

THE PROSPECTS OF THE AUTISTIC YOUTH REGARDING LEISURE: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

Received on: September 11, 2024

Passed on: February 06, 2025

License: 

*Jéssica Luisy Diniz Camilozi*¹

Universidade Líbano (FL)

São Paulo – SP – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5802-3936>

Ana Cláudia Porfírio Couto

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)

Belo Horizonte – MG – Brazil

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3457-0987>

ABSTRACT: This survey aims to identify the prospects of the autistic youth regarding leisure. For this purpose, it was carried out a qualitative and exploratory integrative review on the database: SciELO, CAPES, PePsic and BVS. The descriptors used were: (Autism OR Autism Spectrum Disorder OR ASD) and (Leisure). On the CAPES database was also used: Autism + Leisure. After the selection and organization based on pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, the corpus was constituted by 2 articles, all of them found on the BVS database. The studies approached the benefits of leisure for multidisciplinary interventions, introducing a perspective of leisure as a social control that disregards de re-elaboration of ableist and psychophobic values, aiming a social renovation towards the acceptance of the neurodiversity paradigm.

KEYWORDS: Leisure. Autism. Youth.

AS PERSPECTIVAS DAS JUVENTUDES AUTISTAS SOBRE O LAZER: UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

RESUMO: Este estudo teve como finalidade identificar as perspectivas das juventudes autistas sobre o lazer. Para tanto, foi realizada uma revisão integrativa qualitativa e exploratória, nas bases de dados: SciELO, CAPES, PePsic e BVS. Os descritores utilizados foram: (Autismo OR “Transtorno do Espectro Autista” OR TEA) AND (Lazer). Na CAPES também foi utilizado: Autismo + Lazer. Após a seleção e a organização a partir de critérios de inclusão e exclusão pré-definidos, o corpus foi constituído por 2 artigos, todos encontrados no portal BVS. Os estudos abordavam os

¹ She holds a degree in Psychology from Universidade Salgado de Oliveira (BH) (2023). Postgraduate degree in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Neuropsychology. She has experience in the field of psychology with an emphasis on cognitive-behavioral psychology, sociodrama/psychodrama, and (neuro)psychological assessment. Coordinator of the Neurodiversity Study Group. Facilitator of the support group for autistic adults: Suporte-a- Support for the Autism Spectrum.

benefícios do lazer para intervenções multiprofissionais, apresentando uma visão do lazer como controle social que desconsidera a reelaboração de valores capacitistas e psicofóbicos, objetivando uma reforma da sociedade em direção à aceitação do paradigma da neurodiversidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Lazer. Autismo. Juventudes.

Introduction

Leisure, according to Gomes (2023), had its semantic origin in the Latin term “*licere*”, meaning power and permission. Similarly, it comes from the 13th-century word “*lezer*”, meaning the lack of desire to work. Some authors argue that leisure emerged in Greco-Roman antiquity, while others trace it back to capitalist mercantilist urban-industrial societies, especially after the English Industrial Revolution. Generally, conceptions of what constitutes the beginning of leisure disregard the continuities and discontinuities in the construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of knowledge and practices within their contextual aspects.

Regarding the definition of the aforementioned concept, there is no consensus, and various theories attempt to explain it in their own way. The most studied theories are: leisure as the occupation of free time, as time free from obligations, as a subjective experience, and as culture and human need. In Brazilian studies, the conception of leisure as a dimension of culture and a human need prevails compared to other countries. From this perspective, leisure is understood in its historicity, in its mutable and localized narrative dynamics, and in its playful potential within social time and space. Play allows one to feel, create, elaborate, learn, and express cultural meanings. Playfulness transforms itself, allowing people to transform themselves in the relationships they establish and to modify or give new meaning to the world. Playful movement is reflective, critical, and political (Gomes, 2023). During leisure time,

therefore, we form and reshape who we are, who we want to be, and how we want to present ourselves. Nevertheless, the playful potential of leisure is not always achieved, and when it is, it can exacerbate unpleasant feelings and actions for those who experienced it. Like all dimensions of human life, it can be conformist, generating neediness, anger, sadness, and loneliness. Even more so in contemporary societies, where profit comes before the individual and their desires.

Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD is characterized by significant deficits in social communication and restricted and repetitive behavior patterns, with early onset, causing impairments in various contexts and areas of life. In this context, the deficits are not better explained by another condition, and there is a high genetic prevalence. Young people under 18 may exhibit aggression and regress in their development, although most manage to expand their socio-behavioral repertoire. This does not mean that most autistic people will be independent. On the contrary, a large proportion, based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders², will need help to maintain their daily life activities and support themselves financially. Similarly, the spectrum highlights the notion of diversity in the ways of being, existing, and presenting oneself as autistic. Within this spectrum, we find levels 1: needs support, 2: needs substantial support, and 3: needs very substantial support.

At level 1, the autistic person exhibits noticeable difficulties in social communication in the absence of assistance. Regarding restricted and repetitive behaviors, activities, and interests, these cause impairment in one or more contexts and affect independence.

² 5th edition with revised text.

At level 2, there are substantial and noticeable difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication and in socio-affective reciprocity. Regarding patterns of restricted and repetitive behaviors, activities, or interests; these cause harm in various contexts. They are frequent and apparent.

At level 3, regarding social communication, severe deficits are observed, and restricted and repetitive behaviors, activities, or interests cause harm in all contexts. A person with autism may present different levels of support in each diagnostic area of autism, which are: social communication and patterns of restricted and repetitive behaviors, activities, or interests. Levels of support can change throughout life (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Despite receiving criticism, the support levels are interesting because they remove the pathological and individualistic idea of mild, moderate, and severe autism; highlighting the importance of societies accommodating autistic people in their needs, difficulties, and strengths.

According to the neurodiversity paradigm and movement, championed by autistic youth and adults, autism is not a disorder, disease, or condition (Walker; Raymaker, 2021). It is a neurodivergence that is part of human existence, constituting an important identity of the autistic person. Neurodivergent individuals are those whose way of perceiving, feeling, and dealing with themselves, others, and the world is significantly different from the social standards advocated by the dominant culture as appropriate and adaptive. Other neurocognitive styles are neurodivergent. Examples of neurodivergences, in addition to autism, include: difficulties in socialization and learning (resulting in a medical diagnosis or not), bipolar disorder, ADHD³, schizophrenia, dyslexia, intellectual disability, giftedness/high abilities, and borderline

³ The neurodiversity paradigm suggests the concept of Kinetic Cognitive Style as a replacement for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). See more at: [10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw](https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw).

personality disorder. In contrast to neurodivergent individuals, there are neurotypical individuals. Neurotypical, as the name suggests, refers to someone with typical neurocognitive functioning, within what is considered healthy in a given culture and historical moment. It is observed that the neurodiversity paradigm and movement question the separation between “us and them” and reinforce how normality and mental health are social constructs that can be deconstructed and reconstructed at any time.

