the quality of life of the elderly in question.

KEYWORDS: Old age. Corporal activity. Well-being.

RECRIANDO A VIDA A PARTIR DO *CLOWN*: UM ESTUDO COM IDOSOS EM UM CENTRO DE CONVIVÊNCIA EM PORTUGAL

RESUMO: O presente artigo visa apresentar parte de uma investigação empírica que teve como objetivo: verificar de que forma um processo de criação do *clown* aplicado com idosos pode contribuir para o bem-estar e a vida com qualidade. Orientando-se com base em uma abordagem qualitativa, foi realizada uma pesquisa-ação com um grupo de idosos residentes em um centro para o convívio de idosos na cidade do Porto/Portugal. Desse modo, foi realizado um conjunto de atividades com os idosos: atividades de relaxamento; atividades corporais; e atividades de expressão corporal. O que contribuiu para uma maior vitalidade corporal, aquisição de uma maior desenvoltura dos movimentos, mais segurança em relação ao próprio corpo, mais independência pessoal, e uma melhor respiração, interação, criação, comunicação e desinibição corporal. Assim gerando impactos no seu bem-estar e para a melhoria da qualidade de vida dos idosos em questão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Velhice. Atividade corporal. Bem-estar.

Introduction

Nowadays, taking into account the increase in average life expectancy, old age has come to be seen as another stage of human development, which can be well

enjoyed, lived with autonomy, independence and in a very creative way, from the moment in which the possibility of aging well, with health and quality of life has become a reality for many countries and for individuals themselves.

There is a visible shift from an approach historically centered on genetic-biological aspects to a perspective that recognizes old age as a socially important and growing sector (CUENCA, 2017, 2018), as well as the tendency to review the stereotypes related thereto, which seeks to relate this stage of life to activity, learning, productivity, participation, new achievements, independence, autonomy, loving bonds and the possibility of a long, healthy life, with positive, satisfactory, enriching and happy experiences (CUENCA, 2018). If, until then, aging was synonymous with physical decline and disability, where inactivity, loneliness and emotional isolation prevailed (BARBOSA JUNIOR; BAPTISTA, 2018; CASTRO, 2017; MARTINS, 2017), old age has come to mean today the right time to seek knowledge, to create new skills, new habits, hobbies and practices of multiple activities, both physical, intellectual, social and cultural in nature, in which self-fulfilling, self-aware and self-transforming experiences are lived. What we think of as the case of leisure experiences at this stage of life (CUENCA, 2018), pleasurable and subjective experiences, lived by each person in a unique way and which, among other things, contribute to the awakening and development of powers, the feeling of fullness and new meanings for living (MARTINS, 2021; OLIVEIRA; LIMA; MARTINS, 2018).

This expectation about aging has been gaining emphasis in several areas of science and in many societies. However, achieving longevity and the realization of a growing elderly population in the coming decades will pose challenges to civil society, organizations and governments, requiring accountability, participation and engagement

from everyone. Because linked to this achievement there are still aspects that need to be unveiled and demystified, in order to provide this aging population with an excellent quality of life, not only from a biophysiological point of view, but also social and cultural, which are aspects entirely responsible for preserving the well-being and integrity of the human being.

Current studies point to a more optimistic view of old age. For example, the study by Lima, Moraes e Martins (2018), on practices that aim at the quality of life of elderly people in a day center; the reflections by Martins (2017) on possibilities of aging with quality; the study by Moraes, Barbosa Junior and Martins (2017), carried out with elderly people who live in a community in the coastal area of Ceará and in which they seek to perceive the activities that are satisfactory to them in their daily lives; and the reflections by Manuel Cuenca (2018), on possibilities of how to experience satisfactory aging.

However, discrimination and prejudice are still noticeable, which, related to negative aspects, such as physical and mental weakness and functional losses, reinforce feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, conditioning the elderly to situations of isolation and not living this stage of life in a full, expressive and pleasurable way (CASTRO, 2017; FILGUEIRA *et al.*, 2020). Elderly individuals continue to be evaluated as less productive, less safe, less stable, less capable of facing challenges, archaic in relation to technological advances and changes, conservative, inadequate, more prone to accidents and suffering from difficulties and limitations. According to Paz (2011), all these negative characteristics make the experience of old age a threat to the individual's self-esteem and well-being. These may be some of the reasons why many elderly people are led to give up on their dreams, their goals, their personal

projects, to isolate themselves, to adopt an anti-social lifestyle, to develop a solitary personality and to lose enthusiasm for moving forward with life, demonstrating, with all this, behaviors of frustration, resentment and helplessness.

In this sense, and knowing that Portugal is among the five European countries with the highest rates of lack of assistance, exclusion and violence against its elderly – according to a study carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO) and published in 2018 (DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS, 2018; EXPRESSO, 2018), and, at the same time, the one estimated to have the highest proportion of elderly people among the countries that make up Europe (DIAS; RODRIGUES, 2012), it is increasingly necessary to think about practices that can contribute to the well-being and quality of life of its elderly, contributing to the possibility of feeling supported in the current condition of their lives.

