



Aesthetics and happiness in the perception of old people users of beauty products

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Abstract

Objective: To identify the relationship between aesthetics and happiness in the perception of old people users of beauty products. *Method:* This is an exploratory and descriptive research, of qualitative nature, through a semi-structured interview, with 21 women aged ≥ 60 years. The information was synthesized according to the thematic content analysis of Bardin. *Results:* The participants mentioned that there are connections between aesthetics and happiness, conceiving them as inner beauty, generating subjective well-being, because they are linked to the goods of the soul, character, love, respect for others, reciprocity, humility, ethics, joy and dialogue, way of being and acting, in contemplating nature, in relationships trust and coexistence with others and belief in God and the care of the spirit, of the mind. They considered interior beauty more significant than the exterior, which is focused on the body, facial, and capillary aesthetics, but without aesthetic exaggerations, since the care of body image with exterior aesthetics is a way, a means, of social insertion and search for more lasting happiness. *Conclusion:* a balance between inner and outer beauty is necessary to achieve happiness, but with a preponderance of the aesthetics of existence, of the inner aesthetics, which generates more happiness because it is based on self-knowledge, self-control, autonomy, personal and social fulfillment.

Keywords: Women.
Aesthetics. Happiness. Health of the Elderly.

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INTRODUCTION

The aging process is characterized by the dimensions of heterogeneity, multifactoriality and multi-causality, also part of the body experience and self-recognition, the perception of self-esteem, beauty and happiness, especially when considering that the bodily transformations, coming with aging, may deviate from the standards of aesthetics in force in society^{1,2}. For Japiassú and Marcondes³, aesthetics is one of the areas of philosophy, which had its definition coined by Alexander Von Baumgarten, in the 18th century, to designate the study of sensation, the science of beauty, taste and subjective world, pleasant to the senses, for the purpose of elaboration of an ontology of the beautiful. Of Greek origin, *aisthesis*, it is a term that means the individual's ability to receive sensitive impressions from the objects that surround him, judge its appearances and perceive how the five senses are affected by the impressions⁴.

According to Ferreira⁵, from the 20th to the 21st century, new ethical and aesthetic issues, linked to the human body, were developed from biotechnology, such as the search for aesthetic surgeries and the "eugenics" of beauty, placing public health in front of ethical issues involving aesthetics, which comprises beauty. In the last century, attitudes towards beauty and aging, as a synonym for happiness, have undergone radical changes, in which there is an exacerbated concern with the physical appearance of people, especially women⁵.

The job market demanded an appreciation of appearance, which required subjects to invest more in their bodies, resulting in "a world of competition in which beauty helps to conquer and maintain spaces, at the price of eternal vigilance and strict sovereignty of oneself" (p.193)⁵. Beauty has always been based on contemporary customs, with the influence of current aesthetic standards¹. However, in this scenario, the aging process, often associated with negative images, can generate dissatisfaction in the way people perceive themselves throughout this process². Thus, investigating the stage of old age refers to understanding old people in their entirety, as it involves multi and interdisciplinary issues of a biopsychosocial nature, since the meaning of the

changes that occur with aging depends on the act, think, question, interpret of each person^{2,4,6-8}.

In the last decades, care for body aesthetics has become synonymous with happiness and the human body has been elevated to the category of true cultural, symbolic, social and economic capital^{9,10}. But, after all, what does happiness consist of? For ancient and medieval thinkers, such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, happiness is the supreme good of man. It is what people most crave in life and the search for external goods, such as money, material goods, fame, the cult of the body, aesthetic beauty, etc., produce a simple, apparent happiness, because these goods are means, instrument, path, possibility^{11,12}. What generates more happiness are the inner goods, of the soul, such as knowledge, self-knowledge, self-control, autonomy, personal, social and political fulfillment^{11,12}.

A study developed by Sumngern et al.¹³ comes close to this conception of happiness structured in the goods of the soul. They demonstrated that the old people who did not need to work in order to survive, nor were they focused on the search for external goods and excessive care for their body, considered themselves happier than those who had these concerns¹³.