It is important to emphasize that the neurotypical concept is not the opposite of autistic, as is often used in scientific literature and common sense. To claim that those who are not autistic are neurotypical, according to Walker and Raymaker (2021), is the same as saying that non-black people are white. Another point to highlight is that the prefix “neuro” is not synonymous with brain or neurological, and it does not only consider genetic aspects, as many critics of the neurodiversity paradigm claim. “Neuro” comes from nerve, and nerves are present in all the mind-body functioning of human beings. A system that transcends dichotomies and encompasses political, social, cultural, ethnic, economic, and religious aspects.

In line with the neurodiversity paradigm and movement, this work will not use the terms disorder, condition, or ASD. The terms “person with autism” or “person with ASD” are not well accepted by the paradigm and movement, either. Similarly, expressions such as “people with homosexuality” (Walker; Raymaker, 2021) and “people with blackness” are not accepted. It should be added that the neurodiversity paradigm does not deny the harm and suffering of neurodivergent people, nor does it fight against diagnoses and multidisciplinary interventions. What happens is a redirection, a new critical and ethical way of thinking about these concepts. The disorder and the treatment given to those diagnosed with it are not denied; rather, they

are rethought, and the importance of diagnosis and interdisciplinary follow-up is recognized.

In this liberating journey, active reflection emerges, in collaboration with autistic individuals, professionals, and family members, on the contexts in which the disorder occurs, its intersections, and its implications. This analysis examines permitted and prohibited interventions and denounces abuses of power and knowledge, relinquishing the privileged position of professionals in order to assert their right to develop interventions with autistic individuals. Simplistic, universalizing, static, and reductionist explanations of what constitutes a mental disorder and the appropriate treatment for those affected are discarded.

The neurodiversity paradigm aims for a polysemy of meanings and of life, and to maintain its flexibility, it is emphasized that the neurodivergent concept should not be used in a rigid and decontextualized way.

According to Groppo (2017a) and Groppo (2015), youth groups are plural and changeable. There are many ways to be young, and just like autism and leisure, being young involves different social determinants, intersections, and inherent characteristics. The concept of consubstantiality refers to the absence of overlap, priority, and primary contradiction of one social relationship over another. There are no separate claims. When a young autistic person makes their demands, they do so as a young autistic person, and not as a young person first and then as an autistic person. The claim comes from the person with all their social relationships and ever-changing identities. Sometimes it is necessary to distinguish these interrelationships, however, this is only possible through sociological analysis. Consubstantiality encompasses the shifting positions of power and historical determinism, while intersectionality posits fixed

relational positions and mobilizations within sectors (Kergoat, 2010). For this reason, this work will prioritize the concept of consubstantiality, which criticizes the naturalizing process of pre-defined identities, reinforcing labels for autistic youth, how they are and should be, framing their leisure practices within oppressive dominant devices and discourses.

Being young is not about being in essence, it's about existing and resisting in multiple, flexible, fluid, and reflective ways. Their socialization processes, in harmony with Groppo (2015), are reinterpreted as processes of subjectivation, where the subjects of youth are points of arrival and not of departure.

In these processes of subjectivation, being young encompasses having a sense of social and capital belonging, having a sexual orientation and gender identity, being part of the neurodiversity spectrum as neurotypical or neurodivergent, being a person with a disability (PwD) or not, having a race/ethnicity, and dealing with spirituality. Being young implies a number of other ways of being, existing, and presenting oneself. The social age category of youth does not exist in isolation; it constantly and dynamically interacts with other social categories. This idea of youth, in its changing and diverse forms, has not always been present. Structural-functionalist theories posited a single way of being young, based on biological and psychological factors. Critical theories have attempted to consider intersectionalities, whether of class and social belonging, or how one generation influences another, and therefore, how these intersections influence young people. However, they remained ignorant of other influences and possibilities, failing to engage in dialogue with each other and unable to break free from the predominance of biopsychological perspectives. In addition to not listening to the different young people and what they thought it meant to live their

youth. In post-critical theories, there is the current that follows postmodernism and post-structuralism, and there is the minority current, which proposes a restructuring of modern society. In general, post-critical theories are gaining more acceptance because they broaden debates based on what young people think about themselves, are active, are agents of change, and understand the different facets of youth as complementary rather than dichotomous. Brazilian youth are composed of young people aged 15 to 29 (Barão; Resengue; Leal, 2020). Therefore, this research will use this age range reference for the analysis of the articles.

Methodology

This study consists of a qualitative and exploratory integrative literature review research methodology. The integrative review aims to identify, synthesize, and analyze different studies, using different methodologies, on a specific topic (Souza, Silva and Carvalho, 2010). Furthermore, Mendes, Silveira and Galvão (2008) indicate that integrative review reveals gaps in knowledge about the specific topic investigated. To carry it out, it is necessary to determine the defined objective, formulate questions or hypotheses, and conduct the search to collect as many primary sources as possible, guided by the inclusion and exclusion criteria. After analyzing the methods and criteria of the studies, selecting those valid for the research and finally, interpreting, synthesizing and concluding the findings. An integrative review allows for the organized and systematic combination and summarization of results; however, it differs from systematic reviews in its scope of study, as it analyzes experimental and quasi-experimental, theoretical, and empirical studies. Furthermore, it synthesizes past research, (re)positioning a range of possibilities for future research. For its execution,

attention is paid to specifying the theme and hypothesis; defining criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies, searches or sampling; establishing the information that will be extracted from the studies; conducting the examination and interpretation of the included studies with subsequent presentation of the data (Cavalcante; Oliveira, 2020).

Along this path, based on the authors described, the integrative review becomes more laborious due to the varied quantity of articles to be interpreted, while at the same time requiring more in-depth (re)elaborations. This work is supplemented by a qualitative integrative review focused on the methodological analysis of the articles and resulting suggestions for possible theoretical revisions in the field of cultural studies of leisure, critical and post-critical studies of youth, and studies of the neurodiversity paradigm regarding autism.

