

Aging, old age and the meaning of being grandparents from the perspective of elderly professional actors



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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the perception of elderly professional actors regarding aging, old age and the meaning of being a grandfather or grandmother. An exploratory, descriptive, cross-sectional study was performed. An open interview with a semi-structured script was used, and the data was analyzed with the Bardin technique. The discourse of the elderly actors revealed an unfavorable view of aging and the denial of this process in their personal lives. From an artistic perspective, however, the respondents had a favorable image of old age and youthfulness, highlighting the favorable influence of the profession on their own aging and old age. Most showed a favorable perception of the meaning of being a grandmother or grandfather in family life, and had a neutral stance on the interpretation of this role in the professional field. It can be concluded that the profession of acting influenced discussions on the various aspects of aging and that the skills of the actor's craft encouraged elderly actors to tend to deny their old age and to have an unfavorable view of aging.

Key words: Elderly; Aging; Older Adults; Grandparents; Actors.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid decrease in birth rates that has occurred in recent years has led to a growing elderly population. This increase in life expectancy is a biopsychosocial phenomenon worthy of attention. Studies that focus on this phase of human development have become more and more relevant, as they seek to improve the quality of life of individuals in this age group.¹

In the context of the elderly population, art is considered a positive influence, and the theater helps increase vitality, particularly when associated with working as an actor/actress.² The word “art” comes from the Latin *agere*, which means acting, action or activity. An artist is an agent and an actor is somebody who acts, on stage or off.³ Therefore, the profession of actor/actress demands social, physical and psychological abilities related to vocal and bodily expression, as well as how to prepare for them. However, the aging process leads to the onset of certain limitations, which can affect the performance of activities that are essential for actors/actresses.

Negative images of old age and the scarcity of roles for elderly actors in television programs and commercials were common complaints for many years. This was probably due to the emphasis that is placed on youth and beauty in western society. A study conducted in the USA showed that the negative image of old age on television was constant, and the roles offered to elderly actors were less important or rarely seen.⁴ In the 1980s, Moore & Cadeau⁵ analyzed 1733 television commercials over a period of eight weeks on three channels in Toronto, Canada. Only 2% of the commercials featured elderly people, with elderly women less visible than elderly men. Dail⁶ identified the elderly as the social group that is most negatively and unfavorably treated by the media, particularly in relation to health, sociability, the ability to work, personality and physical abilities. In

the 1990s, Tupper⁷ performed a study to determine if the under-representation of the elderly, as well as the negative image of old age on television in the 1970s and 80s, was still an issue. The authors found that stereotypes about old age on television were less common, although opportunities for elderly actors/actresses had also declined, as they were rarely used in commercials.

In Brazil, a number of surveys on this theme have been conducted through social media, although they were mostly qualitative, rather than quantitative. Changes have occurred in how commercials portray or address the elderly. They are no longer characterized in the negative light of previous decades, although they are still rarely seen in commercials, when compared with younger adults and children.⁸ Television transmission began in Brazil in the 1950s with TV Tupi (which closed in 1980). Significantly, those who were involved in the creation of Brazilian television and who helped to make it the main vehicle of communication in the country are now elderly. In the artistic world, they are icons who inspired new actors, viewers and the general public.

The professional training of an actor/actress is a long and continuous process. It is commonly believed that an actor/actress is only suitable to play all types of roles once they have matured and reached old age, after years of study. In addition, actors/actresses maintain inter-generational contact in their work, since they regularly act in scenes involving people of all age groups, playing different family members over the course of their careers, including grandparents.

Several meanings have been applied to the roles of grandparents in social, historical, cultural and familiar environments. At the end of the 1960s, grandparents played traditional roles, such as: present-givers; tellers of children’s stories; and baby-sitters when parents were absent. In the 1970s and 1980s, grandparents became a part of a family

grouping process, which involved relationships between generations and power and control in the parental structure, with a focus on assistance and family maintenance. In the 1990s, the role of grandparents was centralized as follows: they offer great affection to their grandchildren, with little reprimanding; they act as mediators between their children and grandchildren; they are a source of affection and understanding in tempestuous periods of a child's development; they speak of their own experiences as children and parents; they recount the family history.^{9,10}

