

## *The importance of groups in oldness re-education*

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### **Abstract**

It was studied how groups contribute to the re-education of aging, using the existential phenomenological method based on the experience with elderly. The elderly reported perceiving society as exclusionary, but they found in the groups the space to redesign their lives, a new view of aging and the existential confirmation of the companions. The most significant moments were those in which they were protagonists of the action. The groups stand out as a privileged space for the health recovery and the exercise of citizenship of the elderly.

**Keywords:** age groups, old age, psychodrama

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## **WHY DELVE INTO OLD AGE STUDIES?**

The demographic transition observed in Brazil over the last decades calls for the need for spaces in our society that promote the rehabilitation of aging as an integral process of the life cycle. Misconceptions persist about old age as a stage associated with loss, disease and death. Likewise, it is undeniable that social roles experienced by adults change with the arrival of aging, which requires a redesign in order to avoid isolation, loss of identity, assist in the search for creative answers to the new moment and thus rescue their recognition and that of others as a participant and rights subject. The present study had as its guiding question: what is the contribution of the elderly groups in the process of rehabilitation of old age?

There is no denying that a person makes changes in the meaning of his life with aging. Obviously, these changes are not part of an isolated process because the person is not an islander: he participates in a network of meaning-producing social relationships. This network of relationships has strengths that permeate the aging self and rituals that mark the beginning of old age.

## **THE METHODOLOGICAL CROSSING**

The paper presents reflections from the reports of participants of elderly groups, obtained through the various activities developed by the authors, directing group experiences based on psychodrama methodology, whose meanings were in accordance with the guiding question of the study. In addition, the reflections converge on recent debates involving publications on aging.

By recognizing changes in the definition of who is considered old, this term was used to refer to people over 60 years. In the groups, there was participation of elderly of both sexes, with a predominance of women. The meetings usually had weekly frequency with an average duration of one hour and thirty minutes. There were several scenarios of the meetings, which are linked to university extension programs.

The interventions used in the elderly groups had a theoretical and technical reference to Psychodrama. The group management sought to create space for crystallized candid responses, impregnated with cultural preserve (Moreno, 1978), to be transformed into spontaneous responses (Moreno, 1978), valuing the creativity of the elderly in groups and in life. Psychodrama technical resources were used to facilitate group interaction and sociodramatic work in each meeting, based on the emergence of the life stories of the elderly and their comments about the meetings and about old age.

From the careful reading of the field diaries of the academics involved in the coordination of the groups and the evaluation sheets of the meetings completed by the elderly, the mapping of aspects made it easier to understand the importance of the groups in the rehabilitation of old age. The comments were separated into five indicators that were later grouped into two units of meaning that will be presented below: "old age as recognition of self" and "the importance of groups".

## **OLD AGE AS RECOGNITION OF SELF**

Throughout life, people often spend little time thinking about aging. The perception of this process often comes from others when, for example, a stranger identifies it as elderly. In addition, society's understanding of old age influences the notion of the person living its recognition of the aging self. Therefore, the elderly person has a perception of the reactions of the external world, which add up to all the fantasies, information about old age and memories

of the experiences he had during his life with other people, as well as the observation of “others” that grow old by his side.

Physical changes and the action of time invite the person, more than at any other stage of the life cycle, to the inner gaze. Then the idea of uselessness becomes untrue in the face of this perspective: in old age, there is a new world to be discovered, that of oneself. In this way, the internal content of each member is put into the group, worked and elaborated at the meeting, and returned into each one, transformed into creative subjectivity.

Rodrigues (2003) also emphasizes that in our society, we observe the production of a subjectivity essentially fabricated, modeled, received, consumed about old age. This subjectivity of aging can be identified by the speeches. Historically, old age was associated with disease, death and uselessness. To counteract this model, in recent years, there has been an emerging discourse that the elderly should “get busy”: attending dances, traveling a lot and having various activities. The criticism of these speeches is that they seek to dictate a way of life for the aging and, as a subjectivity is created from the outside in, disregard the desiring subject and “impose”, without necessarily realizing it, a stereotype of being old. These speeches threaten the creative revolution (Moreno, 1978) in the Morenian conception and may lead to illness.

It is undeniable that in the aging process, relationships change significantly, with changes in social roles. Passos and Feitosa (2018) highlight some of these new experiences and point out the importance of bonds to achieve healthy interactions. Examples of such experiences cited by these authors are: the death of loved ones, migratory movements, the children who make up their families, the arrival of grandchildren/great-grandchildren and retirement.

