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The Stages of Life in the Jungian Perspective: A Photo Elicitation Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: This single case study examined a 63-year-old man's perceptions of his life course and aging process based on a photo elicitation interview. The basis of the data analysis was the theoretical framework of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology.

Methods: The interview was conducted using five photos selected by the subject. Each photo represented different phases and helped to understand his biography. We have elaborated five thematic axes related to the participant's account: i) childhood, paradise lost; ii) adolescence, seeing time; iii) adulthood, time of action; iv) midlife, consolidation period; and v) old age, the synthesis.

Results: The qualitative findings were consistent with Jung's ideas about the role of life stages in psychological development. Looking at photos evoked detailed memories and clarified the importance of each phase of life for personality development. The interview showed that there is a continuity of development in old age.

Conclusions: Photo elicitation interviews can be useful for both psychological research and clinical practice. This technique enables the interviewer to adopt a non-directive attitude, facilitates the recall of memories and promotes the projection of inner states onto the photographic images.

Keywords: Jungian psychology, photo elicitation, phototherapy, human development, aging.

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Introduction

Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, was the first psychologist to propose a psychotherapeutic method specifically aimed at mature and older adults. At a historical time when psychodynamic authors were emphasizing the role of childhood in the psychic constitution, Jung's clinical experiences with older patients led him to propose a broader view of human development (Sawin, 2014). He found a significant difference between the first half of life, which includes childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and the second half of life, which encompasses maturity and old age (Jung, 2001).

This difference lies in the direction that psychic energy or libido takes during the life cycle. From childhood to young adulthood, libido tends to be outwardly directed as the person needs to develop a solid ego and adapt to the social environment. Once these tasks are completed, the focus shifts to inner growth (Jung, 2001; 2015; Morbach & Pedroso, 2020). This process leads to individuation, which means the differentiation of the individual psyche from the collectivity and the realization of one's uniqueness (Jacobi, 2013; Stein, 2006; Von Franz, 2005).

For Jung, the second half of life is significant within the human life course. At this time, there is greater contact with the Self, a structure that represents the totality of psychic processes (Jung, 1970a; Stein, 1998). The Self precedes and transcends the ego as it contains both the conscious and unconscious content (Colman, 2006; Jung 1970a; Stein, 1998). Jung therefore began to look at the life stage in which patients find themselves as a reference for the goals of psychotherapeutic practice (Jung, 2015).

Older patients responded best to the method developed by Jung, which he called dialectical or synthetic-constructive (Jung, 2015). In this understanding, unconscious contents are regarded as undeveloped aspects of personality that remain in an infantile state but can potentially be developed (Clarke, 1992; Jung, 2015). Jung reported that these patients often complained of a feeling of stagnation and meaninglessness. This indicated the depletion of the resources of consciousness, and that the psychotherapeutic process should focus mainly on the patient's irrational material (Jung, 2015).

From that point on, clinical work focused on the images that emerged from the patients' dreams and fantasies. Jung frequently asked older patients to start plastic activities such as painting and drawing (Jung, 2015). The reason for this new direction of treatment lies in his view of the unconscious. Analytical psychology recognizes two forms of thinking: directed and non-directed thinking. The former is inherently linguistic, objective and logical. It is outward looking and aimed at communication and adjustment to the real world, so it requires more effort. The latter is archaic and spontaneous, similar to daydreaming. It manifests itself through images that emerge from the

unconscious (Jung, 1976). Working with images in a clinical setting enables non-directed thinking and access to the creative potential that lies in the unconscious.

The claim that the images of the unconscious are archaic and potentially creative implies that they are collectively inherited and therefore have never been conscious. Since the beginning human species was exposed to visual stimuli from the outside world. The stimuli penetrated the psyche and developed potentials or elementary ways of thinking and imagining the world (Jung, 1979). These primal thoughts consist of archetypal images that form the deepest substrate of the human psyche, the collective unconscious. Archetypes thus represent universal experiences of humanity. However, archetypal content only manifests itself indirectly, through images in dreams and other types of non-directed thinking (Jung, 1979).