As well as acting in the role of grandparents in their professional lives, many elderly actors play the same role in their personal lives. Thus, it is necessary to consider that their aging is usually marked by the difficulty of maintaining family ties, particularly with their children and grandchildren, due to their working hours and frequent travelling. In some cases, this can lead to the destruction of family bonds. It is also notable that, since the job of actor/actress does not require professional labor documentation, the subsequent lack of social security may have left many elderly actors dependent on financial help from members of their social support network and family, once their careers ended.¹¹

The aim of the present study was to investigate the perceptions of elderly actors on aging, old age and what it means to be a grandparent at home and at work (theatre, dubbing, radio and television), as well as to examine their perceptions on the influence of their profession on their lives and their old age.

METHODS

This exploratory, descriptive and cross-sectional study was conducted between February and December in 2014. The sample was calculated based on theoretical saturation, with a total of six actors interviewed.¹² The following inclusion criteria were applied: a) individuals aged 60 years or more; b) who were professional actors; c) with at least 30 years of experience (or more than half of their life) working in theater and television.

An open interview with a semi-structured script was used (Chart 1). The interview was divided into four sections: 1) the identity of the participant; 2) issues related to the actor's craft and the beginning of their career; 3) issues related to aging and old age and; 4) perceptions concerning their family relationships, with a focus on the role of grandparents.

Chart 1. Script used for the interviews. São Paulo, 2014.

Socio-demographic data

Name: _____ Stage name: _____

Age: _____ Gender: F () M () Religion: _____ Education: _____

Marital status: _____

If married, how many years: _____ If divorced, how many years: _____

Lives with: _____ No. of children: _____ No. of grandchildren: _____

Age of children: _____ Age of grandchildren: _____

Retired? () yes () no

Part I- Actors life

1. How old were you when you started acting?
2. How did your career progress (from the beginning until now)?
3. Are you still acting?

Part II- Aging and old age

4. What is it like to get old while working in the theater and television?
5. How did you feel playing the role of a grandparent?
6. What do you think about the elderly as artists?
7. Has your profession affected you aging process in any way?
8. Has old age changed anything in your profession? How so?
9. Do you feel old? In what ways?

Part III- Family relationships

10. How were your relationships with family members before you began your career? How were they afterwards?
11. What were the most significant events that occurred in your life and in your family during your career?
12. What does being a grandparent mean to you in the real world?
13. How regularly do you see your grandchildren?

() Every day () Once a week () Once a month () Once a year

The present study was conducted with elderly actors who were registered with *Pioneiros, Profissionais e Incentivadores da Televisão Brasileira* (Pioneers, Professionals and Supporters of Brazilian Television) (Pró-TV), located in the city of São Paulo. This institution was founded in 1995 by the actress Vida Alves and several other actors. The aim of the institution is to preserve the memory of TV and serve as a meeting point.

Initially, the researcher obtained authorization from the management of the abovementioned institution. One elderly actor was contacted, and the snowball technique was used to conduct the other interviews. The data collection was carried out individually in the abovementioned institution or in the residence of the elderly actor, without the presence of others. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. To ensure anonymity, the names used in the present study are fictitious.

The interviews were analyzed based on Bardin's technique of content analysis,¹³ which involves the following criteria: a) Comprehensiveness – all communication avenues were explored and no data was omitted; b) Representativeness – the categories were obtained using similar methods and collected from similar individuals; c) Homogeneity – the data refers to the same theme and was obtained from similar individuals using similar methods; d) Pertinence – the interviews were adapted to the content and the aims of the study, while the referral of indices and the creation of indicators were based on the aims of the research (the text was divided into comparable units of categorization for the thematic analysis and codes were used to record the data); and e) Exclusivity – an element was not classified in more than one category.

Based on the analysis of the material collected, categories were created, codifying the items in accordance with the abovementioned criteria, selecting the categories based on the core meanings of the statements of the participants. These categories were created to address the content of the statements in their totality, creating thematic axes. The qualitative analysis of this codified data helped to confirm the occurrence of statements in

each category, while also identifying sub-categories and extracting relevant sections (Chart 1).