Knowing also that the clown creation processes allow a relationship with otherness (SANTOS, 2016), which can imply a

state of openness, freedom, generosity and vulnerability, extremely necessary to achieve the purity, naivety, fragility, spontaneity and joy of a clown, as well as the confrontation between the “mask” that hides the person of the subject and the essence of his own being (SANTOS, 2016, p.20).

This paper sought to verify how a clown creation process applied to the elderly can contribute to the well-being and quality of life of this population.

With this purpose, an intervention program entitled “Humor and Well-being in Seniors” was developed, implemented and carried out at the Bonfim Senior Citizens’ Center.⁶ (CCIB), in the city of Porto, Portugal. The challenge consisted of providing the elderly involved in the research with a space for inclusion, motivation, creation, fun, knowledge, reflection and humanization, as well as a space/time for resuming and

⁶ Opened in 1989, CCIB is a support home for the elderly population living in the parish of Bonfim, in the city of Porto, Portugal, which is divided into two areas: “Day Center” and “Community Center”. Both areas consist of a social response and the provision of a set of services that contribute to maintaining the well-being of the elderly in their socio-family environment.

recreating values considered essential and predictive for a successful old age, such as freedom, autonomy, self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-knowledge, self-expression and self-realization, where the psychophysical, social and cultural components encompass all domains of satisfaction and personal fulfillment.

Research Area: Cultural Studies

It is important to mention that this study had as its basic and developmental scope Cultural Studies, this epistemological tradition of the Human and Social Sciences, which, since its genesis, at the University of Birmingham/England, presents itself less as a discipline and more as an interdisciplinary intellectual domain, where different areas intersect, suggesting multiple possibilities of crossover - for example, psychology and theater, in the case of this study (BAPTISTA, 2009, 2021; BARKER; JANE, 2016; ESCOSTEGUY, 2010; HALL, 2016).

According to Baptista (2009, 2021) and Hall (2016), Cultural Studies is an intrinsically peculiar, interdisciplinary and political field of research, which offers space for research and reflection on different issues, moving through various thematic and theoretical fields.

This area of research, quite different from others that we know so well, also assumes as a premise for the development of its studies a questioning look on the part of the researcher, which presents as a guiding thread the contestation of socially constructed limits regarding the most diverse human realities and which seeks to shed light on a set of sociocultural issues that were once naturalized in order to intervene in them through the use of theoretical, methodological and stylistic paradigms of diverse

causes, always called upon from each reality investigated (BAPTISTA, 2009, 2021; BARKER; JANE, 2016; HALL, 2016).

It should be noted that, according to this interdisciplinary field (basic to the investigation in question), the realities under study must be investigated not from reductive perspectives in relation to the realities investigated. But rather, realities, from this interdisciplinary field, must be looked at and understood from a perspective that is always attentive and open to dialogues and to the possibilities of the unexpected, the unknown, the new, of what may emerge at each moment (SOUSA SANTOS, 2010).

Methodology

In this predominantly qualitative interdisciplinary reflection investigation of an artistic/social nature, the empirical research was configured based on the application of the action research method (THIOLENT, 1992), which gave shape and support, as pointed out, to the program “Humor and Well-being in Seniors”, carried out in an institution for the elderly located in the city of Porto/Portugal.

This methodology was chosen due to its practical orientation and flexibility, where research and action were brought together through the integration of planning, action, observation and reflection processes (FRANCO, 2005).

The favorable scope of action research also occurred for two reasons: first, the researcher was able to carry out an action with participatory, transformative and dialogical principles and practices, creating a link between the research and the social reality of the agents involved in the research; and second, the agents were able to play an active role in the reality of the observed contexts and say something about their experiences.

The “Humor and Well-being in Seniors” program took place between April and September 2014, totaling twenty-three (23) sessions, with a weekly frequency of 3 hours of activities, taking place every Tuesday of the aforementioned period, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

It should be noted that, as this is an investigation involving human beings, the necessary ethical procedures were followed. The research participants (the elderly participants in the group) were presented with purpose of the study, as well as the Free and Informed Consent Form, asking them for authorization to use photographs, ensuring that their identities would remain confidential, as well as the right and freedom to withdraw their consent at any time during the research.

Group Characterization

The program had the representative participation of sixteen (16) elderly women and no elderly men.⁷, all of whom attend the Centro de Convívio para Idosos do Bonfim (CCIB), are between 70 and 92 years old and functionally independent. Still regarding those enrolled in the program, there was a predominance of women aged between 70 and 79 years (56.25%), with between the 1st and 4th year of education (81.25%) and widows (87.50%). In other words, the most representative profile was women under 80 years of age, with basic education and widows.

⁷ According to the elderly women enrolled in the program, men generally show more interest in board games and table games: cards, dominoes, quinoa, checkers, ludo, chess, etc. Women, although they also enjoy these games, are more suited to manual and artistic activities, such as knitting, lace, embroidery, fabric painting, drawing, collage, choral singing, theater, dance, etc.