Qualitative review, according to Creswell (2007), deepens the understanding of the reality being addressed. This type of analysis can be used to obtain results in a field of knowledge. The research covered in this work is a type of integrative qualitative review called meta-synthesis, which promotes the processual approach of qualitative review (Cavalcante; Oliveira, 2020). In this critical evaluation of the questions raised by the studies analyzed in their multiple, displaced, and dynamic aspects, it is essential to define the object of research, which in the case of this article is the production of knowledge about the concepts of leisure, youth, and autism in interrelation.

Continuing, the second stage of qualitative research is a broad search for research materials, aiming to understand and interpret ethically and critically the context of the concepts to be analyzed. In line with this phase, the third stage of the qualitative meta-synthesis review defines the types of documents to be evaluated, and the fourth

stage refers to the composition of the sample, one of the most difficult stages. Thus, the material with the greatest analytical potential is chosen, and this choice requires the use of techniques appropriate to the research objective, thus aiding thematic similarity and methodological comparability (Cavalcante; Oliveira, 2020).

The exploratory nature of the study, detailed here, is based on Mendes, Silveira and Galvão (2008), as this is a topic that is still in its early stages in the scientific literature, requiring the formulation of hypotheses. In exploratory research, the research questions are specific from the outset, and since this is an area still with significant gaps in theoretical contributions and practical implications in the scientific field, it is up to the researcher to highlight popular and scientific knowledge and lack of knowledge about the topic of interest, expressing the barriers to the manifestation of what different others and agents say, do, and resist (Piovesan; Temporini, 1995). Exploratory studies, like integrative qualitative studies, aim to correlate the individual parts of discourses with their motivating and derived discourses within a broad cultural, political, and social context, starting from what is known to maximize the meanings to be produced from there. Knowledge is interpreted as an affirmation of time and space, power and expertise. Therefore, based on the exploratory research, it is envisioned that the barriers to the values and actions of the research subjects can be overcome. Therefore, exploratory research questions should be formulated and re-formulated with the intended answers in mind. Our research is with them, not for them. It is research driven by emotion and encounters with subjectivities, which sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

In light of the above, to carry out the qualitative integrative review of the exploratory meta-synthesis type, the following descriptors were searched in the database

of SciELO⁴, CAPES⁵, Pepsic⁶ and BVS⁷: (Autism OR “Autism Spectrum Disorder” OR ASD) AND (Leisure). The following was also searched in the CAPES database: Autism + Leisure. The initial search, common to all databases, did not find any scientific articles in CAPES, PePsic, and SciELO. On the BVS portal, 100 articles were found. Of those 100, 4 articles were selected based on their title. Of the 4 articles, 1 was discarded based on the abstract, as it did not address the perspectives of autistic youth on leisure, and 1 was discarded after full reading because it only mentioned the concept of leisure in the title. With the second search, on CAPES, for Autism + Leisure, 11 articles appeared. 10 articles were discarded based on their titles. Option 1 was discarded by the abstract because it did not address autistic youth. The inclusion criteria were: a) articles that collect data on leisure directly from autistic youth; b) articles written in Portuguese, Spanish, or English; and c) articles that mention the concept of leisure in the title and body of the article. Exclusion criteria: a) being a review article; b) articles not available in full; and c) articles that do not mention any segment of the range from 15 to 29 years old⁸, or do not mention concepts of adolescence, youth/youths, or young person. The review was conducted between April and August 2024. The analysis of the articles utilized the concept of cultural leisure, critical and post-critical theories of youth, and the neurodiversity paradigm.

⁴ Scientific Eletronic Library Online. Available at: <https://search.scielo.org/advanced/?lang=pt>. Accessed on: April 18, 2024.

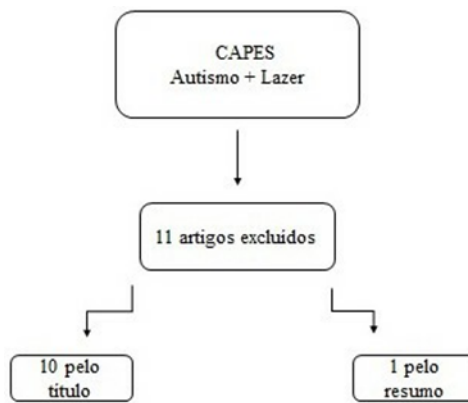
⁵Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br>. Accessed on: April 18, 2024.

⁶ Psychology Journals (PePsic). Available at: <https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/>. Accessed on: April 18, 2024.

⁷ Virtual Health Library (BVS). Available at: <https://bvsalud.org/>. Accessed on: April 18, 2024.

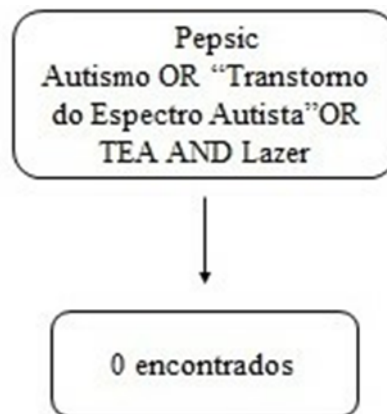
⁸ IBGE considers people between 15 and 24 years old to be young. In this article, however, the age category defined by the Brazilian Youth Statute will be considered, which considers people between 15 and 29 years old to be young.

Figure 1: Search data from CAPES



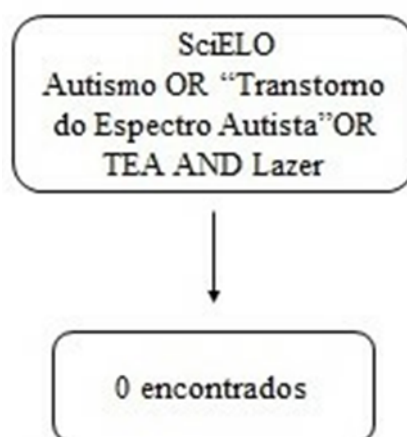
Source: the author.

