

Mandalas and Guided Imagery: Improving the Life Quality of Elders

Mandalas y Visualización Creativa: Mejorando la Calidad de Vida de los Ancianos

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of guided imagery and mandala drawing on depression and psychological well-being. **Methodology:** The participants involved in the study, people aged 65 – 85, were randomly assigned to one of the two groups: the control group (n=20) with the age mean 69.2, which was not exposed to the intervention, and the experimental group (n=20) with the age mean 76.2, which was involved in the intervention (comprising guided imagery and mandala art). The sessions took place once a week, for four weeks. All the participants completed the questionnaires: Beck Depression Inventory and the Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire. The data were analyzed using ANCOVA. **Results:** The results report a significant difference between the groups regarding depression and psychological well-being. **Conclusion:** This study supports the practical capacity of guided imagery and mandala drawing in improving the quality of life.

Keywords: mandala, guided imagery, psychological well-being, depression, elders

Resumen

Objetivo: Este trabajo pretende evaluar los beneficios que la visualización creativa y el dibujo de mandalas, tiene en la depresión y el bienestar psicológico. **Metodología:** Los participantes del estudio tenían entre 65 y 85 años, y fueron elegidos al azar para formar parte de uno de estos grupos: grupo de control (n=20) con una media de edad 69.2 años, que no fue sometido a intervenciones sino tan sólo a un test (compuesto por un pre-test y un post-test); y el grupo experimental (n=20) con una media de edad de 76.2 años, sometido a una intervención compuesta por ejercicios de visualización guiada y dibujos de mandalas. Las reuniones se llevaron a cabo una vez por semana durante cuatro semanas. Todos los participantes rellenaron el Inventario de Depresión Beck y el Cuestionario de Bienestar Psicológico de Ryff. Los datos fueron analizados usando ANCOVA. **Resultados:** Los resultados demuestran una diferencia estadísticamente significativa en cuanto a la depresión y el bienestar psicológico entre los dos grupos. **Conclusión:** Este estudio demuestra el valor práctico de la visualización creativa y del dibujo de mandalas como método para mejorar la calidad de la vida.

Palabras clave: mandala, visualización guiada, bienestar psicológico, depresión, vejez

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Introduction

The society today is facing a problem in offering special care to a growing number of elderly people. The growing number of elders in the world proves that the quality of life has risen over recent decades, but this fact calls for increasing the professional caregivers' attention concerning this age group, in order to support their needs and to better understand the psychological and physiological processes of aging. As Jung says, "the second half of life is marked by one's reorientation towards the inner life, the purpose of this stage of life being that of passing from the relativity of "I", from the point of view of experience, to the relation with the Self, respectively, the reunion of "I" and the Self." This process implies a deeper self-awareness, a profounder knowledge of people and is necessary to bring into consciousness the unconscious features, in order to get to an internal and external reference to the earthly and cosmically structure of the universe.

The purpose of this research is to observe the effects of guided imagery and mandala drawing on psychological well-being and depression on the elderly. The results can offer support in using these simple and adaptable techniques aiming to facilitate and sustain the humans' natural tendency of growing and personal development.

Conceptual clarifications

The process of personal development influences the individual as a whole. Individuation is a process of development, of fulfilling the human potential through the union of contraries. Throughout individuation mandalas may appear to represent the primary order of the complete psyche. Jung had studied the mandalas for fourteen years before introducing them into his theory and practice. Mandalas are the previous sketches of the successful union between the mental pairs of opposites existing in the psyche; they are more or less successful preliminary stages of completion and wholeness (Jacoby, 2012). They show up, sustaining the self-regulating tendency of the psyche, when there is confusion within the psyche.

Recently, researchers find out more and more about the way images can influence emotions, thoughts, well-being, and the way the body and the brain react to drawing, painting, or other artistic activities, clarifying for us the manner art therapy can be helpful for a wide range of

people. Lusebrink (1990) observed that images are a bridge between body and mind, between the conscious levels of information process and the physiological changes that occur in the body. Guided imagery, an experiential technique due to which the person is directed towards a state of relaxation and then guided towards specific images through suggestions, was used to reduce symptoms, to change the mood and to reinforce the healing capacities of the human body.

