142 - THE BODY, MORALITY AND COMMUNITY LIFE: A NURSING HOME PERSPECTIVE

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The current view is of one in which the entire world is concentrated on quality of life, not only in the individualistic and egocentric sense, but also involving a holistic vision of the concern over the planet's survival. However, we focus on the seclusion and the life of individuals in an elderly care institution.

The environment, a space in which to come and go within defined limits, may certainly provoke the physical body into imagining that the world ends there, when the gates are closed and the residents remain under the protection of the directors, employees and specific medical staff. These individuals may limit the field of imagination through which these elderly patients, under supervised and sometimes limited freedom, travel and describe their journey by assuming the role of narrator and character in their own story.

Our study was performed at Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire, a nursing home that houses individuals of various ages with assorted life stories that begin to be told without any inhibition in front of the tape recorders and other equipment used by our team. The residents are ladies and gentlemen, whose unique lives have been based on a social plurality that redesigns a communal picture that is well known to social researchers. The humble and conflicting life of those who faced hard days, but filled with fond moments to remember and emphasize the morality and values brought forward from yesterday, which are nearly always recalled with sadness and nostalgia.

These are our characters, always attentive to any unkind gesture, or to any stranger entering their natural habitat. The elderly patients of the Vila, volunteers in a study on the quality of life, begin to narrate, instigated and motivated to share how see themselves in the world, and how they think that the world sees them. They externalize their view of the world, of values, of morality, of relationships and their daily conflicts.

When they expose these values, there is a moralist view of one another's gender behaviors.

Juan expounds his sexual taste:

"I like women, I love women. There was one here… about four years ago. This .. this lady was married! But, she was like gold to me. A kiss here, a kiss there…. a kiss here… a kiss there… That's all there was, it was good… Yeah, I was content. I only make a move when I'm ah.. ah.. ah.. potent, right? If I'm not potent, there's no use! She worked here for a while, she was crazy about me… Crazy!"

However, when he refers to the relationships of others at the Vila, he emphasizes:

"That there is.. ..is.. is.. putting your nose where it doesn't belong! It's putting your nose where it doesn't belong! It's… it's a dirty old man putting his nose where it doesn't belong! It's a dirty old man putting his nose where it doesn't belong! It's just to show off!.. But he's nothing at all!"

The idea is refuted by Ms Tiane:

"I'm too old for that!"

"Not for that! Just for friendship, right dear!?"

The idea that relationships can occur in old age is viewed with suspicion by some of the individuals we interviewed, even though they recognize that both men and women need affective relationships to lead a healthy life. However, they distrust those who get too close to their partners.

Juan reports sexual encounters that had a marked effect on him. He expounds his emotional and biological reaction:

"I was pretty wild when I was a kid. I was. The first woman I ever had…it was the most wonderful thing that I'd done in my life! It was… I was… I didn't even know where I was. I was seventeen years old. Yeah. Seventeen. It was in the country, inside a .. a.. a charcoal shack! This woman … this woman ran away from there. There was a flour mill that was making flour… and she told me she wanted to show me something in the charcoal shack."

And he adds:

"… 'You're not afraid of your husband, are you!' 'No way, I live back here! Are you afraid!? Let me take care of it!' She said to me: let me take care of it!' So, I went, boy, it was the best th… that I liked most!... I was a kid, right?! … Yeah. She was a real dish! Hot!"

Life in a group, even in an institution bordered by the limits of a street that is often seen another world, is still one of solitude for them, a sensation that can be present in any person, institutionalized or not.

"… Solitudes scares anybody. Solitude scares anybody and takes away their happiness!"

"…After I turned seventy-five …. It was all over!"

The disenchantment with the world and with relations seems to be part of a vocabulary where memories are painful narratives of a good time that will never be repeated in the life of these people separated by the walls of an institution.