Figure 2: Search data at Pepsi



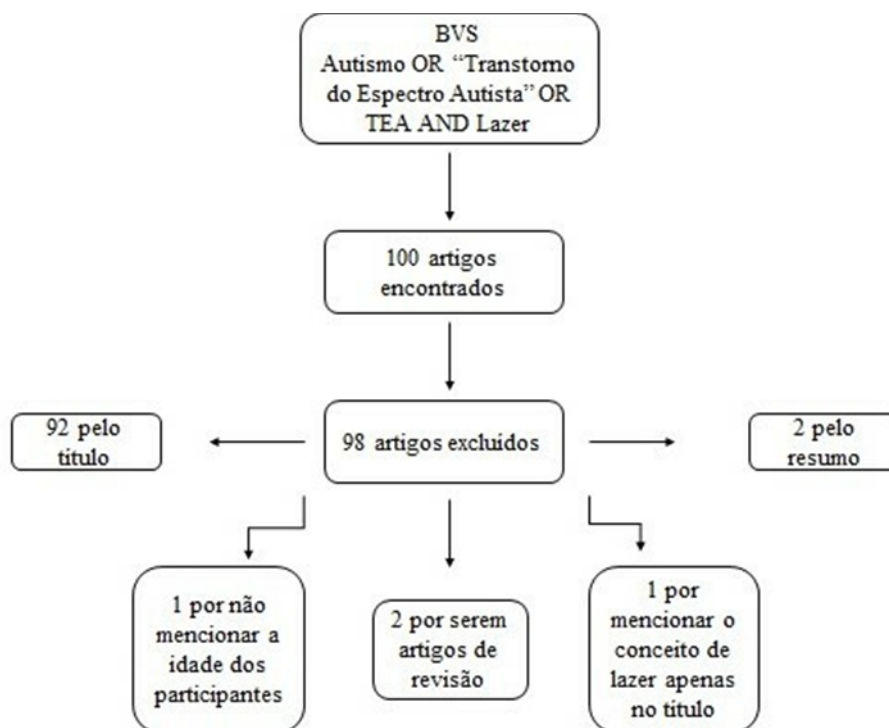
Source: the author.

Figure 3: Search data from SciELO



Source: the author

Figure 4: Search data on BV



Source: the author

Analysis and Discussion

The article “Restricted Interests and Autism: The article “Further Assessment of Preferences for a Variety of Leisure Items”, found on the third page of the BVS search, was included after a complete reading.

The methodology adopted in the article consisted of recruiting four young autistic men, under the age of eighteen, through a school for children and young people with disabilities. The school is not named. Criteria for participating in the study: low to moderate history of aggressive behavioral problems; history of being able to perform tasks at a desk for 10 minutes; history of scanning and selecting various items, confirmed by a clinician responsible for the case. Participants were selected for the study by their caregivers because they had a history of restricted toys and preferences for leisure items, and behavioral problems associated with being denied access to their preferred items. The school was consulted to determine the frequency and intensity of behavioral deficits, assessing whether the antecedents and consequences were consistent with those reported by parents or caregivers. The aim of the research was to ascertain: a) whether participants prefer non-replenished (familiar) game or leisure items, or frequently replenished items, b) whether participants who prefer replenished items select items with properties that match or do not match the preferred non-replenished item, and c) whether participants who show an exclusive preference for non-replenished items select replenished items during response restriction and replenishment increase in the set of manipulations. One participant selected non-replenished items without additional manipulation. The other three only selected leisure items that were replenished after additional manipulations. The study highlights that, under conditions of a varied range of potential reinforcers and with response restriction, a behavioral

repertoire of multiple interests is fostered in autistic individuals, which facilitates services based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA).

This article demonstrates the use of a quasi-experimental methodology and an appropriation of leisure as an intervention for the development of cognitive and behavioral flexibility. Leisure has a purpose and an interest, but it is questionable whether it truly constitutes leisure. A utilitarian approach to leisure activities for clinical and educational interventions that aim for a “cure” of autism, rather than focusing on the quality of life of the autistic person, who is autistic. Explanations of what leisure is, its importance, and what these young people think about leisure were not included. The article remained in the analysis of this review because it observed the behavior of autistic youth and, from that perspective, indirectly encompassed their viewpoints. The specific targets of analysis of these young people's interests can be constituted, based on Gomes (2023), as entertainment or recreation controlled by economic and political interests, equating programmed activities that maximize profits and not people. By promising fun, they distract the young autistic person from themselves. Therefore, young autistic individuals not only have their playful excitement inhibited, but also the development of their emancipatory self-awareness inhibited.

The inclusion of young autistic individuals with disruptive behaviors classified as mild to moderate, who can sit for at least 10 minutes while performing tasks and who are already accustomed to using electronic devices and selecting various items from them, raises the question of whether the goal is to find young people who can more easily and passively adapt to the leisure activities desired by the health institution. Those who don't conform to these standards have no chance, no place, no voice? What is leisure time like for young autistic individuals with behavioral patterns classified as

severely aggressive, who do not own electronic devices or who do not know how to use them or do not want to? They don't sit still for 10 minutes and their interests don't vary? The interaction of technological leisure, with its dangers and defenses, among autistic youth could also be explored in greater detail.

Based on what has been explained so far, the interests of autistic youth do not seem to be welcomed, but rather used as a mechanism for changing these young people. The desire is nullified, and therefore, the subject is nullified. Unsolicited and forced change, a change that places these young people in the position of spectators of their own lives and not protagonists of their own stories, presenting a pathological idea of autism. The neurodiversity paradigm and the motivation of the neurodivergent person, the pleasurable and potentially transformative aspects of restricted and repetitive interests, are not considered when analyzing the writings of Walker and Raymaker (2021). Autism is seen as a disorder that disrupts society. The societal norm that disrupts and deprives autistic individuals of leisure opportunities, aiming to make them “less autistic”, is not intentionally exposed; however, it does become apparent.

Based on Gomes (2023), the disinterested, synergistic, creative, revolutionary and spontaneous aspect of cultural leisure is disregarded. To what extent is the intervention aimed at helping young autistic individuals, and to what extent is it aimed at making them conformist and converting them to neurotypical tastes? Such a view is, at the very least, questionable. Health, work, sexuality, spirituality, and relationships are all important for well-being. However, little is said about leisure. Even more so for autistic people. Even less so for autistic youth. Young people with disabilities are significant in statistical data; however, they remain in a situation of social vulnerability, and their inclusion in studies and public policies is scarce. In this context, they are

presented as one of the youth groups that suffer the most prejudice and violence (Barão; Resengue; Leal, 2020). Thus, the young autistic person, who is a person with a disability, is deprived of investment in inclusive leisure activities, according to the law recognized by Rousseff, Fernandes & Belchior (2012). This is concerning, given that cultural leisure, in its fluid, critical nature and chosen by the individual, is essential for someone's well-being. Moreover, it is a human right.