Jung used in his therapy the special qualities of arts. He used art as a method of self-analysis, being inspired by his personal experiences that became the foundation for understanding the importance of using imagery in analysis. The development of art therapy was strongly influenced both by Freud's psychoanalysis and by Jung's analytical theory. Jung's theory was incorporated in the methodology specific to art therapies. Jung believed that symbols have the capacity to unite the oppositions, as a natural attempt of the psyche to resolve inner conflicts and as a method to individuation.

Mandalas

Mandala means "magic circle" in Sanskrit. It is known from ancient times in the East, but it can also be found in the world's cultures, having a universal spread dating from Paleolithic (The Rhodesian drawings on rock) (Gardner, cited in Miller, 2005). It belongs to the oldest religious symbols of the world. Being seen by the Buddhist monks as a representation of the individual's spiritual path (Marshall, cited in Greening, & Portemier, 2012), Jung introduced it in therapy as representing the state of the Self. For Jung it represents a cryptogram regarding the state of Self. Jung (1980) says that "the true mandala is an inner image that is gradually built through active imagination, namely when there is a disturbance of balance in a soul or when a thought cannot be found and it has to be searched for, because it is not contained in the sacred doctrine." Jung (in Greening & Portmeir, 2012) argues that mandalas symbolize the "center of personality, a central point within the psyche, to which all are related and arranged, and which itself is a source of energy".

Nowadays, mandalas are used in different types of psychotherapies, for example Stanislav Grof uses mandalas to help in integrating the experience gained during a Holotropic Breathing session. Its aim in psychotherapy is to become a

tool for personal expression, to increase self-awareness, to resolve conflicts and heal (Henderson, 2007). In art therapy, mandalas refer to any kind of art realized in a circular context. Jung (1934) noticed the calming and healing effect of mandala drawing upon its creator, is facilitating the psychic integration and finding the life personal purpose. Mandala, according to its effects, can lead to solving various psychological complications and it releases the personality from emotional and ideational confusions, producing a personal unity that can be considered as a rebirth state on transcendent level (Jacobi, 2012). All these contribute directly to the quality of life perceived by a person.

Regarding treatment, Jung's ideas started from his belief that, in order to obtain psychical balance, the person should establish a communication between conscious and unconscious mind. He thought that a good method to get to this state of balance is using the transcendental qualities of symbols, as those that appear in dreams and art. Jung considered symbols as a unifying element of opposites, as an attempt of the psyche to reconcile internal conflicts, and as a way to get individuation. Jung worked with the patients' images, trying to discover hidden possibilities and helping a person to find meaning and wholeness in his/her life (Malchiodi, 2003). To the same effect, Jung understood from his own experience and from others' that the artistic creation is a useful method for accessing the healing properties of archetypes. Jung's analytical psychology is substantially overlapping transpersonal psychology. Both approaches focus on the fact that psychological development has to include high levels of consciousness, as well as on the fact that the transcendental is inside us and it is available to anyone. As Scotton says (in Miller, 2005) these approaches integrate different traditional knowledge in their theory and practice, and the importance of addressing both to personal and transpersonal issues is noticed.

Recently, transpersonal approaches of art therapy integrated Jung's philosophy, transpersonal psychology and spiritual practices (Malchiodi, 2003). Jung is considered the first practitioner of transpersonal approach in art therapy, because he believed that the process of individuation requires exploring and integrating the spiritual dimension expressed through images that appear in dreams and art (Jung, 1964). Joan Kellogg (1978) highlighted the value of the artistic expression in accessing the transpersonal aspects

of the Self through mandala drawing. The techniques that address both body and mind reflect the current thinking that sees imagery as a form of treatment (Achterberg, cited in Malchiodi, 2003) and physical symptoms as an expression of transpersonal aspects of Self. The artistic expression is seen as a method to explore what is beyond Self, and as a process due to which modified states of consciousness are accessed.

Kellogg (1978) explored mandala drawing in relationship with Jung's theory regarding the collective unconscious. These approaches underline the central role of imagery in psychotherapy, and the archetypal material revealed by artistic expression and by dreams are seen as having the potential of transforming the psyche.

Mandalas are based on a religious experience, and are constructions through which the universe and the human being - mind and matter - are connected. Mandalas serve as a medium that allows both the creator and the observer to experience a sacred world.

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a technique which uses the capacities of human mind to create mental representations of objects, places, situations which will be perceived through the person's senses (Post-White, 2002). It implies the use of imagination in order to provoke one or more senses. In a session of guided imagery, the therapist leads the client using a script or an imagery technique. As Achterberg says (in Roffe, Schmidt & Ernst, 2005): "guided imagery involves directing the person inside his/her mind through experience, in order to reach the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions and influence the body's changes." This method can be applied either to a group or to a person.