The material was organized in accordance with a common meaning, which was expressed using codes, thereby enabling the transformation of raw data from the text into a representation of the content, determined in the form of analysis units. The weighting of the simple frequency of each analysis unit was translated into a quantitative (dimension) or qualitative (direction) character. The direction of the content analyzed was *favorable* (positive aspects of statements), *unfavorable* (negative aspects of statements) or *neutral* (undefined, vague, indeterminate, indifferent or impartial content, which did not express a positive or negative opinion). Thus, qualitative and quantitative analysis of the interviews was achieved.

The present study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Escola de Artes, Ciências e Humanidades (School of Arts, Science and the Humanities) (EACH) of the University of São Paulo (USP) under protocol number CAAE: 17469813.7.0000.5390. The actors who participated signed a free and informed consent form.

RESULTS

In total, six elderly actors were interviewed (three men and three women). Their mean age was 74.2 years. All six were still working as actors and had at least 45 years of work experience, with a mean of 56.66 years of professional activity. Three were widowed, while two were married and one was divorced. Concerning religion, three of the six claimed to be spiritualist or holistic, while two were Catholic and one was Messianic. All of the participants had two children, with an average of three grandchildren and 1.2 great-grandchildren.

When questioned about the milestones that had occurred during their professional lives, five of the participants stated that they had been working as an actor since their childhood and that their first job in the radio/television/theater came while they were still children. Four of them spoke of changes in their professional activity throughout

their careers, as well as the positive and/or negative effects of the military dictatorship that occurred during their career. In general, they had played leading roles. Two of the participants spoke of a downturn in their careers after a fire in a television station in São Paulo in 1969.

All of the participants stated that they did not feel old. However, when discussing their self-perceptions of aging and old age, most mentioned unfavourable aspects (54 analysis units). There was constant evidence of denial of this process in their statements (Table 1).

Table 1. Self-perception of aging and old age among elderly actors/actresses in terms of their profession, as well as their respective frequencies. São Paulo, 2014.

Self-perception of aging and old age among elderly actors/ actresses in terms of their profession	Frequency of analysis units	
	Absolute	Percentage
Unfavorable perception of aging and old age	54	40.3
Favorable perception of aging and old age	45	33.6
Neutral perception of aging and old age	35	26.1
Total	134	100.0

Concerning the perception that the interviewees presented in relation to young and old individuals in the artistic world, a favorable image of the elderly was recorded in 11 analysis units, whereas an over-

valuation of the elderly was reported in eight units and a favorable image of the young was addressed in 12 units (Table 2).

Table 2. Perception of young and elderly people in the artistic world from the perspective of elderly actors/actresses, as well as their respective frequencies. São Paulo, 2014.

Image in the artistic world	Frequency of the analysis units	
	Absolute	Percentage
Image of youth		
Favorable image of youth	12	63.2
Unfavorable image of youth	4	21.0
Neutral image of youth	3	15.8
Total	19	100.0
Image of the elderly		
Favorable image of the elderly	11	39.3
Over-valuation of the elderly	8	28.6
Unfavorable image of the elderly	5	17.8
Neutral image of the elderly	4	14.3
Total	28	100.0

The profession of actor/actress was recognized by the participants as a favorable influence on aging and old age, with 23 analysis units. None of the statements were unfavourable in relation to this aspect (Table 3).

The elderly actors were questioned about how they felt playing the roles of grandparents. Most of the analysis units revealed a neutral position in relation to these roles (11 analysis units), as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 3. The influence of the profession on aging and old age among elderly actors/actresses, as well as their respective frequencies. São Paulo, 2014.

Influence of profession on aging and old age	Frequency of analysis units	
	Absolute	Percentage
Favorable influence of profession	23	82.1
Neutral influence of profession	5	17.9
Unfavorable influence of profession	-	-
Total	28	100.0

Table 4. Interpretation of the roles of grandparents in the professional sphere, as well as their respective frequencies. São Paulo, 2014.

Interpretation of the roles of grandparents	Frequency of the analysis units	
	Absolute	Percentage
Neutral interpretation of the roles of grandparents	11	52.4
Favorable interpretation of the roles of grandparents	9	42.8
Unfavorable interpretation of the roles of grandparents	1	4.8
Total	21	100.0

Most of the elderly actors exhibited a favorable perception of the meaning of being a grandparent in their family lives (30 analysis units), as can be

seen in Table 5. Significantly, only one of the six participants was not a grandparent.