Results

Stillness: First Check

Although CCIB offers a range of activities for its visitors, it was observed that a good number of them, especially the older ones, spent a lot of time sitting, almost without doing anything, living what we think of as inactivity – in the sense of idleness – , thus suggesting the existence of an experience in which an expropriation of the present, an expropriation of time on the part of the elderly person, can occur. Which, according to a Hedeggerian interpretation, also calls for a dispossession of oneself. This is because, still from this perspective, there is no man without time; man is made in time; and time and man end up being considered one and the same thing (BAPTISTA, 2013).

According to Fonseca (2004), although stillness and rest are linked to later moments in life, the effects associated with inactivity can further accentuate the loss of functional capacity, in addition to leading to a decrease in physical performance and motor skills, thus generating processes such as lack of motivation and even social isolation. Adding to this observation, Berge (1975) points out that in old age the effects of inactivity can even threaten the gestural plane, that is, if the limbs and muscles remain inactive they lose their taste for movement and become inept. In other words, we have an idle body, whose experience of idleness seems to extend and penetrate from its temporal apprehension to physical dimensions and others, such as relationships with others.

It is important to highlight that such considerations presented, which range from limitations of gestures to social relationships, contribute to the development and reproduction of stigmatized discourses and perceptions about old age in our cultures,

such as those mentioned, which involve thinking of old age as a phase marked by illness, or even by the feeling of uselessness after retirement, this social milestone that indicates that “old age has arrived”. These are discourses that we internalize and that contribute to our perceptions about being elderly, as well as to the perceptions of the elderly themselves about themselves (BARBOSA JUNIOR; BAPTISTA, 2018; FILGUEIRA *et al.*, 2020; MARTINS, 2017; J. SANTOS, 2021; TEIXEIRA *et al.*, 2015; TEIXEIRA *et al.*, 2016).

Still with regard to inactivity, another verification was carried out through interviews with research participants when they were asked about their routines. According to the responses presented, in their homes, elderly women spend more time sitting and lying down than the other way around, as they feel weak, tired and sleepy. All this is due to illnesses, decreased physical vigor, slow movements, lack of flexibility, difficulty moving and reduced postural control. In their homes, elderly women are almost exclusively occupied with basic household tasks, such as: preparing food; cleaning the house; washing and ironing clothes. These tasks, according to them, were considered common and easy to perform, but which, over time, became increasingly difficult to perform.

As mentioned by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) (2012), the ability of elderly people to perform basic daily activities, even recreational ones, is closely related to their gestural capacity, that is, their individual ability to move and manipulate the environment in which they live. It is important that these capacities are stimulated and developed through regular physical activities, so that elderly people can remain active and independent in their homes for as long as possible.

In view of this observation, and given that bodily activities are also an ongoing part of clown creation processes, we sought to develop a set of practices focused on body work and body expression, duly adapted to the reality and physical and psychological needs of elderly women. The aim was to take the elderly women out of a “state of stillness” and move them to a “state of attitude and action”, developing moments in which playfulness, creation and free expression are conjectured. Moments that we could interpret as possibilities for leisure experiences, marked by the playful and creative dimensions Cuenca (2014).

Restoring Motor Autonomy

A set of activities aimed at preparing, raising awareness and sensitizing the body was prepared, such as: warming-up procedures, stretching, massage and body relaxation; postural integration and body mobility techniques, based on the perception of postures (body axes, correct posture), support bases, hip positioning, balance, weight transfer, correct way of walking, sitting, bending down and standing up.

According to Augusto Boal (1978), procedures such as warming up, stretching, massage and body relaxation, in addition to relaxing and stimulating muscles that are rarely used in daily routine, end up altering those habitual circumstances that mechanize the body, movements, sensitivity and even ideas.

- i. The main purpose of body warming is to increase body temperature in order to prevent injuries;
- ii. Stretching dynamics contribute to better flexibility and fluidity of movements⁸;
- iii. Massages are stimulating and produce a feeling of invigoration, as well as

⁸ For elderly people, stretching should be maintained for at least 60 seconds, gently, taking due care to avoid injuries.

relieving anxiety and tension caused by everyday stress;

- iv. Relaxation is a psychophysical process that promotes muscular and mental rest, producing a feeling of relief, lightness and well-being.

As this is a group of elderly and very vulnerable people, the researcher sought to develop the dynamics of warming up and stretching the body in a light, controlled manner, at low intensity, gradually and sufficiently, given that the movements of the elderly, in general, are slower, less precise, more hesitant and with a shorter reaction time.

It is important to note that the exercises proposed here sought at all times to create an atmosphere of well-being and non-obligation, in which the elderly felt intrinsically called upon not only to perform movements, but to experience their performance and enjoyment, to experience their feeling, their own body, that is, an experience in which they also felt that their autonomy was called upon. Which once again brings us back to these practices and their characteristics, which are central aspects of the leisure experience, such as the feeling of freedom, autonomy and autotelic, in a search for meaning in carrying out the activity itself (CUENCA, 2014, 2016; MARTINS, 2016, 2017, 2021). Here is an example of a group-oriented warming-up exercise:

- **Body warming-up:** to propose circular movements. One person goes to the center and produces a random sequence of movements, freely and spontaneously, seeking to explore all parts of the body. As the movements emerge, the other participants try to reproduce those same movements, imitating them.