The fact that the sample consists of young people under the age of eighteen, with less need for support, and of the male gender, limits the understanding of the diversity of leisure activities among different youth groups and the plurality of autism spectrum disorders. Therefore, the possibilities and difficulties of leisure in autistic youth were not explained, in line with Gomes (2023), in its playful potential for creation, combination, management, exaltation and modification of emotions. The difficulties in leisure activities, according to what is expected of young autistic individuals and their abilities, are captured, with aspects from previous generations being superimposed on the newer ones (Groppo, 2017b). Therefore, a scientific gap is identified regarding the active and flexible socialization argued by Groppo (2015), which circulates and allows older people and children to learn from young people, and young people to learn from adults, older people, and children about different perspectives on leisure, through which the wisdom and lack of knowledge of young people, children, and older people are reaffirmed in constructive dialogues.

In this regard, when examining the dissolution of forms of addressing the identities of young autistic individuals in intergenerational relationships, we recognize that the concept of identities is representative of the historical struggle of people with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals who advocate for neurodiversity. The use of

the concept of identities in this research considers the concept of fluid identity and the potential of thinking, feeling, and acting in metamorphoses, consubstantialities, in infinities of achievements, fragmentations, conflicts, surprises, affections, comings and goings. Fluid autistic identity that subverts, disrupts, and deviates from patterns of neurocognitive normality. This is what the concept of neuroqueering, or being neuroqueer, from the neurodiversity paradigm (Walker; Raymaker, 2021), reminds us of.

The perspective of neurodiversity and its articulation with practices of self-inclusion in environments, reducing biopsychosocial barriers and favoring the potential and possibilities of autistic identity processes in a decentralized and non-static way, helps in understanding that the analyzed article establishes a leisure without history, without color, without poetry, without celebration of difference itself and of the multiple truths about leisure in enjoyment. Leisure activities subjected to neuronormativity. In other words, it becomes subject to the systemic and structural standard of normality imposed on the mind-body duality, thus losing its allure in becoming. This concept contrasts with the findings of cultural leisure, demonstrating the relevance of symbolism and its assimilation in experiencing leisure, and for this process to occur, the relationship between the person, the environment, and the broader, complex cultural framework is desired. The relationship implies that all parties contribute with their perceptions and practices; there is exchange, there is resistance, there are continuous (re)elaborations with refutations to the hegemonic logic of leisure production/consumption (Gomes, 2023). In this article, the experiences of autistic youth, what they know, what they like, and what they can decide, are not placed on an equal footing with other systems. Thus, critical and post-critical theories of youth

provide us with elements to understand that this silencing of the knowledge and power of young people is historical and permeates the popular imagination of delinquent, senseless, and delinquent youth. At the same time, being young occupies a place of social desire, as if people wanted the part considered good about youth: the energy, the beauty, the opportunities, and wished to eliminate, at all costs, what they consider bad: the transition phase to adult stability and the difficulties due to this period of intense uncertainty. Young people are frequently in the spotlight: whether for social glory or disdain. Their lives revolve around power struggles and the resulting manipulations. When another marginalized biopsychosocial category, namely neurodivergent autistic individuals, is added to this category already vulnerable to popular imagination, the limitations imposed on “enjoying/discussing” cultural leisure are amplified.

Therefore, public policies that address the specific leisure needs of neurodivergent youth, especially autistic neurodivergent youth—who are the focus of this article—need to consider the differentiated mechanisms of socialization and social communication in this population, affecting interaction with peers; expression and affective reciprocity; sensory discomforts and fascinations; and impairments related to cognitive, affective, and behavioral rigidity. Likewise, it is argued that moments should be questioned that challenge absolute and unique logics about how young autistic people should (re)live or (re)do leisure, reworking the power-knowledge relations involved in such discourses and (re)actions that are circumscribed and historical.

It is important to highlight that advocating for leisure activities, as leisure for young autistic individuals, without clear therapeutic objectives and goals, does not disregard the importance of these therapies and their different approaches. It points to yet another path, another encounter and disagreement, another dialogue, another

possible endeavor alongside other possibilities. Similarly, it is recognized that each reality is unique and what works for one person does not work for another. The determinants and inherent characteristics of autistic youth and their families need to be considered in public leisure policies. Public policies that listen to the voices, the cries, the silences, the delights, and the revolts of autistic youth for themselves. Whether through verbal or nonverbal communication, whether through alternative and augmentative communication, or through someone else. The important thing is to welcome and validate what different autistic youth groups have to say about public leisure policies for and by them.

Regarding the experience of disinterested, free, and desirous leisure, it is understood that young autistic individuals, at support levels 2 and 3, with various differentiated health conditions coexisting with autism, with limited financial resources and social support, and who need more intensive multidisciplinary interventions; leisure practices separate from these therapies may be more unfeasible, and therefore, it is recommended to ensure that this young person has their leisure time guaranteed within their environment, considering these demands and difficulties. How do I do that? There are several answers to the same question. Because there are many of us. And no two questions are ever exactly the same. It transforms and reinvents itself according to the context.

One could consider, within the therapy sessions, having time for this young person to enjoy their interests without necessarily being tied to having done a “good job”, having “progressed”, and having “behaved well” during the sessions/consultations. Nor should it be associated with using interest as a way to connect with this young person with a defined therapeutic goal. Could it be leisure time

in itself? A time of rest because we want to rest and not because we are being rewarded? A time for “let's have fun together”? From this perspective, it is noted that leisure is inherent in human beings, and human beings are inherent in leisure. A person occupies different roles, places, dynamic identities, and parts of life. Consequently, leisure becomes intertwined and blended with all of this.

In short, the other article analyzed was “Leisure participation and satisfaction in autistic adults and neurotypical adults”, on the second page of the BVS portal. The methodology used in the research was an ecological study with a comparative cross-sectional design. The objective was to compare the type and frequency of leisure activities of autistic and non-autistic adults, as well as to identify and compare factors associated with their leisure satisfaction. To that end, data from the questionnaire was de-identified: Australian Longitudinal Study of Adults on the Autism Spectrum (ALSAA). ALSAA encompasses the mental and physical health functioning, productivity, social participation, and overall well-being of autistic adults and their caregivers. The research subjects consist of 249 participants. 145 autistic adults and 104 non-autistic adults living in Australia can read and write in English. The age range is 25 years and older. All autistic participants reported having a formal autism diagnosis from a mental health professional based on scientifically recognized diagnostic manuals used at the time. 16 participants, who do not have a formal diagnosis, were excluded from the study. 28 participants who were added are not included because they did not provide all the required information. The intellectual commitment of the participants is nonexistent or insignificant. The research indicates that there are more autistic women than autistic men. Participants with autism were recruited through the distribution of materials in autism-focused organizations, businesses serving people with disabilities and healthcare

services, healthcare professionals in Australia, Australian universities, and additional technical and educational facilities. Non-autistic participants were recruited through the same channels, with the addition of local newspapers, contacts with community groups, and league groups.