During the interview, Juan displayed a certain happiness, a joy that we had not seen in him. He had always been very well mannered. But on some occasions, we felt that he was very down. One situation that stands out was during the World Cup soccer tournament, on a day when his family did not come to the Vila to watch Brazil play, as they usually did. He complained of pain and of old age. We were surprised since we had not heard these complaints before. He was content, as long as we talked to him, even for just a short time. We noticed his spiritual side when he told stories that we never imagined could occur in the life of a man who, at first sight, seemed to us so serious.

The residents, when prodded, like to tell their stories or even give their opinions about life at the institution, almost as a plea for help, so that the world outside the walls can hear them. They enjoy going out in groups, or when friends and family visit. These are sublime moments within the community, where they take advantage and make contacts with the outside world.

We thought a great deal about our responsibility as spokespersons of this extra-academic world that cries out for attention from those who leave there with information about the residents' lives. They continuously complain of the many visits they receive from students who, after obtaining the results of their research, do not return with practical benefits for the secluded lives forced on them by age and by the lack of prospects in the world outside.

1. The body, this stranger who changes me with every passing day

In the relation with their body, with a morality based on a culture of machismo, both men and women try not to neglect their appearance. They constantly emphasize how different they were in childhood/adolescence from now, where their bodies do not seem to represent them any more, which fills them with either disgust or resignation.

Specifically in the narrative of Juan, we observe that he accepts his old age, with his head held high, even though at some moments he displays a certain discomfort at being old and sexually incapacitated. He is proud of being honest with himself and with others and accordingly accepts his advanced age.

He understands that women also have their old age crises; however, it seems to us that he describes feminine feelings based on his conversations with his partners and female friends, with whom he shared experiences. He does not morally judge other people's feelings, even though at certain moments, he expresses other value judgments about the relationships formed at the Vila. He tries to explain women in the following narrative:

"Women, no! … That the woman… A woman told me… I don't know if she… said, adding: 'Women diminish men, don't they?' That's what she said, I know she said: 'Juan, women up to… up to eighty years old like to have men on top of them' You see! 'Up to eighty years old, women like to have men on top of them!'"

And concludes:

"I mean she was calling me, right?! … This is what I said: 'Do you still get excited!? She said: Sure, I get excited! She said: 'yes! Depending on the man! If the man is good looking!' She said: If the man is good looking we're excited all the time!' Can you imagine?! And she was quite a woman. She died in here. She died…. She liked me a lot… Every night she came to talk to me… She was seventy-five years old.'"

His conception of female desires is based on his opinion of the women he lived with. The fact that another individual's body, regardless of gender, is transformed with time, seems to be understood by Juan.

The elderly persons interviewed contemplate the past and seem not to forgive themselves or time for their lost youth.

"(…) I gained weight, I got fat. I've lost a bit of that weight because I went on a diet, ok? I've got a new body today. It's not the body that I used to have, no! I was overweight, very fat!

I … I felt very pretty at that time. I was another person. Another physiognomy!" (Tiane)

The idea that a glamorous and light-hearted past still inspires self-esteem and dignity in these beautiful individuals who reminisce about their past to give us an idea that they did not always have the bodies that they now occupy. It is a type of "compensation"; as if they say between the lines: "I am like this now, but it was not always so."

"When I used to get on the bus, all the men would turn around and look at me, dear! I used to wear very high heels. I was always dolled up! I wore a hat, gloves! You never saw my wedding pictures!? Yeah, hat and gloves!" (Tiane)

She treated her body with care, reflecting the concern with physical and mental health. Most of them take care of themselves, both in body and in spirit. They practice religious habits inside the Vila and make a point of explaining the care they take of themselves.

I n the words of Tiane:

"Ah, I walk! I walk every day!"

"I sunbathe! The sun shines brightly in here!"

"I work out my legs; I walk slowly. I'm not a physical wreck, no! You know!?"

"I stretch out full length on the bed! I lift my arms. Now, I have to go slowly, right?"