Table 5. Perceptions of the meaning of being a grandparent among elderly actors/actresses, as well as their respective frequencies. São Paulo, 2014.

Perceptions of the meaning of being a grandparent	Frequency of the analysis units	
	Absolute	Percentage
Favorable perception of being a grandparent	30	88.2
Unfavorable perception of being a grandparent	2	5.9
Neutral perception of being a grandparent	2	5.9
Total	34	100.0

Chart 2 displays the qualitative results.

Chart 2. Thematic categories and sub-categories. São Paulo, 2014.

Categories, codes and definitions	Sub-categories, codes and examples of extracts from interviews
<p>Category 1: Self-perception concerning aging and old age among actors in terms of their profession (<i>Code: AEVA</i>)</p> <p><i>Definition:</i> This category contains statements made by elderly actors about their own perceptions of aging and old age.</p>	<p>a) Favorable aging and old age (<i>Code: EF</i>) “Look, in my opinion, getting old in this profession is a nice way to get old”. (Miguel)</p> <p>b) Unfavorable aging and old age (<i>Code: ED</i>) “This is funny because I get old for others, they are the ones who notice my aging!”. (Lara)</p> <p>c) Neutral aging and old age (<i>Code: EN</i>) “It’s like I said, I don’t know! For me, I’m a person”. (Henrique)</p>
<p>Category 2: Image of young and elderly people in the artistic world, from the perspective of elderly actors (<i>Code: IJA</i>)</p> <p><i>Definition:</i> This category contains the view of elderly actors about young and elderly people in the artistic world.</p>	<p><i>Image of youth</i></p> <p>a) Favorable image of youth (<i>Code: IFJ</i>) “Of course, young people are more attractive, more outspoken”. (Marina)</p> <p>b) Unfavorable image of youth (<i>Code: IDJ</i>) “Because of television, even the cinema, you see, you watch, you notice the difference in a mature actor. Sometimes, young actors can charm you”. (Miguel)</p> <p>c) Neutral image of youth (<i>Code: INJ</i>) “Young actors also take a text and try to give the character a human dimension”. (Miguel)</p> <p><i>Image of the elderly</i></p> <p>a) Overvaluation of the elderly (<i>Code: SI</i>) “Now... the elderly actor has a fantastic capacity to interpret roles, they are more serious, more sure of themselves, although doubt is always permanent, but they are more sure of how to proceed”. (Miguel)</p> <p>b) Favorable image of the elderly (<i>Code: IFI</i>) “We are privileged; old people are not excluded (laughs)”. (Lara)</p> <p>c) Unfavorable image of the elderly (<i>Code: IDI</i>) “I worked with one actress who used to say “The next time I sign a theater contract, I will demand that my character has only two outfit changes and that I don’t have to climb any more than two steps”. (Miguel)</p> <p>d) Neutral image of the elderly (<i>Code: INI</i>) “In our case, we are necessary..., regardless of whether we are well or badly accepted, we are mandatorily required”. (Henrique)</p>
<p>Category 3: The influence of the profession on aging and old age (<i>Code: IPEV</i>)</p> <p><i>Definition:</i> This category contains statements by the elderly actors about the influence of their profession on aging and old age.</p>	<p>a) Favorable influence of the profession (<i>Code: IFP</i>) “I love what I do... Every time you work and act in something you like, your life is much more pleasant”. (Lara)</p> <p>b) Neutral influence of the profession (<i>Code: INP</i>) “The roles have changed, I can’t play a 30-year old stud, only the 60-year old ones, or older”. (Henrique)</p>

<p>Category 4: The interpretation of roles involving grandparents at work (<i>Code: IA</i>)</p> <p><i>Definition:</i> This category contains statements about the opinions of elderly actors on their interpretation of grandparents.</p>	<p>a) Favorable interpretation of grandparents (<i>Code: IAF</i>) “Ah, its great! You have a lot of affection... “. (Bianca)</p> <p>b) Unfavorable interpretation of grandparents (<i>Code: IAD</i>) “To be honest, I haven’t played many grandparents. Ah, as long as it’s a nice grandparent... I hate when they portray grandparents as old and sullen”. (Miguel)</p> <p>c) Neutral interpretation of grandparents (<i>Code: IAN</i>) “It’s normal, I’m at an age to be a grandparent”. (Bernardo)</p>
<p>Category 5: The perception of the meaning of being a grandparent among elderly actors (<i>Code: ASA</i>)</p> <p><i>Definition:</i> This category contains statements about the opinions of the elderly actors on what it means to be a grandparent.</p>	<p>a) Favorable meaning of being a grandparent (<i>Code: AFA</i>) “Being a grandparent is very nice, because you love with freedom”. (Marina)</p> <p>b) Unfavorable meaning of being a grandparent (<i>Code: ADA</i>) “I don’t have time to spend with my grandchildren... I work!”. (Lara)</p> <p>c) Neutral meaning of being a grandparent (<i>Code: ADA</i>) “You can look at them from a third position, from a distance”. (Lara)</p>