Currently, many attributes are given to happiness. For Ferry¹², the dimension of happiness has a complex nature. It is an existential project that can be carried out continuously¹². In summary, the most recent empirical research, when defining happiness, including with old people, associates this concept with self-care, satisfaction with life, pleasure, contentment, health, physical, psychological and spiritual well-being and not only the search for money and external goods¹²⁻¹⁶. It is synonymous with quality of life, social insertion, freedom of choice, autonomy, healthy aging, intelligence, knowledge, functional capacity, love, emancipation, creativity, admiration, acting, wisdom, family relationships, friendships, connection with nature and a god¹²⁻¹⁶.

Aesthetic perception is relative and subjective, particular to each individual, but influenced by each person's worldview. Adequate appearance,

satisfaction with self-image and the relentless pursuit of aesthetics have become essential requirements for obtaining quality of life and the pursuit of happiness, as they are linked with the way of perceiving yourself in relation to society^{2,17}.

The use of techniques, aesthetic procedures and cosmetic products for the quality and longevity of old people is growing. And old people enter this market and seek these treatments¹⁸. A study carried out in France in 2013 showed that a woman is at the height of her beauty at the age of thirty; 92% said that it is possible to age “beautifully”, to be well aesthetically at 70 and 50% of them used cosmetic procedures¹⁹.

There are already several studies on the possible relationships between aesthetics and happiness or satisfaction with life^{1,2,6,8-10,16}, which signal that old people recognize the beauty standards of society and seek to achieve them, through self-care, body image, self-esteem and self-confidence with the use of beauty products. This attitude generates empowerment, healthy aesthetics and physical, psychological and social balance, because the appreciation of the body has become a cultural and economic capital, a business card. It is also identified the need to advance in studies involving old people and the relationships of existential aesthetics. In this sense, considering that our focus is to establish a more specific relationship between aesthetics and happiness, this study aimed to identify the relationships between aesthetics and happiness in the perception of old people users of beauty products.

METHOD

This is an exploratory and descriptive, qualitative study, carried out in 2019, with old women. The inclusion criteria were: being old (age ≥ 60 years) and being a user of beauty products. The justification for this criterion is the understanding that there has been an increasing demand for services that include aesthetics by the old people segment of the population, especially for the female audience. In this sense, this study, linked to the research line biopsychosocial aspects of human aging, is aligned with a larger study that investigates beauty, self-image and aesthetic resources, part of the research project

Reasons for happiness in longevity, developed in the *stricto sensu* program in Human Aging, approved by the University's Ethics Committee, with opinion no. 898,152.

The choice of participants was made in the format of a non-probabilistic sample. Twenty-one old women participated in the interview, who attended a social group, and who accepted to participate voluntarily. The number of participants was determined using the method of gradual theoretical sampling, in which subjects were included in the sample, until it was finalized by theoretical saturation of the topic to be investigated²⁰. All participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form, in compliance with Resolution 466 of December 12, 2012, of the National Health Council. In this sense, the extracts of the statements of the participants are identified with the letter P of the participant, and the Arabic numbering corresponds to the order in which the interviews were conducted.

The research was carried out through a semi-structured interview, lasting 30 minutes. The guiding questions of the interviews were designed in order to meet the objective of the study that aims at the relationship between aesthetics and happiness: What do you mean by beauty and aesthetics? Do beauty and aesthetics make you happier? What brings you the most happiness in this life? In order to hold the meetings, prior contact was made with the participants, through a visit to the coexistence group, to present the study, its purpose and invitation, upon acceptance, the interviews were scheduled on the date, time and place of the participants' preference. The option for the location was a room in the living group itself. The record of the meetings was done through an audio recorder, and the interviews were transcribed in full later, with the guarantee of being deleted at the end of the study.

The qualitative information was submitted to Bardin's thematic content analysis²¹ by a pair of specialists, who also participated in the data collection, with special attention to categorize, collate and seek agreements until reaching 100% agreement between the examiners. Thematic content analysis followed the stages of pre-analysis, content exploration and interpretation, followed by inference.

The pre-analysis consisted of the construction of the corpus, through a fluctuating reading of all the information obtained, in order to apprehend the initial ideas, paying attention to the similarities and contrasts. Then, the exploration of the content and interpretation, based on readings and re-readings of the material, sought to define the units of meaning, which were separated graphically, one in each line of a spreadsheet built for this purpose, constituting the corpus, which would be submitted, by inference, the condensation and prominence of the information for analysis, considering the completeness, representativeness, relevance and homogeneity, in the progressive refinement of the thematic categories, based on semantic criteria, which allowed to abstract and interpret what is relevant, according to the research objective.