On the other hand, viewing external images such as paintings, photographs or videos is also an access to archetypal material. Since images act as a mirror of a person's inner states, they are related to the phenomenon of psychological projection, which is a natural feature of the human psyche. This means that the viewer's inner state is projected onto the outer image (Jung, 1970b; Von Franz, 1999). Consequently, humans are usually affected in some way when interacting with visual productions such as artworks or mythical and religious imagery.

The way the individual psyche projects onto images is related to a person's complexes. In the Jungian perspective, complexes are images of highly emotional psychological situations that have arisen from personal experiences. However, these personal representations are connected to universal human experiences. Complexes thus provide access to personal and collective unconscious content (Clarke, 1992; Jung, 1979; Stein, 1998). Consequently, the contemplation of visual creations leads to memories associated with complexes and opens access to images of the unconscious (Silveira, 1992). This phenomenon is reflected in the fascination that the visual arts have always exerted on human psychology.

For Dubois (1990) the photo is always a mental image and memory is made up of photos. This idea is close to the concept of analytical psychology as explained above. Although photography is considered a "mirror of memory" (Dubois, 1990; Weiser, 2004), it has so far been little used in empirical research in psychology and in clinical contexts (Bates et al., 2017; Glaw et al., 2017; Weiser, 2004).

Jung also emphasized the essential role of memory in the formation of the ego complex. Memory is responsible for giving the subject the idea of continuity in time and space. Also, since memory is closely related to emotions, it is the first psychological function to be activated when conscious and unconscious content come into contact (Jung, 1979). Accessing memories in the second half of life is crucial, since reliving past emotions leads to the integration of forgotten, undeveloped parts of the

personality (Hollis, 1993; Sawin, Corbett & Carbine, 2014). Therefore, photographs can play an important role at this phase by providing a more direct access to the different layers of the psyche (Sawin, Corbett & Carbine, 2014).

In recent years, photographs have been increasingly used in qualitative research. The combination of this visual methodology with traditional methods has revealed its potential to recall memories and gain a deeper insight into the participant's subjective world. Likewise, neuroscientific studies suggest that the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than those that generate verbal information (Harper, 2002). Dealing with images creates deeper content with more layers of meaning (Croghan, 2008; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002).

On the other hand, photography has become increasingly popular, mainly due to technological advances. With the democratization of the use of this visual technique, photographs have become the primary mean of capturing people's private lives (Weiser, 2004). The autobiographical potency contained in personal photographs has been explored in research in the field of developmental psychology, which involves understanding the meanings individuals attribute to their life stages (Glaw et al., 2017).

In this sense, this study examined what content could be accessed when adding photos to an interview with an older person. We wanted to get a life-course overview and understand how the person perceives their maturation and aging process. Likewise, we sought to identify and describe the role each life stage plays in development from the perspective of analytical psychology.

Method

Study Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. We adopted a single case design to examine the subject's perceptions in detail and to understand how he perceives reality in his real life context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, the subject of the study related to feelings, values and attitudes, elements that are part of the subjective dimension (Minayo, 2001).

Case Study Participant

The subject was selected and invited to participate in this research at the University Hospital of the Federal University of Pará, Belém, Brazil, where research in health and human development is conducted. The participant was selected from a waiting list of patients who were referred to the psychotherapy service. The selection was based on the information collected in the hospital registry and the inclusion and exclusion criteria. He was contacted by phone and invited to participate. He had not yet undergone any psychotherapeutic treatment and therefore had not been diagnosed.

The inclusion criteria were: being at least 60 years old, having verbal and cognitive abilities preserved and being available for the interview. Exclusion criteria consisted of subjects who were under the above age range and/or affected by a medical condition that could prevent the necessary verbal reporting to complete the interview. The participant, whom we call Hermes, was 63 years old at the time of the interview. Hermes graduated from college. He is divorced, works as a civil servant and has two adult children.