DISCUSSION

Milestones in the professional career of elderly actors

Most of the elderly actors began their careers in the theater, with dance groups or on the radio when they were teenagers or young adults. Emerson & Souza¹⁴ correlated starting work as a child or teenager in the general publication with lower earnings in adulthood, particularly when considering the impact on education. The decision to start working as a child/adolescent is usually spontaneous or related to the financial needs of the individual’s family. In the present study, most of the actors did not graduate due to their dedication to their acting work during their teenage years, usually as a result of the economic difficulties of their families. Another factor that may have been decisive in the early start to the career of these actors/actresses was a family history in the profession, and the subsequent influence of the family in professional choices, as reported in a number of other studies.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

Some of the actors/actresses interviewed changed their profession, mainly due to two events: the military coup of 1964 and the occurrence of fires in significant television stations in São Paulo. With the foundation of Institutional Act 5 (Ato Institucional 5 - AI-5), censorship increased greatly, hindering the development of plays that criticized the regime, as well as those with the new aggressive, provocative style of the period. These plays were deemed to be “against the regime” and as such, they needed to be tracked down and eradicated.¹⁸ Thus, many actors migrated to other areas, such as dubbing, or opted to acquire experience in another field altogether. In 1969, over a period of four days, three of the six television stations in São Paulo fell foul to fires that destroyed almost all of their studios and archives. This disaster, together with a previous fire in the offices of TV Cultura and the bankruptcy of the Tupi and Excelsior stations, led to the migration of the television industry from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro.¹⁹ Therefore, many actors who could not (or did not want to) move city, or travel between the two cities constantly, opted to stay in São Paulo and seek another career path.

Self-perception of aging and old age among elderly actors in terms of their profession and its influence on this process

Concerning perceptions of aging and old age, Kole²⁰ indicated that no studies have specifically dealt with the issue of how participation in a theatrical performance can affect (positively or negatively) the perception of elderly actors/actresses.

Also concerning self-perceptions of aging, Neri²¹ identified that the correlation between chronological age and aging is only one indicator of this process. The perception of aging normally occurs “from the outside in” and is not recognized immediately by the person themselves, but is associated with other people and daily situations,²² as can be seen in the statement by Lara (voiceover actress):

“I don’t really have that perception, of how I am on the outside...”

“When I worked in television, it was easier, you always see yourself, don’t you?”

A study by Puffal et al.²³ assessed the effect of art as a form of therapy for the elderly, confirming that artistic expression can lead individuals to perceive themselves more accurately in the “here and now” and that art contributes to a process of life reconstruction. An illustration of this can be seen in the following statement by Marina:

“In my opinion, there are positive sides, especially when working in the arts. You don’t really pay much attention to the idea that external aging means you have hit rock bottom.... and you haven’t! Firstly, I am healthy, and secondly, I have the most important thing in life, which is a dream, the desire to do something, the need to wake up excited because somebody is expecting me for a recording”.

The actor Bernard had the following to say about aging:

“I stay active, I work, I do films, I make films here at home, I work in commercials, auditions. I’m still very busy. Maybe more so now than when I was 20 years old [laughs]!”

According to Debert,²⁴ there is a contemporary tendency to review stereotypes associated with old age. The idea of losses and degeneracy have been replaced with the notion that old age can be a time for pleasure, conquests and doing things that we may have had to postpone during other periods of our lives.