During the warming-up and body stretching dynamics, it was possible to observe that the extent and time of the movements produced by the elderly women varied from person to person, even if they were in the same age group. During the exercises, some of them showed better physical fitness, while others demonstrated greater difficulties and physical limitations.

It was also noted that elderly women had difficulty remaining standing for longer than usual. However, the fact that they were sitting did not hinder, much less prevent, the development of body preparation work. Even on chairs, the elderly women were able to skillfully perform small exercises, such as: warming up the hands, arms and legs; warming up the neck, shoulders, wrists and ankles; stretching the spine, arms, legs and feet; free movements (such as stretching, according to their own needs); facial massage; breathing exercises; and body relaxation. All these procedures progressed progressively with each meeting and were applied whenever necessary, that is, before, during and even after the sessions. After all, the focus at this point in the investigation was to stimulate movement, so that the elderly women's body motor skills would be increased and strengthened.

During the sessions, the massage and body relaxation procedures were perceived as the conclusion of a set of body exercises. It was the moment of perception and absorption of all the experiences that occurred during physical training, that is, it was the full moment of encounter between the elderly women and themselves, a moment of internalization and self-recognition.

Massage procedures, as stated by Gil (2001), do not only involve a mechanical aspect, but also the opening of energy channels. This exchange of energy between two bodies, which occurs through physical contact, reduces tension and stress, which, in

addition to causing pain and muscle fatigue, end up reducing the ability to cope with day-to-day life. When these tensions are not released, they create pain, fatigue and discomfort beyond what is desirable.

Relaxation, as Berge (1975) points out, serves as a “purifying bath”, so that habitual tensions can be perceived and eliminated, promoting muscular and mental rest, producing a feeling of relief. Here are two exercises as an example:

- **Body Massage:** Participants form two lines, facing each other. Each of them massages the other's face: first with energetic, cross-shaped movements, over each eyebrow, on each side of the nose, on the chin, on the neck and over the shoulders. Then, gently, with circular movements, on the same points.
- **Body Relaxation:** Sitting on chairs. Relax your spine, shoulders, arms and hands. Relax your legs and feet. Close your eyes and empty your mind. Nasal breathing, filtering oxygen. Inhale gently, filling your lungs. Exhale gently, releasing the air through your mouth. Inhale and exhale.

Four elderly women said that the massage and relaxation sessions gave them a feeling of reduced body pain, rest for the mind, lightness and inner peace.

I feel really good, it's a feeling of lightness. How can I explain it?! It's a good feeling, it does me good (BP, 71 years old).

I'm really fat, aren't I? I can't do much anymore. The massage we've been doing here has helped me a lot, hasn't it? It helps to reduce body pain (AM, 70 years old).

I felt a very good relaxation. It was a moment of rest for my mind. And I learned some details that I had never realized (MJ, 70 years old).

I feel that relaxation touches people's souls, it's a very good thing, very good indeed. I felt a great inner peace (MM, 88 years old).

Figure 01: Facial Massage



Source: Research archive, 2016.

It is interesting to note that these discourses expressed by the elderly women participating in the research present characteristics that are also present in leisure experiences, specifically when experienced as a rest, whether by replacing one activity with another or by relaxing, thus contributing to the development of regenerative functions, generating both physical and psychological benefits (CUENCA; AMIGO, 2014; RHODEN, 2014).

However, it is worth noting that the development of such practices was also accompanied by some further difficulties. One of them, verified in the interview and during the activities, is dealing with postural patterns and limiting movements. According to the Pan American Health Organization (2012), postural instability and lack of mobility have always represented a major challenge for most elderly people. Inhibition in terms of postural control, lack of balance and decreased reflexes, for example, are some of the factors that become more evident with increasing age. Hence the frequent falls in old age, which end up triggering the vicious cycle of immobility.

Incorrect posture and lack of mobility can lead to deficits in small actions, such as: standing, getting up from a chair, walking, bending down to pick up an object, putting on clothes, carrying out any activity, among many other actions that an older person may perform in their daily lives. This decrease in the level of autonomy can cause the elderly to feel fragile, desolate, sad, frustrated and useless. However, the impairment of household activities, including tasks related to personal care, can be avoided or even reversed if the elderly individual remains involved in physical activity programs that provide exercises aimed at postural correction, joint mobility and muscle strength (OPAS, 2012; SQUIRE, 2005).

According to Bize and Vallier (1985), senescence is characterized as a process of impairment of the body's ability to adapt, which is associated with the process of decline and biological deterioration: deterioration of the bone system; accentuation of the dorsal curvature; decreased muscle tone; weakening of the knees; loss of mobility; loss of joint strength; emergence of degenerative lesions (arthrosis and osteoporosis); disturbances of balance in upright posture; slower and less secure gait; less precise and hesitant gestures.