Procedure

The data collection procedure consisted of two steps. The first step was to conduct a preliminary, short interview with the participant to establish an initial connection, collect some socio-demographic data, and ensure that he met the research criteria. He was also informed about the interview format and the purpose of the research. After the participant's consent was obtained, he was asked to select five photos from his personal records, each corresponding to a period of his life: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and one recent photo. A second meeting was then scheduled to conduct the photo elicitation interview.

A photo elicitation interview consists of inserting photographs into a qualitative research interview (Bates et al., 2017; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002). Epstein et al. (2006) emphasize that the use of photo elicitation interviews improves recall and allows for more complete and comprehensive interviews. For Harper (2002), what is unique about photo elicitation in qualitative interviews is the way in which subjects respond to the symbolic representations evoked by the images. This creates a different kind of information, with stronger links to memories and more detailed and meaningful reports (Bates et al., 2017; Croghan et al., 2008; Glaw et al., 2017; Richard & Lahman, 2015; Shaw, 2013; Weiser, 2004). Another feature of this technique is the central place the subject occupies, since it requires less interferences and a non-directive attitude on the part of the researcher (Bates et al., 2017, Harper, 2002).

The interview was initiated by asking the participant to talk freely about each photo and the events in his life that it related to. Open-ended questions were asked during the interview to facilitate verbalization, such as: "why did you choose this photo", "what memories come to mind", and "how were you then?" The interviewer was careful not to interfere with the respondent's speech or suggest a particular direction. Both sessions were tape recorded. The selected photos were photographically recorded for a later detailed description. All collected data were transcribed after the interview.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki for experiments involving human subjects. It also complied with the ethical guidelines set out in Brazil, where the research was undertaken. The participant was assured of the confidentiality and protection of his personal data and signed an informed consent form. The researchers also shared that data would be collected through recordings and photos and would only be used for academic purposes. The right to withdraw from research was guaranteed.

Data Analysis

First, we organized the data and identified the content related to the subject's developmental history. Then data were analyzed using the hermeneutic and comparative method of analytical psychology. In this procedure, also known as symbolic amplification, the emerging psychological content must be interpreted through mythical, historical and cultural analogies. In this way, the underlying archetypal aspects that make up the life story of the individual could be identified (Clarke, 1992).

We have therefore undertaken the symbolic amplification of the material identified in the subject's speech. We searched for meanings related to the unconscious dynamics of life events, conscious behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, we identified five thematic axes based on the words the participant used to refer to each phase of his life. These themes were then compared to Jung's description of the life stages to identify and describe elements associated with personality development and the process of individuation.

Results

The five selected photographs were all printed in black and white. At the beginning of the interview, Hermes arranged the photos on a table in two overlapping horizontal rows; the upper one contained two photographs, the lower one three. The top row related to childhood and adolescence, while the other row contained photos corresponding to young adulthood, midlife and old age.

Hermes' exposure to the childhood photograph brought back memories of a simple and welcoming family environment, despite his large family. He carefully described the first photo: Seven people are sitting in a meadow, right next to each other. Hermes is in the foreground, with two brothers on the right and two on the left. Behind are his mother and two other sisters. He soon began talking about the memories that were evoked: "For me it is seeing the city emerge [...] my mother was very loving [...] she taught us affection, showed affection, hugs, affection, she taught us that".

Hermes then mentioned that he was the second child. This was a special day as the photographer had turned up in the neighborhood. On such occasions, the family took the opportunity to take a

picture. The photo was taken on the occasion of a large Catholic procession that takes place in the city every year. His mother was very religious. She was the one who gathered everyone to accompany the procession. Everyone went barefoot, mainly to give thanks for the food and the health of the family: "Dad used to buy fruit and carried that fruit to thank God for what we ate. Bearing fruit had this symbolism for him [...] so my mother always made a vow and we all paid it". However, the most important memory this photo evokes is the moments with his parents, especially his mother. She taught her son to respect his grandparents and older people in general. She was also the one who gave him the most attention and care. The backyard of the family home was large and had an orchard that almost looked like a forest. The families in the neighborhood shared food, and his mother attended and greeted everyone. There was a lot of community life and "feelings that prevailed". He also mentioned that she used to sing while doing laundry and he would stand next to her and listen. Hermes linked this memory to the fact that he still has a great fondness for music and a good musical memory.