All of the actors interviewed stated that they did not feel old. A study by Santos²⁵ analyzed the social representations of old age and the identity of elderly subjects and showed that the elderly consider reaching old age as a triumph. They also felt that bodily alterations could be accepted as the fruits of their life story. However, they did not characterize themselves as old: other people are old, those who belong to an older, more specific age group than the one to which they themselves belong.

In a study by Magnabosco-Martins et al.²⁶ on the elderly and old age, the elderly participants did not consider themselves to be elderly, since they were very active and happy. They believed that being old or elderly depended on each person’s state of mind. Those that had “a young spirit” and stayed active, maintaining good family relationships and a religious faith, were not classified in this “undesirable” stage of life.

It is common to hear elderly individuals say things like: “old age doesn’t exist”, or “it’s a state of mind”.²⁷ Araújo et al.²⁸ indicated that the ideological components that are intrinsic to intra- and inter-group communication in contemporary society and express negative opinions about old age are reflected in the social desirability of the elderly to use the fact that they are independent, active and autonomous to deny their aging.

Lopes & Park²⁹ stated that understanding how old age, the elderly and the aging process are perceived and represented enables us to understand certain behavior patterns and feelings, whether on behalf of society or the elderly themselves. Despite the fact that most of the elderly interviewees revealed an unfavourable self-perception in their statements, the influence of their profession had positive repercussions on

their lives. Marina had the following to say on aging as a professional actress:

"We are luckier than many others. People say that getting old is awful, and of course, there are downsides (...), but in my opinion, there are upsides as well".

Successful aging requires the reinforcement of positive attitudes and the ability to adapt to social circumstances characterized by change, continuous learning, the ability to acquire new skills and incorporate new concepts and technology, thereby acquiring the information required to make decisions.³⁰ The statements of the interviewees revealed that their job and activity throughout their lives (and in old age) had a unique importance to them. The actors/actresses mentioned that work is fundamental so that people can develop personally and be recognized socially.

In our current society, many elderly individuals are returning to work after retirement as they are the main providers in their families.³¹ The fact that they are working could be indicated as a powerful and independent survival factor.³² The interviewees were satisfied and engaged with their work, stating their desire to keep working as long as possible.

"We are lucky, because we can start working as a child, like I did, and finish when the man upstairs pulls the plug. There is no fixed career time". (Lara)

Actors have to play characters and live other lives in their working hours. Playing an elderly person on camera makes them familiar with something that is not common in their real lives (aging), complementing their experiences and knowledge of the world.³³ With the global expansion of the theater to include more elderly actors, more appropriate performances and texts are required, as is the exploration of themes that provide interesting challenges for this age group.²⁰

The image of the elderly and the young in the artistic world from the perspective of elderly actors

The media is one of the channels that affects our beliefs, values and representations concerning

old age, thereby contributing to the maintenance of stereotypes related to old age and the elderly. It was clear in the statements of the elderly interviewees that the image of the elderly individual is favorable in the artistic world, as they are often seen as role models by those who are beginning a career in the profession. They often feel they are the true protagonists and essential to a good plot, as can be seen in the following statement by Marina:

"You realize that, not because you are old, but because you are experienced, you stay strong, because while we may not be in the limelight, we are the foundation. So you see that the older characters, older actors, are crucial to the story. A soap opera imposes itself through these characters - the rest of the cast are decorations that move around. Of course, the younger actors are more attractive, more outspoken, they make for better decoration, but the adults and the older people give the text its strength".

There was a notable over-valuation of elderly actors, which implied a negative image of the youth, as can be seen in the following statement by Miguel:

"A young actor was playing a very difficult role - Richard III, and he did it magically. Sometimes, a young actor can charm you!"

In a sense, some of the elderly actors over-valued their work and that of their colleagues, claiming to have experience and the life of an artist, which led to them looking down on young and up-and-coming actors/actresses.