These techniques are frequently used to reduce anxiety and physical pain and for bringing a state of calmness (Lang & Patt, cited in Roffe, Schmidt & Ernst, 2005). Likewise, it has been proved that guided imagery encourages responsiveness to treatment and facilitates the recovery process (Simonton, cited in Roffe, Schmidt & Ernst, 2005). Psychoneuro-immunology's theories claim that through the psychological response to guided imagery, these techniques can reduce stress, increase immunological functioning and bring a state of well-being (Post-White, 1998).

Kaplan (2000) underlines the importance of neurosciences in art therapy and the value of mind-body unity concerning the guided imagery and the artistic activities. Camic (1999) conducted a research in which he used visual art and other kinds of art along with cognitive-behavioral techniques, meditations and guided imagery, in order to reduce chronic pain among adults. Sloman (2002) investigated the effect of guided imagery on quality of life, anxiety and depression in patients with advanced cancer. The results show that this intervention has significant effects in the case of depression and life quality. The data show that guided imagery can be used as a psycho-supportive adjuvant in therapy. It can be used along with artistic expression in order to facilitate self-expression, get insights and reduce stress. Psychotherapists use guided imagery to encourage relaxation, stimulate creativity and increase concentration (Camic, 1999).

Relevant researches

The focus on the relationship between physical well-being and emotional state has increased in the last decade. Practitioners from various fields explored the complex relations between illness, healing and the unconscious messages that give us a sense of being in the world. For example, DeLue (1999) studied the physiological response of school children when they were drawing mandalas. Using biofeedback techniques, the researcher concluded that just drawing within a circle produces a physiological relaxation response.

Artistic expression and guided imagery have been studied together (Lusebrink, 1990), as methods to reduce stress and to increase relaxation (DeLue, 1999). As a form of healing, imagination is an ancient practice, but recent research show that images have an essential role in healing and well-being (Achterburg, cited from Malchiodi, 2003).

There are few research studies regarding the effects of mandala drawing. Most of the studies concerning mandala as a therapeutic tool are, in general, case studies and clinical observations (Henderson, 2007). They use mandalas in various populations and contexts, such as: schizophrenia (Minulescu, 2001), psychotic disorders, posttraumatic stress and dissociative disorders (Cox & Cohen, 2000), ADHD (Smitherman, Brown & Church, cited in Henderson, 2012), and dementia (Couch, cited in Henderson, 2012).

Mandala drawing helps to purify the mind (Erricker, cited in Greening & Portmier, 2012), and as Huh says (Greening & Portmier, 2012) it may represent a high level of spirituality. Another study led by Henderson and collaborators (2007) found that mandala drawing has positive effects on people suffering from posttraumatic stress syndrome. Those in the experimental group subjected to intervention (mandala drawing) achieved statistically significant decreases of severity of PTSD symptoms than the control group. Mandala drawing can provide cognitive integration and organization of complex emotional experiences.

Methodology

This research is testing, in a control manner, the benefits of mandala drawing on psychological health. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of guided imagery and mandala drawing on psychological well-being and depression, in the case of elderly. Mandala drawing can be a therapeutic tool, generating long term positive emotions that can be used to build and increase psychological well-being.

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the benefits of guided imagery and mandala drawing in terms of psychological well-being and depression. These are the hypotheses we want to study:

1. There are, statistically, significant differences between the experimental group and the control group regarding psychological well-being.
2. There are, statistically, significant differences between the experimental and the control group regarding depression.

Subjects

For this study, a group of 40 participants aged 65-85 was analyzed; it was divided into two: a control group comprising 20 subjects (out of which 8 men and 12 women), and an experimental group, also comprising 20 subjects (out of which 9 men and 11 women). The participants were members of "Sf. Arhangheli Mihail si Gavril" day center, and they volunteered in this study. Most of participants were rural dwellers, only few participants being city dwellers. The level of

education differed, most of them having attended high school or a vocational school. They were randomized to one of the two groups: the control group, which was not exposed to intervention, and the experimental group subjected to intervention, which consisted of an exercise of guided imagery and mandala drawing. The experimental group took part in four sessions (meeting once a week), where guided imagery exercises were conducted, followed by mandala drawing.