After that, the tone of the narrative changed as he recalled that these were indeed difficult times. The family had financial difficulties and sometimes there was a lack of food, not only at home but throughout the city. Gradually he became aware of these facts:

So this lack has a meaning for me, so I start to see the world and to know that the world is not only me [...] I began to understand that the world was bigger, there were relatives, there were friends, but the world was bigger than that. And each time it got bigger.

The sense of belonging to something much larger evoked a dramatic event: the day he lost his family in the midst of this gigantic procession. He recalled moments of intense fear and attempts to find his parents, up until the moment a man helped him and took him home.

Hermes ended his childhood account by saying that this photo reminded him of many good stories. It was a simple but happy life with lots of affection, games and storytelling. He then connected the end of childhood with two decisive events: the family's move and the death of his mother.

Yes, there was my mother who died when I was 13; there's my father, the brothers. Anyway, I don't think it was paradise but I think it was a very good time in my life and it showed me a lot of who I am today, I am fraternal...

After the death of his wife, Hermes' father became deeply depressed and could no longer take care of the children. So each brother moved to live with a relative. In addition, Hermes entered a completely unfamiliar school environment: shortly before her death, his mother had enrolled him in a new school. He also emphasized that despite his mother's early death, she still appears in his dreams, which are "good dreams."

Beginning the description of the teenage photo, Hermes soon compared childhood to this next phase, saying it came from a time "when you could still play." The photo shows a group of young

people in a schoolyard. We could see Hermes, four boys and one girl, all with musical instruments and dressed in 1970s fashion. In this picture he must have been 15 or 16 years old. However, his speech immediately returned to his 13-year-old:

It's interesting when I was 13, I think I was still in that phase, you know, playing, knowing life is serious, the world is big, but it was time to play, you know, it was still time for these things. When my mother died I was still 12 years old, but I was almost 13 [...] but just before that I started the new school.

The school was Catholic and professional, much larger than the previous one, and the curriculum included some recreational activities. Soon after beginning his studies, Hermes came into contact with the theater and began to play in a musical band.

So when I got involved in school activities, I started getting involved, but I was more or less aware that I wasn't after soccer. I wanted to write, you know, write for the school newspaper, you know, take part in meetings [...] organize music festivals, poetry recitals and round tables. [I] also wanted to learn to play [guitar].

At this time, Hermes felt the need for communication and the development of critical thinking. He was interested in cinema and helped found a film club. Another point he highlighted was the "rebellion against parents" in the midst of a turbulent political time nationally and internationally. At the time his country was under a dictatorship and the world was witnessing the reverberations of the 1968 student movement. Soon he also began to question the school itself and the teachers, who were mostly Catholic priests.

Eventually the school got small because it was fenced and had some walls. And people lived outside the walls [...] and so we started to see the lack of housing, the lack of jobs [...] So, cinema, theater, television, music, meetings, parties, all had that sense of something that was beyond these walls, you know.

One of these teachers, who used to challenge the school rules, tried to instill political and social awareness in the students. This person became a source of inspiration for the young Hermes, as he drew attention to the fact that alongside work there are workers' rights.

When naming the next photo, Hermes explained that it was chosen because it depicted "a moment of growth." He added that this stage represents the "time to act". It differed from adolescence, which, as mentioned, was the "time of seeing". Entry into the labor market took place at the age of 19. The selected photo is a record from the time of his entry into the trade union movement. It shows a group of 20 men, some sitting on chairs, others standing, including the interviewee. He explains that the transition from teenage to adult happened with the completion of professional training and entry into the world of work:

And so, out of the paradise of childhood and... of a happier, simpler phase of living together, came the time when I had to convince myself that I needed to support my family [...] to get a job, full-time work, keep studying and maybe do the things I would like to do. Maybe.