RESULTS E DISCUSSIONS

The participants were between 60 and 68 years old. Most were married (75%) and all were retired, with monthly income of one to three minimum wages. From what emerged from the participants' speeches, it was possible to build three categories: aesthetics as inner beauty, aesthetics as exterior beauty and family and friends as a synonym for happiness and beauty.

Aesthetics as inner beauty

The participants associated aesthetics with intrinsic dimensions, understood as the inner beauty, which is expressed by psychic well-being, love, character, reciprocity, humility, respect for others, ethics, kindness, solidarity, joy, dialogue. These virtues are manifested in the extrinsic qualities of the body, in attitudes, in the way of being and acting, as attested by the statements below:

“It is no use to be beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside. Beauty is in the person's heart and goodness” (P 21).

“It is the beauty inside [...], but it shows on the outside. People's attitude of helping others” (P 16).

“It means being beautiful inside [...]. It is a set [...]. Stimulation inside and out, how to be nice, dear, friend, kind” (P 17).

“Beauty comes from within [...]. Aesthetics does not influence [...]. To see how a person is doing, look inside” (P 5).

“Beauty is to be happy [...], to greet people, to talk (P 14).

“Beauty is something inside [...]. If this one is fine, the exterior will also be fine” (P 20).

For Alves et al.,²² the aesthetic beauty of an old person is in conduct, behavior, the ability to accept the other, respect, the search for health, attention and care. A survey conducted by Albarello et al.,²³ with the objective of knowing the relationship between the perception of beauty and aesthetic care, with 20 rural women in the post-menopause, demonstrated that the participants did not consider the corporal beauty standards as significant and were cautious in the use of aesthetic and cosmetic products.

The participants mentioned that inner beauty is also manifested in the person through contemplation and contact with nature, in the cultivation of gardens, in relationships of loyalty, trust and sharing in coexistence with others, in the belief in a god, in the institution and in religious rites:

“Beauty is contemplating nature, cultivating flowers, garden, plants” (P 14).

“Of course, the person has to look well, too [...], with God in the first place. He is everything [...]. Exterior aesthetics are important, but not the main” (P 3).

“Beauty is receiving the risen Jesus, going to church, taking communion [...]. Nature, the sun [...], the natural and inner beauty of the world with whom we live” (P 19).

“Beauty is nature [...]. Live and let other people live [...]. One has to be the first beauty - the heart and kindness” (P 10).

“Beauty is the people who help each other [...]. Inner beauty is the most important [...]. Outwardly beauty deceives. Being a good person and a person of God” (P 15).

“The beauty inside is the best [...]. The person becomes special [...]. Nature is also beautiful: the birds singing, the trees” (P9).

According to Fin, Portella and Scortegagna¹, many old women conceive and resort to the foundations of the religious and Christian tradition to justify inner beauty. In this cultural imaginary, the inner dimension, connected to “the sensations of the sublime, the wonderful and the divine”, is valued more than body aesthetics.

According to Brito et al.²⁴, aesthetics is a reflection around the beautiful, which encompasses the branch of aesthetic properties, the sensitive, linked to the act of feeling, imagining and art, which comprises creation, imitation, inspiration, artistic, cultural and religious value. The beautiful pleases, rejoices and achieves the sensation of pleasure provided by beauty, related to the senses. However, the experience of the beautiful is not only the sensation that causes pleasure, but the conception and apprehension that people realize through sensation. But it depends on people’s interest in relating and seeking a deeper view with objects, such as contemplating nature, religious objects and images, a flower and garden cultivation, where the pleasure felt does not come from colors, but of the action in which the eyes and the mind perceive the figure and the fixation of the eyes on everything that catches the eye.

Among the aspects of aesthetics as interior beauty highlighted in the statements above, two of them, the contemplation of God and nature, are considered in the Western philosophical tradition as promoters of happiness, because they are related to the state of mind to which man aspires, for the which both material and spiritual goods are needed^{11,12}. God is identified as the supreme and sublime principle, a pure act, that is, without movement, immobile, eternal, source of true happiness for the human, fragile and contingent creature¹². Nature, on the other hand, is valued for its aesthetic, sensitive dimension,

pleasant to the senses and the mind, as a carrier of the ontology of the beautiful³.