In view of this reality, we sought to develop a set of integration and postural mobility techniques, based on the perception of postures (body axes, correct posture), support bases, hip placement, balance, rooting, weight transfer, correct way of walking, sitting, bending down and standing up. The purpose of this moment was to help the elderly women regain better balance in an upright posture; to help the elderly women develop greater dynamism and confidence when walking. Here are two exercises:

Postural Integration: Everyone standing/ feet parallel, towards the hips/ knees slightly bent/ hips in place/ divide the weight between both legs/ spine straight/ body stacked/

open the chest/ close the back/ jaw parallel to the ground/ look at the horizon/ shoulders relaxed/ arms loose and relaxed/ perceive the balance.

Body Mobility: Walk slowly/ step with your heel, soles of your feet, toes/ lift your feet off the ground/ do not press your feet on the ground/ do not slide your feet on the ground/ keep your spine straight/ jaw parallel to the ground/ transfer your weight from one leg to the other/ occupy empty spaces/ stop/ when changing direction, turn your head first, then your shoulders, torso and hips/ alternate rhythm/ slow, normal, fast/ stop/ walk.

Figure 02: Global Postural Reeducation



Source: Research archive, 2016.

During the physical activities, we also tried to set aside a few minutes for breathing exercises. Breathing exercises, namely, are an integral part and one of the key principles of any physical activity. Maintaining correct breathing is essential for restoring vital forces. Good breathing, according to Berge (1975), helps to relax muscles and control movements, as well as causing calm and a feeling of psychophysical well-being. Below is an exercise as example:

- **Breathing Exercise:** Sit comfortably/keep your spine straight/bring your chin

towards your chest/shoulders light and relaxed/feet parallel, apart and resting on the floor/arms loose and relaxed/place your hands on your ribs, so that your fingertips do not touch/close your eyes/thoracic breathing/inhale through your nose/fill your lungs with air/exhale through your mouth, gently/inhale again/exhale gently.

Warm-up, stretching, massage and body relaxation procedures, as well as postural integration techniques and breathing exercises, were applied in all sessions. All these activities met the needs of the elderly, such as: acquiring greater bodily vitality; acquiring greater ease of movement; acquiring greater security in relation to their own body; acquiring greater personal independence; acquiring greater self-confidence; and acquiring better breathing. Below are five comments:

Professor, do you realize that I am not using my walking stick when I do my exercises? I am more confident, including in my colleagues (AS, 75 years old).

I'm moving around more, sometimes I'm sitting for hours and it's not convenient (RR, 75 years old).

I think it's good to do these activities, these gymnastics that we do. Warming up is good for the muscles and the body, I really like what I'm learning (MC, 70 years old).

After I walk here I can lift my arms higher, I could no longer take the dishes out of the dishwasher to put them on the counter, each time it gets higher and I have difficulty. (...) This arm is already better than this one, it is more fixed, because we also need to do gymnastics (MS, 82 years old).

Here, once again, it is possible to notice characteristics and benefits of the proposed activities. Activities that appear to be lived as leisure experiences. And its results are also similar to those of leisure experiences, such as contact with one's own physical limitations, their constant challenge, overcoming them, and the development of a feeling of protagonism and autonomy, corroborating what Cuenca (2018) presents to us about the potential of leisure experiences in aging.

Body Expression Activities

During the process, we also sought to develop a set of body expression activities, oriented towards body awareness work, in the form of small perceptions, such as: body movements; affective movements; spaces and planes; rhythm and time; sensations and bodily states. According to Gil (2001), the work of bodily expression does not end with the body, it also opens outwards, that is, it is learning about oneself and the world. Therefore, we need to become aware of how important our body is, as it is a “living archive” that keeps records of all our experiences and wisdom, of everything we have seen, heard and felt throughout our lives.

Body expression, according to Pedrosa and Tavares (2009), is an organized activity, endowed not only with objectives that aim to develop sensitivity, imagination and creativity, but also communication. This communication occurs based on the relationship that is established between the subject and his own body, between the subject's body and the body of the other, as well as in relation to music, the environment and the world. All these relationships are what keep the subject in the world of perception (a being open in relation to the environment), whose manifestation occurs through perceptive processes, through sensitivity, through the field of feeling. These relationships emerge at the moment of spontaneity, at the moment when the subject acts with total freedom. That is, it is the ability to experience the environment in which this body is manifesting. This would be the moment of creative expression, from the perspective of dialogue and exchange, starting from the body itself, starting from movement.

The body expression exercises included the apprehension and physicalization of thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensations, needs and desires through the body, as well as

free improvisation: from the production of spontaneous and random movements (without thinking, without questioning, launching oneself into space); from the proposed relationships (body x music, body x object, body x space, body x body). All exercises involved interaction, creation, communication and bodily disinhibition, as also expressed from the creative and playful dimensions of leisure experiences (CUENCA, 2014).

- **Body Expression Exercise:** Mirror exercise (in pairs): individuals A and B stand facing each other. Individual A creates a sequence of movements based on the relationship established between his body and the proposed music, while individual B (image reflected in the mirror) tries to reproduce the same movements. At the supervisor's signal, the action is reversed.
- **Body Expression Exercise:** Find the photograph or sculpture of each feeling or state, such as: joy, sadness, anger, terror, pain, fear, laziness, etc. Move from one feeling to another automatically.