"I take a shower, wash my hair. Everything. I do my clothes. My clothes go to my niece's house to get washed in her washing machine. She sends them back, all nice and clean!"

In the narrative interviews that we used to hear the residents talk about how they see body image as quality of life, it seemed to us that there was a need for them to always resist solitude, isolation and even more, a drop in quality of life that could cause serious health problems should they stop performing physical activities or taking care of body hygiene.

In Emilton's narrative, we also see his concern with appearance and body hygiene.

"I've gained weight in here. I got fatter. Yeah, I got here and I got fatter. I got fatter, I had stomach problems, but I got better and… I got even fatter!"

"I'm fatter! But clean as a whistle! I take care of myself!"

"I shave every three days, every three days… Yeah, I shave, I shave!"

"I take a shower. I wash my clothes. My clothes are in the wardrobe over there… under lock and key!"

"Yeah. I wash them. I'll go get them! My clothes are sorted. All of them. And my bed is turned down! I take off a sheet. I've got a sheet; I take it off real early! Not at night! I sleep in the other one and when it's real early I turn it down… pretty, ain't it? There !"

"I take a shower. At five o'clock I'm taking a shower. I wash my mouth, I clean my false teeth…Then I comb my hair, put on a bit of perfume, change my clothes and come and sit here. A radio playing…"

"Whenever I feel like it, I go for a walk… with the radio in my hand, walking around. I pass by Maria's.. I don't even look over there, don't even look! I don't look over there at all! Don't look! Her locked up in there… I don't go over!"

Could this be the way he is defending himself? But from what and from whom we do not know? But the residents explain every one of their actions within the institution. They expound on diseases of old age and report each one that they have as a way of calling our attention to their age-related situation.

The Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire, located in João Pessoa, Brazil, is a philanthropic entity funded by public and private donations and supplemented by part of the pension received by the elderly residents.

Considerations

This study inside the Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire called our attention to the urgency and need for implementing measures that will benefit the subjects of our research. This was made clear by the way in which they spontaneously and naturally described their problems and conflicts, provoked by the methodology chosen, the narrative interview, perhaps in the hope that this "confession" would result in benefits for their community.

What they need, in addition to attention, affection and care of administrators and family members, are public health care policies that promote activities that improve quality of life and increase life expectancy in Brazil, where this study was conducted and which is now in its final phase.

We would like to return to them with the care that they so desperately need, so that not only their body is taken care of, but mainly that academic projects are developed that improve the quality of life of individuals housed in elderly care institutions who are isolated on the margins of a society ready to explode.

There would, therefore, be space within modern society to cultivate life by benefiting the quality of human life in every sense of the word.

Elderly yes, incapacitated no, are perfectly able to contribute to the community, enjoying quality of life and work. And nothing better than academia to map the deficiencies of the group and mediate conflicts, thus contributing to the knowledge of a field

of science in order to provide enhanced dignity to these institutional residents. This includes if not the absence, at least the control of diseases and an increase in quality of life in the form of health, physical care, physical therapy, among others, in order to obtain a balance within the group housed in this institution.

This is our concern with the social and the academic benefit of scientific research. With each group of researchers that enters and leaves, the residents hope for an improvement in their lives, both in the physical facilities of the institution and in the health of the group. Below is a photograph of one of the outings organized by volunteers, where the residents gather for leisure activities and for the opportunity of spending a different day under the supervision of those responsible for their physical and mental well-being.

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ABSTRACT

The present article is a result of research begun in 2006 at the Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire elderly care facility in João Pessoa, Brazil. The purpose of the study was to observe the behaviors of the residents in terms of their social life, socialization and way of life, focusing on their body image. The methodology used was the narrative interview, whose finality was to follow their thinking from childhood to the present in order to give us an idea of how they see the world and each other. Within these narratives is the way in which they deal with sexuality and the types of relationships formed between their peers as well as the natural conflicts arising from these bonds. The residents of the Vila have loving relationships, get married and base their values on the individual experiences of each one. Valuing body image becomes an almost instinctive attitude, given the care that the men and women take of their appearance and the concern about what the others think of them.