Aesthetics as exterior beauty

The participants, in addition to considering the inner beauty as a preponderant to be happy and have satisfaction in life, said that the outer beauty, with the care of body, facial and hair aesthetics is also significant and can be appreciated as a means, a balance between body and soul, intrinsic beauty, care for spirit, mind:

“Get dressed, cut your hair, get your nails done” (P 19).

“Beauty is high self-esteem [...]. In the person who gets dressed, the inner beauty is the most important [...]. Being okay with myself, I’ll be okay with everyone” (P 22).

“Dress up well, hair, lips, dress well, do makeup [...]. You need to be satisfied, in a good mood” (P 12).

“Beauty is beautiful skin, beautiful hair [...]. Is to be well dressed” (P 6).

“Beauty is to be well, beautiful, with skin, eyebrows, eyes [...]. But it is not worth being beautiful on the outside and without content [...]. The inner beauty is part of 99% of the beauty of a woman” (P 7).

“Beauty is getting dressed [...]. Being happy [...]. Giving good energy, being beautiful, positive, staying with a good mind, having friends [...]. Being with brushed hair and makeup” (P 21).

For Valentim, Falcão and Campos²⁵, there is a new construction of the corporal beauty of women in the 21st century, in which they start to have the function no longer of production, but of body-consumer. Therefore, self-care becomes essential, as it increases the person’s quality of life, self-esteem, confidence and security. For Ehlinger-Martin et al.⁶, the level of awareness of cosmetic procedures is high and has been included in medical and psychological

consultations. In a study with a thousand French women, these authors⁶ observed that, with advancing age, there is a disparity between internal and external age, which leads to tension and dissatisfaction with appearance, especially facial, which increases with time and results in regular use of anti-aging products in 40% of women over 45 years of age. However, in a historical-philosophical approach focused on happiness, Sant'Ana-Loos et al.⁷, evaluated the need to rescue the idea that life can be beautiful at any time, which depends, significantly, on the posture of who lives it.

However, according to Copatti et al.², aesthetic beauty or appearance is related to positive body self-image, which consequently has a favorable effect on self-esteem, which can influence also positive behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, according to the way old people perceive and value their own body, they feel more optimistic and become more sociable².

In the search for satisfaction with body image, the search for invasive treatments, such as plastic surgery, botulinum toxin and permanent makeup, as well as cosmetic procedures (facial, capillary and body), have been growing, often in an abusive way, which can lead, in some cases, to emotional and psychological suffering for not meeting social expectations¹. In this sense, more incentive programs are suggested to promote the health of old people that involve, in addition to caring for diseases and their stakeholders, self-care with beauty as a strategy for valuing self-esteem^{6,8,17,25}.

Family and friends as a synonym of happiness and beauty

In relation to what provides the most motivation to live and exist, the participants highlighted that the greatest beauty of their lives is in living with the family as a promoter of inner well-being and happiness. The family was considered to be a pillar, something irreplaceable, essential, a carrier of meaning for life:

“When I receive the family (son-in-law, grandchildren, daughter-in-law) and go to mass [...]. This keeps me standing [...] and is a reason to live” (P 2).

“Being with the family [...]. That's something money can't buy” (P 15).

“Loving people, family” (P 20).

“To be with the family, to receive the visit of the grandchildren and to see the children well. That makes me happy” (P 6).

“Peace with the family [...]. Believing in God is everything” (P 21).

“The family” (P 16).

According to Rocha et al.²⁶, the family is constituted as a social support network, a hierarchical group of people who maintain reciprocal bonds of affection, tenderness, compassion and balance, of protection and care, especially for old people. Joia and Ruiz²⁷ developed a qualitative research with 30 old people in the city of Barreiras (BA), Brazil, in order to understand the factors associated with life satisfaction. They demonstrated that the construction of affections among the family has a strong association of satisfaction and happiness with life²⁷. The old people who did not live with family members, were identified with higher levels of stress and little motivation to live and face existential vicissitudes²⁷. In another study, by Araújo, Castro and Santos²⁸, with the objective of understanding the social representations of family for the old people who participated and did not participate in social groups, with 60 participants, identified that the family, even with conflicting relationships, is a provider of happiness, autonomy, security, care, support and social representation and integrity.