According to Berge (1975), body expression activities allow individuals to express their most hidden feelings, their most essential emotions, as well as connect their own body, communicate what they think and reconnect with nature and others. These attributes are similar to those that stand out in the case of leisure experiences (CUENCA, 2018; MARTINS, 2016; RHODEN, 2014).

Figure 03: Sculpture of a Feeling



Source: Research archive, 2016.

All body expression activities involved pleasant music and a bit of acting. Music, in this experiential context, was a fundamental element. As a sound stimulus integrated into movement, music boosted bodily expression, in order to incite and guide movement, evoke and release feelings and emotions, stimulate imagination and creation.

According to Berge (1975), the melodic and rhythmic dynamism of music is something that leads the individual to a total surrender of the body, which is essential to achieve gestural spontaneity, that is, free expression – which suggests another premise of leisure experiences, specifically their playful and creative dimensions (CUENCA; AMIGO, 2014).

Below it is provided the comment of one of the elderly women, noted in her logbook:

I think that the liberation of the body, the liberation of gestures, of movements, of everything, the sound of music, I don't know, is a liberation, a fantastic thing. (...) It is a necessary therapy for the body and especially for the mind, which I really like (MJ, 70 years old).

From the comment of the elderly woman in question, we can clearly observe these attributes of the experience of carrying out such activities, in which the feeling of

perceived freedom is evident, a certain enjoyment of the experience itself, in addition to a therapeutic component – as the participant herself highlights –, contributing to the feeling of regeneration of her body and mind, including for other perspectives on herself (CUENCA, 2014, 2016; CUENCA; AMIGO, 2014).

If we are even more concrete, and take the word “liberation” from the old woman’s own use to refer to her experience, we can infer that she is freeing herself, freeing herself from looks, from speeches, from possibilities that once rigidified her body and mind. She is freeing herself, acquiring a sense of power and autonomy over her own life, which was previously rigid (MORAES, Barbosa Junior and Martins, 2017; OLIVEIRA; LIMA; MARTINS, 2018).

Final Considerations

A progressive change in the behavior and body attitudes of the elderly women was noticeable throughout the process. The body stretching and muscle/joint warm-up procedures provided an improvement in the resistance capacity to withstand physical effort and fatigue during exercises, as well as an improvement in joint mobilization, resourcefulness, flexibility and range of movement. The joints, for example, seemed to have been released from the “knots” that had previously held them together. Massage and body relaxation procedures (the most appreciated by elderly women) helped to reduce tension, causing rest, calming and muscular relief, stimulating a feeling of invigoration and a sense of psychophysical well-being.

The postural integration techniques provided the elderly women with a safer base of support, a more correct body axis and better balance in an upright posture, which greatly contributed to them remaining standing for a much longer time than usual

during the practical course. As for the movement exercises, these led the elderly women to develop greater precision and dynamism in walking, which was now more correct, safer, with less effort and without the need for support. Increased action, body reflexes, awareness of vertical attitude and movements became almost automatic.

Satisfaction with their own performance and the results achieved served as motivation for the elderly women to participate, get involved and make an effort with each proposed exercise, in order to overcome the limitations and difficulties imposed by their own bodies. If at first they doubted that they were capable of carrying out the physical activities because, according to them, they felt old, sick, rusty, heavy, tired and lazy, practice proved the opposite. The elderly women, within their limits, in their own way and in their own time, remained potentially active and participatory, even though each exercise demanded commitment, time and physical effort. Not to mention that respect and care for one's own body became an increasingly constant concern, and motor autonomy an increasingly secure point of reference.

Body expression activities led the elderly women to improve the precision and fluidity of their movements (mainly of the arms), as well as to develop small perceptions, such as: rhythm, time, space, plans, sensations and bodily states.

We infer that personal freedom was the essential substrate that allowed the elderly to create and express themselves freely. This real experience of freedom (without demands, without responsibilities and without oppression) was what made expressive presence possible in its purest state. This verification occurred, above all, in those exercises in which the elderly women were instructed to physicalize feelings and emotions, whose actions were loaded with truthfulness, intentions, feelings and emotions, giving space to involvement, expression and creation.

It is interesting how the experiences in such activities seem, in the course of their experiences and the comments of the elderly women in question, to present points in common with some of the attributes of leisure experiences, which allows us to infer that in the case in question the experience of leisure and its benefits, whether explicitly or more discreetly, seems to emerge in the experiences of the elderly women in question throughout the exercises proposed in the investigation. This is configured as an experience of freedom and autonomy, creation and expression, as highlighted, and which thus contributes to experiences of well-being and re-appropriation of oneself and one's possibilities in old age, seeking to overcome one's own limits, thus contributing to human development at this stage of life.

We also concluded that the physical interventions developed during the “Humor and Well-being in Seniors” program, which are an ongoing part of the training and creation processes in clown practice, constituted an excellent means of providing independence and motor autonomy to the elderly, in addition to having contributed to the development of the cognitive, affective and social dimensions, which are closely interrelated with the feeling of satisfaction and personal fulfillment.