Faced with the changes, when they reach old age, people can assume an attitude of imprisonment and an excessive appreciation of past experiences, repeating expressions such as “*in my time, it was better*”. These experiences are characterized by the reproduction of cultural preserves (Moreno, 1978) and are formed by actions that were in their original spontaneous states and, subsequently, began to be performed repeatedly and candidly. When a person's daily experience is based on the reproduction of cultural preserves, there is a dullness of spontaneity and, consequently, an illness.

Losses and modifications need to be assimilated. Moreno (1992) stresses the importance of spontaneous being: “Only a creative being can be true. Only one creative being can exist. The only one creative being can be Me” (p. 107). The ability to continually create makes one exist and be responsible not only for one's life, but also for one's quality of life in the cosmos (Moreno, 1993).

Just as the arrival of old age calls for the resignification of relationships, it stimulates the creation of new bonds. It is possible to recreate a relationship that lasts over the years of existence, as well as being open to meet and relate with new people that enable encounters in the life trajectory. Moreno (1993), through the concept of sociometry, made it possible to “investigate by researching the development and organization of groups and the situation of individuals in them” (p. 33). Thus, it is clear that groups contribute to facilitate the creation and recreation of new bonds, as will be presented in the following unity of sense.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GROUPS

Older people come together in various social, cultural, recreational and political events. At meetings, they study topics that interest them, organize outings, work together, talk, discuss. The meetings clearly show how older people claim their space for participation and how they grow as they feel a sense of belonging to a group. Thus, it was observed that the movements of the groups intertwine with the personal changes noticeably present in each of its members. Note that group interaction favors new relationships, difficulties that were seen as personal and

unique are alleviated (“*I thought this only happened to me*”), among other comments. The elderly reported that joining the groups allowed them another vision of aging, in which they found a *locus* with sufficient content to express themselves with the certainty of feeling understood by the peer group.

All elderly participants in the groups reported that they perceive society as excluding the old and find in the groups, the necessary participation space to redesign their lives and be existentially confirmed. They also expressed in different ways their satisfaction in integrating these spaces. In the groups, considering the relational conception, Fonseca (2018) highlights that the search for relationships is inherent to man and explains that “at the pole of separation, there is the fear of loss, abandonment and annihilation. At the center of the relationship is the pleasure and joy of realizing an expected relational moment” (p. 146).

Costa (1998), in his work with elderly groups, points out quite satisfactory results, among them: expansion of self-knowledge and self-esteem; broadening of interests in life, interpersonal relationships, new discoveries and creations; observation, acceptance and respect for aging; decrease or extinction of prejudice linked to younger individuals, allowing greater access to their world, greater encouragement to social struggle for the admission of their legal rights as a citizen of society; predisposition to the creation of an internal world and, consequently, a different view of its external world; rescue of his body in order to know him, touch him, feel him, increasing his previously contained body movements and his previously nonexistent or deadened sensations; clarification of doubts and information.

The possibilities of true encounters offered by the group experience and the dynamism of exchange that provides coexistence result in constant movements in group dynamics. Fonseca (1980), after presenting a scheme of human development as a contribution to psychodramatic theory, states that:

The nine phases described for the individuals can also be observed in the groups. However, as a group is not a child, which takes many years to become an adult, the group phases overlap more quickly and less clearly. However, some phases are well marked and easily detectable. . . In short, we have in a group, in terms of its development, four basic phases: indifferenciation, group recognition, triangulation and circularization-inversion (pp. 130-131).

These group metamorphoses favor the new and adequate responses of the elderly to the aging process, when commenting on the family that changed with the departure of their children, and/or widowhood, the elderly stated that the presence of their peer group confirms its existence as they refer to the groups as "one family." A family in which it is possible to report their daily conflicts, share their fears, dream, take walks, deepen knowledge, make new friends, tell jokes, and finally revived. This deep experience in the groups contributes to the aging process being experienced, not as a lonely process, but with the softness of the warmth that the group relationship allows.

The moments of the group that they considered most significant were those in which they effectively found themselves as protagonists of an action, such as when they organized a walk themselves, when they talked about themselves they created, had the opportunity to learn things and teach what they knew, among others. In groups, the elderly find a space that strengthens them to fight for their rights, to seek the fulfillment of their desires, to remain engaged in the community beyond the concrete spaces of their homes and families.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, it was possible to identify that the groups help the elderly to find a

necessary participation space to redesign their lives, the possibility of altering their view of aging and the confirmation of their existence by the presence of their partners. Thus, the groups constitute privileged spaces for the rescue of the health of the elderly, an environment favorable to the exercise of citizenship that strengthens them to seek new environments of integration. All reports showed the importance of the elderly to continue participating and contributing to the peculiarity of their wealth. To let this new subjectivity unfold smoothly from natural and spontaneous coexistence is to believe that human life has not only gained number of years, but quality and health in its full sense.

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