Instruments

All of the participants completed the self-assessed questionnaires: Beck Depression Inventory and the Psychological Well-being Questionnaire, both at the beginning of the research (pre-test) and at the end (post-test), after four weeks. The chosen questionnaires measure the level of depression and psychological well-being.

Beck Depression Inventory

It was developed by Beck and his collaborators (1961) and it was meant to evaluate the severity of the depression symptoms. It comprises 21 symptoms (items), each of them having four levels of severity, from 0 - absent to 3 - highly severe, each level having, in its turn, a question; the person has to choose the question that fits best his condition. The 21 symptoms were chosen from the most common symptoms of the depressive disorders and from the psychiatric literature: depressive mood, pessimism, sense of failure, dissatisfaction, feelings of guilt, feelings of punishment, self-loathing, self-accusation, self-punitive desires, crying, irritability, social isolation, indecision, self-image change, work difficulties, sleep disorders, fatigue, appetite loss, weight loss, somatic concerns, and libido loss.

Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire

It was developed by Ryff (1989). It contains the following components: self-acceptance (a positive attitude toward oneself and his/her past), positive relations with others (qualitative and satisfying relations with others), autonomy (the sense of independence, freedom and self-determination), purpose in life (the belief that life has its meaning and value), environment mastery (the ability to manage his/her own life and

environment), personal development (open-mindedness to new experiences and continuous personal development). The answers are evaluated on a Likert scale, from 1 (strong disagreement) to 6 (strong agreement).

Procedure

All of the participants filled in the questionnaires at the pre-test level and, then, they were randomized in one of the two groups. The control group was not subjected to the intervention; it was tested at the beginning and at the end of the study, four weeks after having taken the first test. The experimental group was also tested at the beginning and at the end of the study, after having been subjected to the intervention comprising a weekly fifty-minute session, in which there was a guided imagery exercise, a different one for every week, followed by the mandala drawing moment; at the end of each session they were asked questions about the drawing they had created. The first session theme was "The Favorite Place", the second session theme was "The Dissolution of Resentment" (that exercise was developed by Emmet Fox), the third session theme was focused on "Inner Beauty" and the last session theme was "The Tree and the Light" developed by Iolanda Mitrofan (2008). At the end of the study all the participants filled in the post-test questionnaires.

At the beginning of the first session the participants received the informed consent form and the questionnaires. After filling in the forms, the people belonging to the experimental group started the exercise of guided imagery, then they received a blank sheet with a drawn circle on it and a box of crayons. Then they had to follow the instructions and draw in the circle what they feel that best represent their emotions, feelings, disposition they have. They could use any colors, shapes, symbols, forms, but couldn't use words. They were allowed to draw for 20 minutes. At the end of the session they were asked to answer several questions related to the drawing made by them:

1. Imagine that you are inside the mandala, how do you feel there?
2. What associations do you have for the colors you used (eg. words, feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories)?

3. What associations do you have for the shapes that you drew (eg. words, feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories)?
4. Give a title to the drawing, based on your reflections.
5. How is the mandala representative to your current life situation? (How much does your mandala illustrate who you are, and your current situation in life?)
6. What feelings, memories, and thoughts does your drawing convey?

Results

The questionnaires were administered individually, every subject following the same procedure. For the statistical processing of data, the SPSS program was used. For the verification of formulated hypotheses a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine, statistically, the significant difference between intervention and non-intervention conditions on depression and psychological well-being control, for the pre-test scores.

The distribution of the data is symmetric, being in the -2 - +2 intervals, for both Skewness and Kurtosis. The internal consistency (Alpha Cronbach) was calculated for each test. The values obtained vary between $\alpha=.77$ for the Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire and $\alpha=.90$ for BDI.

First hypothesis

The necessary conditions for using ANCOVA were followed, there is a linear correlation between the covariate (the scores from pretest) and the dependent variable (posttest scores). This aspect was verified using r correlation coefficient and the scatter plot resulted from the association of those two variables. The values obtained are: $r(40)=.743$, $p<.001$. The data sustain the assumption of homogeneous regression slopes for the various groups. The value of F is: $F(1.36)=0.759$, $p=.38$, which means the null hypothesis was not rejected. Levene's test for equality of variances was performed, the results are not statistically significant, the assumption of homogeneity of groups is sustained. The assumptions for ANCOVA are met.