Happiness was also associated with the beauty of friendship, through living with friends, carrying out projects, leisure, helping others, participating in religious life, in the search for peace and tranquility, as attested by the statements below:

“Being healthy, [...] leisure, dancing, partying, being useful, being able to help” (P 14).

“Help the Church! [...], then the others, people” (P 13).

“To serve God, Jesus [...]. Help, have peace” (P 20).

“To serve God, Jesus [...]. Love people, family [...]. Help, have peace” (P 7).

“Beauty is the understanding that comes with a set that adds up [...]. Conquering inner and outer beauty, well-being is also achieved: taking care of yourself, eating right, being at ease with life and yourself, helping others, traveling and contemplating God and nature” (P 3).

Relating to friends and being sociable makes the individual feel loved, esteemed, cared for, valued and welcomed. It makes the old person belong to common and mutual relationships and obligations²². According to a study by Nguyen et al.²⁹, with 837 old people of African descent, in order to examine the impact of informal social support from family and friends on the development of well-being, it demonstrated that the beauty of subjective interactions are promoters of satisfaction with life, happiness and self-esteem.

Regarding the benefits of religiosity in the lives of old people, a literature review study by Agli, Bailly and Ferrand³⁰ suggested that spirituality and religion have a positive effect to delay cognitive decline and help people use coping strategies in the face of the disease and to have a better quality of life.

For Foucault³¹, when a citizen manages to develop and improve his way of being, taking care of himself, including in the physical and aesthetic sense, extolling autonomy, freedom and coexistence with others, he becomes the creator of his beauty and makes his life a work of art, molding itself, called the aesthetics of existence. Thus, there is a relationship between aesthetics and happiness, because taking care of oneself requires valuing both the inner beauty, the values and virtues of the soul, and the outer beauty, linked to body, hair and facial aesthetics. As participant 16 of our survey pointed out, “happiness is being well, encouraging, loving, motivating [...]. It is a set [...]. It is necessary to balance and have good feelings”.

The study by Jung and Moon³² also demonstrated that there is a relationship between aesthetics and happiness. Old people with high self-esteem, with inner beauty, were more motivated to seek aesthetic products and services and this relationship promotes

successful aging³². A study carried out with old women participating in a social group, which aimed to describe and explore the care and the impact of aesthetic appearance on the social perception of these old women, identified in the participants' perceptions that body care is related to body, facial and capillary aesthetics, and are generators of self-esteem, satisfaction, happiness, freedom, psychological well-being and social well-being³³. They were also conceived as effective means of family, social and professional integration, motivating them to face the existential vicissitudes³³.

This study, as well as its potential in expanding knowledge by exploring the ways of perceiving, feeling and taking care of the body by the old people segment of the population, has limitations in the sample, in terms of its definition, considering that it was not random, its size, which does not allow generalizations, and its characterization, which did not identify the religious orientation and body mass distribution of the participants, as well as the fact that it was carried out with old women who use beauty products, which may have different relations with the aesthetic aspects compared to those who do not use such products. In this sense, it is suggested to improve the methodology in future studies, and to further explore the complementary relationships between aesthetics and happiness, relating them to research with other old people and in other settings.

CONCLUSION

According to the objective of the research, to identify the relationship between aesthetics and happiness in the perception of old people users of beauty products, the participants reported that there is a connection between the themes, because aesthetics as inner beauty is linked to intrinsic dimensions, to the subjective well-being, to the goods of the soul, to character, love and respect for others, reciprocity, humility, ethics, to the bonds of solidarity, joy and dialogue, to the way of being and acting. Still, beauty was identified with contemplation of nature, in the relationships of trust and coexistence with others and belief in God, in the care of the spirit, of the mind. They considered the interior beauty more significant than the exterior, focused

on body, facial and capillary aesthetics, but without aesthetic exaggerations.

Furthermore, for the participants, happiness is connected to inner beauty. What brings more happiness in their lives is the coexistence with family, friends, the execution of personal, social and religious projects and the search for peace and tranquility. Finally, a balance between inner and outer

beauty is necessary to achieve happiness, but with a preponderance of the aesthetics of existence, of the inner aesthetics, capable of promoting knowledge and self-care, self-knowledge, wisdom. The care of body image with external aesthetics is a way, a means, an instrument of social insertion and the search for a more lasting happiness.

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