REFERENCES

BAPTISTA, M. M. Estudos Culturais: o que e como da investigação. **Carnets, Cultures littéraires: nouvelles performances et développement**, n. spécial, automne/hiver, p. 451-461, 2009.

BAPTISTA, M. M. Estudos Culturais portugueses: o legado de Stuart Hall. *In*: BAPTISTA, M. M.; BARBOSA JR, F. W. (Orgs.). **Cartografias dos Estudos Culturais em língua portuguesa: perspectivas, investigações e desafios**. Coimbra: Grácio Editor, 2021. p. 139-160.

BAPTISTA, M. M. Ócio, temporalidade e existência: uma leitura à luz da fenomenologia e hermenêutica heideggerianas. *In*: MARTINS, J. C.; BAPTISTA, M.

M. (Orgs.). **O ócio nas culturas contemporâneas: teorias e novas perspectivas em investigação.** Coimbra: Grácio Editor, 2013. p. 39-46.

BARBOSA JUNIOR, F. W. S.; BAPTISTA, M. M. R. T. Reflexões sobre a escrita como resistência aos discursos hegemônicos sobre a velhice. *In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; ROCHA, L. D. L. A. (Orgs.). No envelhecer, experimente viver: reflexões sobre experiências potencializadoras de vida nos tempos livres da velhice.* Curitiba: CRV, 2018. p. 89-124.

BARKER, C.; JANE, E. A. **Cultural studies: theory and practice.** Londres: Sage Publications, 2016.

BERGE, Y. **Viver o seu corpo.** Lisboa: Compedium, 1975.

BIZE, P. R.; VALLIER, C. **Uma vida nova: a terceira idade.** Lisboa: Editora Verbo, 1985.

BOAL, A. **Duzentos exercícios e jogos para o actor e o não actor, com ganas de dizer algo através do teatro.** Lisboa: Cooperativa de Acção Cultural SCARL, 1978.

CASTRO, B. P. L. Tornar-se velho. *In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; LOPES, M. R. R. (Orgs.). Envelhecer: tempo de (re)criar a vida.* Curitiba: CRV, 2017. p. 19-44.

CUENCA, M. C. Ocio Valioso. **Documentos de Estudios de Ocio**, n. 52. Bilbao: Universidad de Deusto, 2014.

CUENCA, M. C. O ócio autotélico. **Revista do Centro de Pesquisa e Formação – SESC**, n.2, p. 10-28, 2016.

CUENCA, M. C. Posfácio: potencialidades do ócio para o desenvolvimento humano e sustentabilidade ao longo da vida. *In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; LOPES, M. R. R. (Orgs.). Envelhecer: tempo de (re)criar a vida.* Curitiba: CRV, 2017. p.165-185.

CUENCA, M. C. **Ocio valioso para un envejecimiento activo y satisfactorio.** Madrid: Editorial CCS, 2018.

CUENCA, M. C.; AMIGO, M. C. O encontro entre o ócio e a cultura: reflexões sobre o ócio criativo desde a investigação empírica. *In: BAPTISTA, M. M.; VENTURA, A. (Orgs.). Do ócio: debates no contexto cultural contemporâneo.* Coimbra: Grácio Editor, 2014. p. 5-32.

DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS. **OMS. Portugal é um dos cinco países da Europa que pior trata os idosos.** Data de publicação: 28 de fevereiro de 2018. Available at: <https://www.dn.pt/portugal/interior/portugal-esta-nos-cinco-paises-da-europa-que-pior-trata-os-idosos-estudo-9139937.html>. Accessed on March 08, 2018.

DIAS, I.; RODRIGUES, E. Demografia e sociologia do envelhecimento. *In: PAÚL, C. C.; RIBEIRO, O. (Coords.). Manual de Gerontologia: aspectos biocomportamentais, psicológicos e sociais do envelhecimento.* Lisboa: Lidel, 2012. p. 179-201.

EXPRESSO. (2018): **Portugal está nos cinco países da Europa que pior tratam os idosos.** Data de publicação: 23 de fevereiro de 2018. Available at: <http://expresso.sapo.pt/sociedade/2018-02-23-Portugal-esta-nos-cinco-paises-da-Europa-que-pior-trata-os-idosos#gs.XJwcDV0>. Accessed on March 08, 2018.

ESCOSTEGUY, A. C: D. **Cartografia dos Estudos Culturais: uma versão latino/americana.** Ed. on-line. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2010.

FILGUEIRA, L. M. A.; BRILHANTE, A. V. M.; MORAES, L. D.; LIMA, P. P. C.; MARTINS, J. C. O. A dança como recurso terapêutico para a melhoria da saúde de idosas institucionalizadas da cidade de Fortaleza-Ce. **Investigação Qualitativa em Saúde, Avanços e Desafios**, v.3, p. 212-225, 2020.

FONSECA, A. M. G. **Uma abordagem psicológica da “passagem à reforma” – desenvolvimento, envelhecimento, transição e adaptação.** 2004. Tese (Doutorado em Ciências Biomédicas) - Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas de Abel Salazar, Universidade do Porto, Porto, 2004.