KEYWORDS: old age, sexuality, quality of life.

LE CORPS, LA MORAL ET LA VIE EN GROUPE: UNE PERSPECTIVE ASILAIRE

RÉSUMÉ

L'article presenté est le résultat d'une recherche qui a débuté en 2006 dans l'Asile Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire, à João Pessoa/PB. Ce travail d'investigation a eu comme objectif d'observer le comportement des retraités concernant leurs relations sociales aussi bien que la manière dont ils vivent que leures apparences corporeles. La méthodologie utilisée a été l'entretien narratif avec comme finalité de suivre l'évolution des convictions des retraités depuis l'enfance jusqu'aux jours actuels. Cette recherche vise à comprendre la façon dont ces personnes se perçoivent ainsi que le monde. Dans cette voix, la manière dont ils envisagent leur sexualité et la façon dont ils établissent des relations entre eux montre la complexité des conflits naturels des relations humaines. Les retraités de la Vila sortent ensemble, se marient et ont des valeurs fondées sur leur expérience individuele. Valoriser son apparence devient prèsque instintif, puisque nous observons une vraie préoccupation chez les habitants de la Vila pour leur apparence ainsi que pour l'immage qu'ils peuvent transmettre aux autres retraités.

MOTS-CLEFS: vieillesse, sexualité, qualité de vie.

El CUERPO, LA MORAL Y LA VIDA EN GRUPO: UNA PERSPECTIVA EN SITUACIÓN DE ASILO

RESUMEN

El presente articulo es resultado de uma encuesta iniciada em el año de 2006 en la Institución Asilar Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire, en João Pessoa-Paraíba, que tiene por objetivo observar ele comportamiento de los albergados respecto a su vida personal, socialización y modo de vida, visando su imagen corporal. La metodología utilizada en esa encuesta fue la Entrevista Narrativa, com la finalidad de acompañar el pensamiento de los albergados, desde la niñez hasta el momento actual para dar una ídea de como ellos se vem em el mundo y como vem al outro. Desde este punto de vista, la forma como enfrentan la sexualidad y formas de relacionamiento entre sus pares trayendo a la luz los conflictos naturales de la sociabilidad de los relacionamientos humanos. Los albergados de la Vila namoran, se dan en casamento y tienen sus valores basados en la vida individual de cada uno. Valorizar la imagen corporal llega a ser uma actitude casi instintiva llevándose en cuenta el cuidado que las mujeres y los hombres tienen con su aparencia y la preocupación com que los otros piensan a su respecto.

PALABRAS CLAVES: vejez, sexualidad, calidad de la vida.

O CORPO, A MORAL E A VIDA EM GRUPO: UMA PERSPECTIVA ASILAR

RESUMO

O presente artigo é resultado de uma pesquisa iniciada no ano de 2006, na Instituição asilar Vila Vicentina Júlia Freire, em João Pessoa - Paraíba, a qual tem, por objetivo, observar o comportamento dos albergados em relação a sua vida pessoal, socialização e modo de vida, visando a sua imagem corporal. A metodologia utilizada nessa pesquisa foi a Entrevista Narrativa, com a finalidade de acompanhar o pensamento dos albergados, desde a infância até o momento atual, para dar uma idéia de como eles se vêem no mundo e vêem o outro. Dentro dessa fala, a maneira que encaram a sexualidade e as formas de relacionamento entre os seus pares, traz, à tona, os conflitos naturais da sociabilidade dos relacionamentos humanos. Os albergados da Vila namoram, dão-se em casamento e têm seus valores baseados na vivência individual de cada um. Valorizar a imagem corporal chega a ser uma atitude quase instintiva, tendo em vista o cuidado que as mulheres e os homens têm com a sua aparência e a preocupação com o que os outros pensam a seu respeito.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: velhice, sexualidade, qualidade de vida.