When elderly actors/actresses are used in commercials, there is a tendency to use exaggerated stereotypes, such as the "sick, unhappy, unproductive elderly individual who needs constant help and suffers from loneliness and isolation".³⁴ Some elderly actors/actresses have certain limitations, caused by aging, related to physical and cognitive issues:

"Sometimes, an older actor might have problems with their memory and movement. There was an actress I worked with who said: 'The next time I sign a theater contract, I'm going to demand that my character has only two changes of clothes and only needs to climb two steps'. (Miguel)

Debert²⁴ stated that the new image of the elderly does not offer solutions for the decay of cognitive abilities and physical and emotional control, which are essential in our society so that an individual is seen as autonomous and fully capable of exercising their rights to citizenship. Oliveira & Rabot³⁵ cited a number of advantages to using the image of an elderly individual in a commercial: it shows the companies interest in social causes; it values the image and social function of the elderly individual in society; it increases the self-esteem of the elderly, as well as their life satisfaction; it transmits confidence to the consumer and credibility to the product. Lara claimed to be satisfied with her profession and the image of the elderly in the artistic world:

"We are very lucky, our job doesn't have... older people are not excluded (laughs)."

The meaning of being a grandparent at home and at work

The family, as a system, faces significant challenges as a result of the demands associated with old age. Each family experiences this stage of life in a manner which is determined by previous family bonds and standards. The manner in which the family and their members deal with this period is correlated with the type of system that they create over the years and the capacity to adjust to the new demands and losses caused by this process.³⁶ Concerning what it means to be a grandparent at home, the interviewees viewed it as something favorable, particularly as a result of what they learned while bringing up their children. Bernardo made the following comments on this subject:

"It is a pleasure! You treat your grandchildren better than you treat your children. You know more and you give them something in exchange for a smile. I love my grandchildren".

These meanings are similar to others cited in literature, confirming that being a grandparent can contribute to the resolution of family conflicts and psychosocial issues, through the formation of new affectionate bonds. It is a chance to be a

better grandparent than they were a parent: an opportunity to reassess life and see their past mistakes, as well as to have a positive influence on their grandchildren.^{37,38}

In general, the analysis units showed that, for elderly actors, playing the role of a grandparent in their work is neither a positive nor a negative experience. For most of them, they are ensured of a role, since there are characters that only they can portray, including grandparents. This idea was addressed by Henrique:

"In our case, we are necessary, regardless of whether we are well-accepted or not."

Bianca had the following to say on the issue:

"Ah, it is fantastic. You have a lot of affection... there's a saying: grandchildren are a blessing, without the responsibility of being a parent. That's it really, being a grandparent is great in real life and in fiction!"

Vassileva-Karagyozeva³⁹ analyzed how grandparents were portrayed in a number of Polish soap operas, the narrators of which remembered their childhood and teenage years in the end of the communist era. In fictitious situations, the grandparents were portrayed as caregivers who offered emotional and psychological support, transmitters of the Catholic faith and religious values, guardians of traditional morality, a source of knowledge about family and national history, as well as stress-relievers during confrontations between their children and grandchildren.

In children's programs, grandparents tend to be portrayed as strong individuals, rather than secondary and inefficient people. The strength of the grandparents is often built on the weaknesses of others (e.g.: their own children). In some ways, this strengthens stereotypes and does not portray old age as heterogenous.⁴⁰ There is no single way to experience old age. There are many ways to get old: this stage of life is as diversified as the others.⁹

The fact that a convenience sample was used is a limitation of the present study. Consequently, it is not possible to generalize the results obtained

for all elderly actors/actresses. In addition, most of the actors we contacted were still working and had extremely busy schedules, which hindered the interview process. There remains a scarcity of studies on this theme in the field of gerontology, which hinders the discussion of the present study.

CONCLUSION

This study identified metaphors referring to the perception of old age, aging and the meaning of being elderly in the home and at work. The elderly actors/actresses addressed positive, negative and neutral aspects, thereby highlighting the complexity of the topic in terms of common sense. It was shown that being an actor or actress influenced the participant's reflections on different aspects of the aging process. Therefore, art and the skills of actors, which involve cognitive, physical and

motor abilities, lead elderly actors to deny their own aging and to have an unfavourable view of the aging process.

The media, anti-aging treatments and the social cult of beauty and youth often advocate a stereotypical view of old age. Conversely, in the artistic world, the interviewees demonstrated a favorable image of the elderly and the young, highlighting the importance of the roles of elderly individuals in the plots of soap operas and plays. Most of the participants had a favorable perception of the meaning of being a grandparent at home and a neutral posture in relation to playing the role of a grandparent in their jobs.

Future studies should investigate the family relationships of elderly actors/actresses, as well as the stereotypes and prejudice experienced and witnessed in socio-familiar and professional fields.

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