For the first hypothesis we have the following results:

As shown in Table 1.1 the ANCOVA for experimental group versus control group on post-test depression scores control for pre-test scores was found to have statistically significant main effects, $F(1.37) = 6.75$, $p<.001$. The effect size was calculated: $r^2 = 0.94$, which indicates a strong effect.

The adjusted mean and standard deviation (Table 1.2) taking in account the pre-test score show that the control group's mean has increased from 15.25 to 18.71, and for the experimental group it has decreased from 13.5 to 10.03. A high score on depression scale indicates a high level of depression.

Table 1.1

ANCOVA for depression. Test of Between-Subjects Effect. Dependent variable: depression post-test

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Depression pre-test	3212.350	1	3212.350	82.288	.000	.690
Group	655.253	1	655.253	16.785	.000	.312
Error	1444.400	37	39.038			
Total	12953.000	40				
Corrected total	4687.375	39				

Table 1.2.*Adjusted mean and standard deviation*

Group	N	Post-test depression		Post-test depression		95% Confidence interval	
		Observed Mean	Observed SD	Adjusted Mean	Adjusted ES	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control group	20	15.25	10.47	18.71	1.44	15.78	21.64
Experimental group	20	13.50	11.63	10.03	1.44	7.10	12.97

Data resulting from the tests confirm the first hypothesis; there is, statistically, a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group regarding depression. The intervention has a strong effect on the depression level; those in the experimental group experienced a decrease in depression.

Second hypothesis

ANCOVA was conducted to determine, statistically, significant differences between intervention and non-intervention conditions on psychological well-being control for the pre-test scores. The assumptions for using ANCOVA were tested. The correlation coefficient was calculated: $r(40) = 0.665$, $p < .01$, meaning that there is a positive correlation between the covariate (the scores from pretest) and the dependent variable (posttest scores). Also the scatter plot indicates a linear relation between the variables. The value of F is: $F(1.36) = 0.634$, $p = .43$, which means the data sustain the assumption of homogeneous regression slopes for the various groups. Levene's Test for equality of variances was performed, statistically the results are not significant, and the assumption of homogeneity of groups is sustained.

Table 2.1

ANCOVA for psychological well-being. Test of Between-Subjects Effect. Dependent variable: psychological well-being post-test

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pre-test pwb	10289.680	1	10289.680	59.784	.000	.618
Group	3918.810	1	3918.810	22.769	.000	.381
Error	6368.220	37	172.114			
Total	1268076.000	40				
Corected total	18453.500	39				

In Table 2.1 we can see that there is, statistically, a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group regarding the psychological well-being control for pretest scores. F value is: $F(1.37) = 22.79$, $p < .001$. The effect size was calculated: $r^2 = 0.95$ which suggest a strong effect. The results confirm the second hypothesis.

The Table 2.2 shows the observed and adjusted mean for psychological well-being. A high score obtained at this questionnaire indicates a high level of psychological well-being.

The results confirm the hypothesis; there is, statistically, a significant difference between the groups regarding the psychological well-being. The intervention had a strong effect on people's psychological well-being, those from the experimental group experiencing an increased level of well-being traits.

Data analysis suggests that there are, statistically, significant differences on the scales of environment control and the purpose in life. In the case of environment control, an $F(1.37) = 85.1$, $p < .001$, and a strong effect $r^2 = 0.97$ was obtained.

Table 2.2*Adjusted mean and standard deviation for psychological well-being*

Group	N	Psychological Well-being post-test		Psychological Well-being post-test		95% Confidence Interval	
		Observed mean	SD observed	Adjusted mean	ES adjusted	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control group	20	170.05	16.00	166.62	2.96	160.61	172.64
Experimental group	20	183.50	24.90	186.87	2.96	180.85	192.88

Table 2.3*Pre-test-Post-test means and standard deviation for environmental mastery*

Group	N	Environmental mastery pret-est		Environmental mastery post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
Control Group	20	32.9	4.63	28.85	4.09
Experimental Group	20	29.45	6.62	33.75	5.9
Total	40	31.17	5.9	31.3	5.59

Table 2.4*Pre-test-Post-test means and standard deviation for life purpose*

Group	N	Life purpose pre-test		Life purpose post-test	
		M	SD	M	SD
Control group	20	29.15	5.55	26.4	5.26
Experimental group	20	24.7	5.93	26.75	5.78
Total	40	26.92	6.10	26.57	5.46

In the Table 2.3 the pre-test and post-test mean and standard deviation of the environmental control scale are presented. The table contains the pre-test and post-test means and standard deviations of the purpose in life scale.