As a result, both non-autistic and autistic individuals prefer solitary leisure activities. However, autistic adults, including young adults, reported having a greater preference for this type of leisure and showed less satisfaction with leisure in general. Likewise, they seek more intellectual challenge, virtual stimulation, pleasure, and learning in leisure activities. Compared to non-autistic peers.

The article employs a quasi-experimental methodology and does not detail the concept of leisure adopted in the research; similarly, it does not specify the study for autistic youth. Their findings in this review are justified by the fact that they address a segment of young adults, aged 25 to 29. One step forward is to address research on leisure and its importance, to listen to some voices from autistic youth, and to address expressions of the neurodiversity paradigm, for example: “autistic” and “autistic people” instead of: “people with ASD” or “people with autism”. The concept of neurotypical, despite being presented as the opposite of autistic, which is a conceptual misconception—as explained in the introduction—is mentioned and shows adherence to the understanding of autism as a difference in minds and bodies. Another interesting aspect is that the research subjects are more autistic women than autistic men, considering that, as the American Psychiatric Association (2022) itself points out, women tend to go unnoticed in diagnostic and multidisciplinary intervention services because they manifest autism differently, often disguising autistic characteristics in

order to be accepted by established gender roles. Therefore, this paper is related to the reality of these young women is a way of denouncing their silencing and suffering.

When comparing young and older autistic adults with their non-autistic peers, it is possible to envision an understanding of both realities without judgment, aiming for a complementation of both functioning and encouraging harmonious coexistence between them. Or it could be a disguised hierarchical bias, in which neurotypical leisure practices are privileged and autistic ones are portrayed as inferior. The real reason for this comparison was not clear. One of the main purposes of this paper is to improve clinical interventions. Therefore, the benefits of leisure activities accrue to healthcare institutions and not to autistic youth.

The being, existence, and presentation of young adult autistic individuals, in their constant re-signification and transcendence of biopsychosocial determinants and consubstantialities, are limited to “us autistics” and “them neurotypicals”, which may corroborate neuroessentialism (Walker; Raymaker, 2021). Neuroessentialism emphasizes an adherence to autism as the total or overestimated and naturalized essence of a person, ultimately classifying them and prioritizing biopsychological aspects over social ones. From this perspective, the neuroqueering possibilities of autistic individuals are not limited to autism itself, but rather encompass coexistence, evocation, selection, and interaction with other varied and fluid identities, which manifest in different ways throughout life, along with their infinite neurocognitive potential; these possibilities are often overlooked.

Thus, critical and post-critical conceptions of youth, cultural leisure, and the neurodiversity paradigm call us to perceive autistic youth in their narratives, in their cases and chaos, in their lives that trigger their different existences. From what set of

conditions did the young autistic person emerge, and to what settlements and ruptures does he/she seek to move? What unequal languages is the researcher talking about? In what ways does engagement arise between the researcher and the research subjects? These activities, which are part of the leisure activities of autistic youth, may be further explored in future studies. Studies with practice, with more uncertainties than certainties, with text in context, with living life and characters, with writings that are in the streets, in the cities, in the homes and demonstrations of young autistic people...

Aspects of age were briefly discussed in the last detailed article, based on the observation that being younger led to more leisure activities and fewer depressive symptoms. However, the reasons for this evidence and the social dimension behind it were not mentioned. Being, appearing, and presenting oneself as young is not just about age, and when encountering different facets of youth in the unfolding of research, this understanding needs to be clarified.

According to Souza and Paiva (2012), there are common movements among different youth groups. These include: the pursuit of independence, leaving the parental home, finishing school and deciding what to do to enter the adult world, entering the job market, experiencing human sexuality in an active and intense way, frequent questioning and criticism, and the relentless search for self-knowledge. These aspects could have been included as influencing factors or not in the leisure experiences, in the study analyzed. Since the social desire of young people for fleeting groups with intense emotional involvement (Groppo, 2015) brings historical urgencies and possible deterritorializations for autistic youth, it can also contribute to the development of other research on public leisure policies.

Both articles fall short in valuing the individual within the collective and present a uniform and structural-functionalist view of what it means to be young, limiting the implementation of comprehensive public policies. For implementing public policies that manage health and leisure, as highlighted by Silva and Abrão (2022), it is important to (re)direct research and teaching through Continuing Education to the managers of SUS [Brazilian Universal Healthcare Program], achieving a broader understanding of leisure as a social right and its potential for health promotion in itself, without being a secondary experience resulting from health practices. With regard to autistic youth, this understanding is necessary because these young people are frequently in health services for the acquisition, development, and generalization of social communication skills and more flexible patterns of behavior, activities, and interests. Many of these young people also depend on the public services offered by the SUS (Brazilian Universal Healthcare Program). How will leisure be provided if, in the communities where these young people are most immersed, there is no understanding of what leisure is or its necessity in human life?

By providing ongoing and up-to-date education on how to implement satisfactory intergovernmental and intersectoral public policies for autistic youth, the importance of opening and maintaining interaction between these young people and other autistic youth, as well as with neurodivergent, non-autistic, and neurotypical youth, is emphasized. Encouraging and offering neurodiverse social and physical environments for autistic youth is valuable. Neurodiverse environments, paraphrasing Walker and Raymaker (2021), are those with people whose neuropsychological functioning differs significantly from one another, when we analyze the values of social and health standards fostered at a given historical-political moment. Depriving young

autistic individuals of neurodiverse leisure activities is to deprive them of the victories and challenges inherent in leisure itself.

Given that these are young people who need support for communication, cognitive and behavioral flexibility, emotional regulation, and activities of daily living, it is understood that in many cases leisure time will be spent with someone who offers the necessary safety and support to that individual. Therefore, it is essential to consider public leisure policies that validate the particularities of this support provider, who tends to be a family member. Sensory and time-space adaptations, activities, and ongoing training on the nuances of the autism spectrum in young people—which is scarce in studies—are possibilities to be considered in the implementation of public leisure policies.

One aspect to highlight is that young autistic individuals may have a relational interest in younger or older people, as pointed out by the American Association of Psychiatry (2022), and may have a preference for leisure activities and places considered to be for people of an older or younger age. Therefore, public leisure policies must aim to ensure that the desires and pleasures of young autistic individuals can be fulfilled in a humane and comfortable way for everyone involved.