FRANCO, M. A. S. Pedagogia da Pesquisa-Ação. **Educação e Pesquisa**, v.31, n.3, p. 483-502, 2005.

GIL, J. **Movimento total: o corpo e a dança.** Sta. Maria da Feira: Relógio D'Água Editores, 2001.

HALL, S. **Cultural Studies 1983: a theoretical history.** In: SLACK, J. D.; GROSSBERG, L. (Eds.). Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

LIMA, P. P. C.; MORAES, L. D.; MARTINS, J. C. O. As experiências de idosos em um centro-dia. In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; ROCHA, L. D. L. A. (Orgs.). **No envelhecer, experimente viver: reflexões sobre experiências potencializadoras de vida nos tempos livres da velhice.** Curitiba: CRV, 2018. p. 125-152.

MARTINS, J. C. O. Lazeres e tempos livres, entre os ócios desejados e os negócios necessários. **Revista do Centro de Pesquisa e Formação - SESC**, n.2, p. 51-58, 2016.

MARTINS, J. C. O. O envelhecimento é agora e enquanto vida for. In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; LOPES, M. R. R. (Orgs.). **Envelhecer: tempo de (re)criar a vida.** Curitiba: CRV, 2017. p. 9-15.

MARTINS, J. C. O. Ócio: Reflexões a partir do isolamento social. In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; LINS, C. F. M.; BARBOSA JUNIOR, F. W. S. (Orgs.). **Ensaios da Pandemia: o isolamento social entre caos e recriação da vida.** Curitiba: Appris, 2021. p. 215-232.

MORAES, L. D.; BARBOSA JUNIOR, F. W. S.; MARTINS, J. C. O. Experiências potencializadoras da vida de idosos da Prainha do Canto Verde – Ceará. In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; LOPES, M. R. R. (Orgs.). **Envelhecer: tempo de (re)criar a vida.** Curitiba: CRV, 2017. p. 105-134.

OLIVEIRA, V. N.; LIMA, A. C. F. B.; MARTINS, J. C. O. Experimentar é dar sentido: sobre as experiências potencializadoras da vida. In: MARTINS, J. C. O.; ROCHA, L.

D. L. A. (Orgs.). **No envelhecer, experimente viver:** reflexões sobre experiências potencializadoras de vida nos tempos livres da velhice. Curitiba: CRV, 2018. p. 13-38.

ORGANIZAÇÃO PAN-AMERICANA DA SAÚDE (OPAS). **Atenção à saúde do idoso:** aspectos conceituais. Brasília: Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde, 2012.

PAZ, J. F. L. El proceso de envejecimiento, especialmente en las personas mayores, dinamizado por valores asociados al encuentro intergeneracional. **Revista mal-estar e subjetividade**, v.11, n.1, p. 13-38, 2011.

PEDROSA, M. R.; TAVARES, H. M. Expressão corporal e educação: elos de conhecimento. **Revista da Católica**, v.1, n.2, p. 198-206, 2009.

RHODEN, I. Atributos das experiências de ócio e implicações contraditórias decorrentes do estilo de vida contemporâneo. *In*: BAPTISTA, M. M.; VENTURA, A. (Orgs.). **Do ócio:** debates no contexto cultural contemporâneo. Coimbra: Grácio Editor, 2014. p. 63-74.

SANTOS, K. J. dos. **O “clownear” enquanto experiência lúdico-criativa potencializadora da vida na velhice.** Curitiba: CRV, 2021.

SANTOS, K. J. dos. **O “clownear” enquanto experiência lúdico-criativa potencializadora da vida na velhice.** 2016. Tese (Doutorado em Estudos Culturais) – Programa Doutoral em Estudos Culturais, Universidade de Aveiro/Universidade do Minho, Aveiro, 2016.

SOUSA SANTOS, B. **Um discurso sobre as ciências.** Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2010.

SQUIRE, A. **Saúde e bem-estar para pessoas idosas.** Lures: Lusociência - Edições técnicas e científicas, 2005.

TEIXEIRA, S.; MARINHO, F. X. S.; CINTRA JUNIOR, D. F.; MARTINS, J. C. O. Reflexões acerca do estigma do envelhecer na contemporaneidade. **Estudos interdisciplinares sobre o envelhecimento**, v.20, n.2, p. 503-515, 2015.

TEIXEIRA, S.; MARINHO, F. X. S.; VASCONCELOS, A. M. C.; MARTINS, J. C. O. Da velhice estigmatizada à dignidade na existência madura: novas perspectivas do envelhecer na contemporaneidade. **Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia**, v.16, n.2, p. 469-487, 2016.

THIOLLENT, M. **Metodologia da pesquisa-ação.** São Paulo: Cortez, 1992.

Address of the Authors:

Kleber José dos Santos

Email address: klaaskleberteatro@gmail.com

Laís Duarte de Moraes

Email address: laishinodalp@gmail.com

Francisco Welligton de Sousa Barbosa Junior

Email address: welligtonbjr@gmail.com

José Clerton de Oliveira Martins

Email address: jclertonmartins@gmail.com