The results obtained for the life purpose scale are: $F(1.37) = 12.58$, $p < .001$, and a strong effect, $r^2 = 0.91$. The intervention had a positive impact on people's psychological well-being, in general, and particularly on their life purpose and environmental control.

Discussion

The statistical data analysis confirmed the hypotheses of the study. The objective of this research was to investigate the effects of the intervention, mandala drawing and guided imagery exercises on elderly people regarding depression,

psychological well-being and the concept of personal Self.

First hypothesis

The first hypothesis of this study investigated the effects of guided imagery and mandala drawing on depression, especially if that kind of intervention could reduce depression. As expected, the intervention has reduced depression. This result was in accordance with the results of other studies that had found out that guided imagery had a positive effect on life quality and depression in the case of patients suffering from cancer (Sloman, 2002). Like meditation, guided imagery encourages people to free their minds from interfering thoughts, to release the worries of everyday life and be absorbed by the session (Post-White, 1998). The scenarios used in this study were designed to address some particular

emotions; these exercises offered a person the possibility of living new experiences, which could activate a person's ability to get out of negative and inflexible thinking patterns, help him/her release negative emotions and discover his/her own inner beauty. Images can influence emotions, Damasio (Malchiodi, 2003) shows the way the body responds to mental images as if they were real. Thus, guided imagery can be used to change the affectivity of a person. Regarding the mandala drawing, Jung (1934) found out that mandala drawing has a calming and healing effect on its creator, and also facilitates mental integration; this directly affects depression.

Mandala, through its effects, can lead to solving various psychological complications and can free the personality from the emotional and ideational tangles, producing a unity of being which can be regarded as a rebirth of man at the transcendental level (Jacobi, 2012). Artistic expression has the capacity to assist the process of becoming aware of things that underlie discomfort and suffering. This awareness can produce an increase in the quality of life, especially in transitory periods. Also, creative activity reduces depression and increases self-esteem (Zausner, cited in Greening & Portemier, 2012). As Esdes and Ager say (in Greening & Portemier, 2012) this type of expression has a positive impact on health, and it can produce feelings of well-being that facilitate the process of healing.

Due to the ability of integrating the contradictory aspects that exist in every person, mandala drawing can influence self-knowledge and self-acceptance, and these, in turn, can decrease depression. Intrapsychic tensions are expressed through mandala drawings because they have the ability to represent order and at the same time to produce it. Mandala drawings can provide cognitive integration and help the organization of complex emotional experiences. Through drawings, the unconscious content can be brought closer to the understanding of the person. Jung thought that, through symbols, the psyche manifests its natural attempt to reconcile internal conflicts. Artistic expression can help a person to bring distress into the field of consciousness and, through this expression, understand and solve his/her suffering (Brederode, cited in Greening & Portemier, 2012).

The themes of guided imagery exercises were focused on positive emotions, on discovering inner beauty and light, dissolving resentment (because negative emotions kept inside, such as anger, resentment, etc., affect persons as a whole,

and can lead to disease), and discovering peace, tranquility, relaxation within themselves. These exercises have the purpose to help the participants to access and realize their inner beauty, to release negative emotions that affect their lives, to find inner peace and, this way, to increase their psychological well-being and reduce depression. Depressed people have a low self-esteem and low levels of self-acceptance, so the purpose of these exercises was to bring into consciousness the inner beauty of the person.

Because of the psychological and physiological decline, the elderly are facing various diseases that can augment depression. Artistic expression is a way to express painful, confusing and contradictory experiences of the disease, which are difficult or sometimes even impossible to express only in words. Depression involves three components: somatic, cognitive and behavioral. Artistic expression, addressing both mind and body can significantly influence depression. An inner emptiness feeling may be influenced by a person's divine nature experience and by transcendence through mandala; inner restlessness is reduced by the capacity of mandala to help the individual to find his/her psychological balance, and the gray perceptual content can be changed by using guided imagery, in this case by experiencing the inner beauty and peace, towards which the exercises were oriented.