In this context, the desire that drives leisure is stifled by data and its numbers, which fail to measure someone's excitement... And what is the young person's contextual perspective on their leisure time? The perspective free of questionnaires and beyond them? The perspective of fun, enjoyment, delight, boredom, tension, and relief that permeates the multiplicity of living and (dis)continuous leisure, which enchants and disenchant and transcends quantitative methodology, still leaves gaps. It failed to encompass the intentionality, planning, execution, and reliving of leisure through

affective memories. The articles left something to be desired regarding what motivates and paralyzes autistic youth to seek certain types of leisure activities and not others. Cultural leisure, as presented by Gomes (2023) as a powerful way of understanding, confronting, and reinterpreting democratic values, interpersonal skills, knowledge, memories, imagination, and self-esteem, is not analyzed in the studies above. In this context, it is necessary to connect cultural leisure with other spheres of life in order to understand the young autistic individual who lives with different identities, desires, advantages and disadvantages, urgencies, needs, and moments. The subject under construction who puts leisure under construction.

Table 1: Selected articles

Article/Authors	Country/Year	Purpose	Results
“Restricted interests and Autism: Further Assessment of Preferences for a Variety of Leisure Items” (Spear; Karsten and White)	United States/2017	To investigate how young, autistic participants with restricted and repetitive interests, who exhibit disruptive behaviors when denied access to their interests, cope with preferred leisure items not being replenished and new leisure items being replenished.	Most participants selected leisure items that were replenished only through manipulation.
“Leisure participation and satisfaction in autistic adults and neurotypical adults” (Stacey <i>et al.</i>)	Australia/2018	To compare the type and frequency of leisure activities of autistic and non-autistic adults.	Adults with autism, including young adults, reported a greater preference for leisure activities done alone and showed less overall satisfaction with leisure.

Source: the author.

Conclusion

The articles show what leisure is, not what leisure is like right now. Exploring leisure time, it reclaims it as in constant, unique interpositions that change all the time. The interest, too, doesn't seem to be in leisure itself, but in what it can add to one's life. The focus is primarily on the article “Restricted Interests and Autism: Further Assessment of Preferences for a Variety of Leisure Items”, which explores the neuronormative rewards of leisure. Qualitative research that understands discourses within their contexts and sentiments was also not identified. This finding may point to the utilitarian interest of leisure. Another aspect to highlight is that no article mentions the concept of youth or links it to leisure, pointing to its possibilities and difficulties as experienced by young autistic people. The theory adopted to explain it was also not made explicit, revealing a lack of interpretation of what the authors articulate as leisure. Furthermore, the neurodiversity paradigm and movement were not considered in the analyses of leisure activities for autistic youth in one of the articles. In the other case, there were uses of expressions adopted by the paradigm without an analysis of the data from a neurodiversity perspective. This finding points to a possible prevalence of the pathology paradigm in studies on leisure and autism, followed by a convenient appropriation of concepts from the neurodiversity paradigm, without a theoretical deepening and understanding of the meanings and signifiers involved in these concepts. It can be seen that the articles are recent: Between 2017 and 2019, this points to an emerging interest in leisure studies for autistic people, especially young people. Certainly, the lack of national articles addressing the topic reveals the Eurocentrism and colonization of knowledge about leisure, in which countries like Brazil adopt and repeat knowledge produced by European or Northern countries without conducting their own

emancipatory research (Gomes, 2023). Nevertheless, based on Barão, Resengue and Leal (2020), Brazil is one of the countries with the highest life expectancy for young people. This positions it as a promising field for public policies, in leisure activities, that contribute to the happiness of autistic youth. The authors just discussed reveal that, among the five leisure activities most engaged in by Brazilian youth, four are free: going to parks, attending parties at friends' houses, participating in religious services, and spending time in shopping centers. How does this finding apply to autistic youth? It is worthwhile to keep this in mind for future research focused on public leisure policies.

In addition to qualitative studies that delve into the leisure experiences of autistic youth, from their perspectives and emotions, experimental studies with random samples can contribute to the development of individualized instruments and intervention plans that identify the weaknesses and strengths of leisure in this population, as well as encourage assertive leisure practices for autistic youth that resonate with the meanings attributed to leisure by these youth. The meaningful and lasting leisure experiences of autistic youth require further studies and new research to fill the gap in leisure activities that are rethought and recounted as part of a new narrative, primarily guided by the theoretical paradigm of neurodiversity. And with that, to champion leisure that is not lost but transformed.

Studies that move towards social responsibility of equity and social justice, reducing ableism – Walker and Raymaker (2021) conceptualize it as prejudice or discrimination against people with disabilities and psychophobia - prejudice or discrimination against neurodivergent people (TJDFT, 2022). Analyses of critical and post-critical theories on being, existing, and presenting oneself as young, and the conceptualization of cultural leisure as a human need, can contribute to an integrative

perspective regarding the views of autistic youth on leisure, leading to the effective implementation of public policies for this group.

Future research is recommended to study public leisure policies for neurodivergent youth and their inherent characteristics, especially for neurodivergent autistic youth. Therefore, studies conducted by health and leisure professionals, including young autistic individuals, are promising for filling theoretical and practical gaps regarding the manifestation of leisure in autistic youth, amidst their routines of therapies and neuropsychological care.

It is interesting that future studies on leisure activities of/for/with autistic youth portray current problems, but also foster positive visions of better futures in which we can invest, exploring the lives, concerns, self-assessments, and leisure needs of young autistic individuals; without pathologizing the autism spectrum. Studies that explore public policies that activate and maintain the potential of neurodivergent autistic youth for self-realization and creativity in their cultural leisure activities. Public leisure policies that favor the triumph of these autistic youth over the limitations of rhetoric, communication, intentionality, and experience. Furthermore, public policies for cultural leisure should provide space for the enhancement of creative synergies that can emerge from the interrelationships and collaborations between neurodivergent autistic minds and bodies, as well as other neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals.

For a celebration of multiplied and intertwined intergenerational values and ideals, it is important that these public policies include autistic youth, non-autistic neurodivergent youth, and neurotypical youth—subjects with all the aforementioned neurocognitive performances, who are in different age categories. In short, it points to the revolutionary vigor of future studies in the fields of leisure as part of human culture

and needs towards neurocosmopolitan societies and humanities (Walker; Raymaker, 2021), which accept and appreciate the scope of neurodiversity in the differences of experiences, communications and corporeality.