Depression is accompanied by somatic symptoms and a sad mood; also, the diseases that come with old age create difficulties for a person, both physical and psychological ones. In this respect, guided imagery is used to reduce symptoms, change the mood of the person and strengthen the healing ability of the body. Feelings of guilt or worthlessness existing in depression may be changed by discovering the inner beauty, acceptance of negative and positive aspects that lie in each person, through self-acceptance, finding out the purpose and meaning in life through the manifestation of the Self in the mandala drawing. Artistic expression has the effect of increasing the capacity of concentration, influencing the inability to concentrate that exists in depression. Because of the loss of meaning of life or of the desire to escape from the inner suffering, depression is accompanied by the persistence of morbid thoughts and suicidal ideation. Mandala drawing can be helpful because it has the capacity to reveal the deepest aspirations of connecting with the whole universe and recognize the universe in the individual, thus exceeding the limited condition of the human being.

Depression in elderly people is expressed through fear of death and nostalgia for the past. Finding a meaning of life can help the person to free himself/herself from the past and stop living in it. Fear of death is influenced by the discovery of divinity, so mandala being a symbol of God and of eternity can affect this fear. The circle is “a symbolic pattern of the Universe, a field in which the macro-cosmos and the micro-cosmos (the human being) interact” (Huh, cited in Greening & Portemier, 2012). “The circle is a symbol of God and eternity” (Edinger, cited in Greening & Portemier, 2012). Finding the transcendental meaning of life helps people alleviate the fear of death, especially in the case of elderly people who are facing the final stages of life. The loss of life purpose, the fear of death and the reduction of a person’s abilities directly affects depression, thereby mandala drawing, as a symbol of divinity, can help a person to establish a connection with his immortal spiritual dimension existing in every being.

Second hypothesis

According to the second hypothesis, the obtained results indicate the existence of meaningful differences between groups as far as concerns the psychological well-being. Also, the results show a difference between the groups in the case of life purpose and the environmental control. Empirical researches have been generally focused on examining Jung’s assertion that mandala drawing is, in itself, good for the person’s mental health and well-being, because it has a calming and relaxing effect (Jung, 1934). In this regard Slegelis (1987) observed people who draw in a circle experience more positive affects than those who draw within a square. Mandala drawing is seen as a tool that facilitates psychological well-being (Pisarik & Larson, 2011). Furth (1988) and Bach (1990) emphasize the ability of spontaneous artistic expression to access psychic intuition and the internal healing potential of the individual. In addition, it offers access to the unconscious material. Like Jung, the authors observed that the spontaneous artistic expression contains repressed emotions, but it is also a source of transformation. The integration of opposites leads to the acceptance of qualities and imperfections, the positive aspects, but also the negative ones in each person, influencing the psychological well-being.

Regarding guided imagery, contemporary research indicates that images have a key role in

healing and well-being (Achterburg, cited in Malchiodi, 2003). Images can create feelings of pleasure, fear, anxiety, calm, etc. There is evidence showing that images can change the mood of a person and even induce a state of well-being (Malchiodi, 2003). Guided imagery techniques help the person to feel a connection between mind and body, and facilitate the feeling of empowerment that helps a person to manage different difficulties that appear in his/her life. In this respect, these techniques can change the way in which a person understands and relates to the problems in his/her life, helping him/her to look at things from another perspective and find different solutions to a certain situation.

Mandala functions as a symbolic representation of the emotional load and of the conflict material, providing order and integration to this material. This way the person can get psychological well-being. Mandala drawing is connected to the innate ability of knowing the divine (Henderson, 2007) and finding the transcendental meaning of life.

Mandala serves as an organized symbolic representation of the Self, which normally remains disorganized in the unconscious. Creating and interpreting mandalas is a process through which a person brings into consciousness, displays and objectively processes motives, feelings, desires and relevant thoughts. As Rogers says (in Pisarik & Larson, 2011) raising awareness of his/her authentic Self and reflecting on it helps the person to integrate and organize thoughts about himself/herself, which in the end leads to healthy functioning and psychological well-being.

Experiencing the Self is an inspiring, numinous encounter, which brings light and sacredness, captivating the individual. In the case of an unstable, weak and poorly structured “I”, the Self becomes a symbol that can help the psyche to achieve the necessary order. This way, the person may come into contact and experience his divine nature, managing to overcome the limits imposed by the human condition, to find his/her purpose and meaning of life. In this respect, the mandala becomes a symbolic drawing that expresses the Self, having a periphery and a center, and inside it containing the opposites. For Jung, the Self is the center of the unknown, divine, superordinate psyche, the psyche that we need to explore throughout our life.