REFERENCES

AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION. **Manual Diagnóstico e Estatístico de Transtornos Mentais**. Texto revisado (DSM-5-TR). 5.ed. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2022. Available at: <http://www.niip.com.br/wpcontent/uploads/2018/06/Manual-Diagnostico-e-Estatistico-de-Transtornos-Mentais-DSM-5-1-pdf>. Accessed on: 04. abr. 2023.

BARÃO, M.; RESENGUE, M.; LEAL, R. **Atlas das Juventudes**. Em movimento e Pacto da Juventudes pelos Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável da ONU, 2020.

BRASIL. Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior. Brasília: CAPES, 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br>. Accessed on: April 18, 2024.

BRASIL. Senado Federal. **Estatuto da juventude**: atos internacionais e normas correlatas. Brasília, 2013.

CAVALCANTE, L.; OLIVEIRA, A. Métodos de revisão bibliográfica nos estudos científicos. **Psicol. rev. (Belo Horizonte)**, Belo Horizonte, v. 26, n. 1, p. 83-102, abr. 2020. Available at: http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1677-11682020000100006&lng=pt&nrm=iso. Accessed on: 27 fev. 2025.

CRESWELL, J. W. **Projeto de pesquisa**: métodos qualitativo, quantitativo e misto. 2.ed. Tradução Luciana de Oliveira da Rocha. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2007.

GOMES, C. L. **Frui Vita**: a alquimia do lazer. Paraná: Ed. Atena, 2023. Available at: <https://www.atenaeditora.com.br/catalogo/ebook/frui-vita-a-alquimia-do-lazer>. Accessed on: 14 jun. 2024.

GROPPO, L. A. **Introdução à Sociologia da Juventude**. São Paulo: Ed. Paco, 2017a.

GROPPO, L. A. Juventudes e políticas públicas: comentários sobre as concepções sociológicas de juventude. **Desidades**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 14, p. 9-17, mar. 2017b. Available at: http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S231892822017000100002&lng=pt&nrm=iso. Accessed on: 22. mar. 2024.

GROPPO, L. A. Teorias pós-críticas da juventude: juvenilização, tribalismo e socialização ativa. **Rev.latinoam.cienc.soc.niñez juv**, Manizales, v. 2, p.567-579, julho de 2015. Disponível em:

http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1692-715X2015000200002&lng=en&nrm=iso. Accessed on: 26 mar. 2024.

INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE GEOGRAFIA E ESTATÍSTICA. **Censo Demográfico 2010 – São João Del Rei (MG)**. Available at: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/mg/>. Accessed on: 10. jun. 2024.

KERGOAT, D. Traduzido por CAMPOS, A.M. Dinâmica e consubstancialidade das Relações Sociais. **Rev. Novos Estudos**, v. 8, n.6, p. 93-103, 2010. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/nec/a/hVNNxSrszcVLQGfHFf85kk/>. Accessed on: 01 mar. 2024.

MENDES, K. D. S.; SILVEIRA, R. C. de C. P.; GALVÃO, C. M. Revisão integrativa: método de pesquisa para a incorporação de evidências na saúde e na enfermagem. **Texto & Contexto - Enfermagem** [online], v. 17, n. 4, p. 758-764, 2008. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-07072008000400018>. Epub 12 Jan 2009. Accessed on: August 15, 2024.

PIOVESAN, A.; TEMPORINI, E. R. Pesquisa exploratória: procedimento metodológico para o estudo de fatores humanos no campo da saúde pública. **Rev. Saúde Pública**, v.29, n.4, Ago 1995.

ROUSSEFF, D.; FERNANDES, J. H. P.; BELCHIOR, M. **Lei Nº 12.764, de 27 de dezembro de 2012**. Presidência da República: Casa Civil. In: Subchefia para Assuntos Jurídicos, 2012. Disponível em: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2012/lei/l12764.htm. Accessed on: 30 abr. 2024.

SILVA, B. C.; ABRÃO, R. K. Políticas públicas voltadas ao lazer para promoção da saúde. **Rev. Humanidades e Inovação**, v. 9, n.9, p. 337-351, 2022. Disponível em: <https://revista.unitins.br/index.php/humanidadeseinovacao/article/view/6125>. Accessed on: 28 fev. 2025.

SOUZA, C.; PAIVA, I. L. Faces da juventude brasileira: entre o ideal e o real. **Estudos de Psicologia**, Rio Grande do Norte, v. 17, n. 3, p. 353-360, set.-dez. 2012. Available at: www.scielo.br/epsic. Accessed on: March 21, 2024.

SOUZA, M. T. de; SILVA, M. D. da; CARVALHO, R. de. Integrative review: what is it? How to do it?. **Einstein** (São Paulo) [online], v. 8, n. 1, pp. 102-106, 2010. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1679-45082010RW1134>. Accessed on: 9 ago. 2024.

SPEAR, M. A.; KARSTEN, A.; WHITE, E. A. Restricted Interests and Autism: Further Assessment of Preferences for a Variety of Leisure Items. **Behavior Modification**, v. 42, n. 1, 2017. Disponível em: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28073293/>. Accessed on: May 18, 2024.

STACEY, T.; FROUDE, E.; TROLLOR, J.; FOLEY, K. Leisure participation and satisfaction in autistic adults and neurotypical adults. **Autism**, v. 0, n. 0, p. 1-12,

2019. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30132680/> Accessed on: May 20, 2024.

TRIBUNAL DE JUSTIÇA DO DISTRITO FEDERAL E DOS TERRITÓRIOS-TJDFT. **Psicofobia**. Seu preconceito causa sofrimento, 2022. Disponível em: <https://www.tjdft.jus.br/informacoes/programas-projetos-e-acoas/provida/dicas-de-saude/pilulas-de-saude/psicofobia-seu-preconceito-causa-sofrimento#:~:text=O%20significado%20original%20do%20termo,com%20transtornos%20ou%20defici%C3%AAs%20mentais>. Accessed on: August 17, 2024.

WALKER, N.; RAYMAKER, D. M. Toward a neuroqueer future: an interview with Nick Walker. **Autism in adulthood**, v. 3, n. 1, 2021. DOI: 10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw. Accessed on: July 19, 2021.

Address of the Author:

Jéssica Luisy Diniz Camilozi
Electronic Mail: camilozijessica@gmail.com

Ana Cláudia Porfirio Couto
Email address: acpcouto@gmail.com