The results show a significant difference between the groups in the case of environmental mastery. The mere act of drawing, through the freedom of choosing the colors, the shapes, the

theme, offers to the person a sense of power and control, which is in contrast with the loss of control that can accompany illness and old age. Under these circumstances, the artistic expression can help people to regain a sense of control in their lives by providing an active process which involves the freedom of choosing the materials, style and theme, allows free play with colors, lines, shapes, and encourages the ability to create what the person wants to create. This element of choice can contribute to feelings of autonomy and dignity when other aspects of life seem out of control. This way, the artistic creation can provide a sense of normalcy and personal power, even if it occurs only during the creative activity. The results also indicate, statistically, significant differences between the two groups regarding the life purpose scale. Mandala drawing facilitates finding the personal meaning of life, which is an essential part of psychological well-being. The research suggests that spirituality has a positive effect on psychological well-being (Wills, cited in Greening & Portemier, 2012). Spirituality has a positive influence on all dimensions of psychological well-being, including life purpose and self-acceptance (Greenfield, cited in Greening & Portmeier, 2012). Mandala drawing, as a symbol of divinity, facilitates the experience of the spiritual dimension of the person, by offering a transcendent sense of life. The transpersonal approach of art therapy reinforces the idea that what is beyond self is essential to the welfare of a person. Artistic expression is seen as a desire to find meaning and to reinforce the person's ability to find well-being throughout the creative exploration.

From Jungian perspective, the content displayed in mandalas represents, symbolically, aspects of the Self that arise from the unconscious zone. Furthermore, mandala provides order and consistency to this unconscious material (Henderson, 2007). The process of creating the mandala helps the person to obtain a higher level of awareness and development of the authentic Self; these are associated with a greater psychological well-being (Harter, cited in Pisarik & Larson, 2011). Because drawing is a sensory activity, involving tactile, visual, kinesthetic and other senses, it is naturally soothing and it involves repetitive activities that may induce relaxation and wellbeing.

The elderly are in a period of initiation in their interior reality, the moment they refold inside requiring a deeper knowledge of self and a reflection of the characteristic features that had remained or had become unconscious. This way,

the artistic expression may support the process of self-discovery, of accessing and integrating the information from the unconscious, helping the person to develop and activate his/her healing potential, because life means a permanent self-development, both in early youth and in hoary old age.

Limits and future research

This study presents some limits like the small number of participants. Another limit of this study is that the testing was done using only self-report methods, creating the risk of biases because of the tendency of desirability of answers. In addition, it would have been useful to have another group subjected to only one of the used techniques, for example, only to guided imagery or mandala drawing, so that to better observe the effects of each technique separately. The length of the intervention was relatively short. Finally, the reduced possibility of generalizing results, the efficacy of these techniques may vary depending on population.

A possible future research direction could study only the effects of one technique, mandala drawing or guided imagery, to observe the efficacy of each technique taken separately. One can study the benefits of this kind of intervention on other group ages, investigating the manner it facilitates the process of individuation. To observe the long term effect of this type of intervention the participants can be tested one month after the research completion.

Jung's theories were widely criticized as being too vague, complex and difficult to understand, thus, leaving it up to the religious or artistic domain (Slegelis, 1987). The Jungian theory failed to gain respect in the field of science due to the lack of scientific research. The results of this study support Jung's theory, including the healing potential of the mandala. Future research could try to create a bridge between the realm of arts and sciences, in order to increase the understanding of the healing techniques resulting from Jung's theory and art therapy.

Conclusion

The elderly usually go through a period of change, restriction of physical and mental capacity. They may face various diseases, depression or even lose their life meaning. The Jungian theory

suggests that mandala drawing has a healing effect on its creator, being at the same time, a symbol of Self, of divinity, facilitating the integration of the opposites and producing order and psychological equilibrium. Mandala drawing is used in therapy to restore the previously existing order. It helps the person to shape things that haven't been created before. Although mandala drawing has been frequently used as a technique to increase self-awareness and psychological well-being under different circumstances, there are few empirical studies that have investigated the efficacy of this technique. The result of this study provides support in using these exercises, in order to improve the elders' quality of life. These results are consistent with the Jungian and humanistic principles.

We conclude that the use of mandalas facilitates one's self-development because it accesses the person's healing potential.

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