So Hermes began to work during the day and study at night. In the meantime he took part in the union struggles. At this time he was also striving to reunite the scattered family and also to anchor his own family core:

I was thinking about a commitment, to get married, to have something, but I was sure that I wouldn't be happy alone, you can build something together, you know. And that has to do with everything I've learned, so I joined the union, but I took the theatre, the music, the joy, you know, I tried to do things so that they could be translated there [...] so I joined the union [...] and I also represented the union during the military dictatorship.

His involvement in social movements made him flirt with a political career. Some colleagues claimed he was well suited for the job as a politically conscious worker. However, he did not go down this path, instead taking on high positions within the union.

The next photo shows him sitting on a staircase surrounded by five people, all colleagues in a new professional job that he was still holding at the time of the interview. He identified it as the middle-aged shot and reported that it represented a "moment of consolidation." At that time he decided to leave the trade union movement and to become more involved in the field of communication and culture. With this in mind, Hermes accepted a lower-paying, but better-suited, public job to his own aspirations.

I thought I had accomplished something... in my mind it was something like this... a cycle was complete. Another will [...] start with the idea of conquering rights. But not in a wide field... in a smaller one, but with a larger view.

During this time he began studying and became increasingly involved as a communicator at cultural events in his community. He also made efforts to honor local artists and educate them about their rights. Hermes stressed that this photo was chosen because it represents his professional transition. He was then able to do the work that inspired him, but without giving up his ideals.

The photo chosen to represent the respondent's current moment is significantly different from the last three. The references to professional life end, and Hermes reappears in a familiar moment, but this time the picture shows only him and his two children in the foreground: a woman and a man, already grown, hugging him with a smile. He shares that he chose this photo because it underscores the importance of children in his life journey: "But I think that relationship with the children is very strong. They are, so to speak, proof that life has meaning. Everything we do makes sense [...] It's a way of not dying. It's a way to keep going".

After this statement, he showed the five photos and explained that life went on as a new challenge. But in order to grow old, he needs everything he has acquired through his experiences:

I won't be able to stop, this will stay with me. It's about... how I'm reshaping all of this to learn to live with the next phase [...] I don't know what it's going to be, but I know it's all related to the things I've learned, the

feeling of being a child, the desire to live the joy of youth, the involvement in the trade union movement, the beauty, the conversations and the relationships I have built in my cultural work... And the children here, who support me a little bit ... so that I don't die. Even if I die. But I still have a lot to do.

The most challenging moment in Hermes' life was adolescence, because it was the time when he had to decide what he wanted to do in life. In childhood, it was the parents who made the decisions. But as a teenager, he knew he had to face the consequences of his choices. He mentioned a marriage that ended in divorce and the risks he took during the union struggle. Sometimes he was arrested and even put his life in danger:

Many of my companions from that time have died...many. I've been to several funerals. So I survived that, but many didn't, you know? So I had the guts, but the guts was to say 'I'm scared, but I'll do it'.

At this point in the interview, Hermes changed the arrangement of the photos, putting them in chronological order from top to bottom, oldest to youngest, explaining:

...There [adolescence] was the moment of decision, here [adulthood] was the moment of commitment and risk, here [midlife] was the moment of consolidation, right... and here [age] would be the synthesis of all this with a commitment to keep doing things, with everything I am today and with everything I've learned. I will try to leave everything to these two [kids] who will carry it on.

However, there have been many changes in what he calls the "seeing time," not only from a physical point of view, but also from an "understanding of the world", as he says: "I see that what I am today is the expansion of what I was then... from what I learned there. It gave me a foundation to keep going".

The role of family members is of great importance in Hermes' worldview. He mentioned several times his respect for older people and his habit of listening carefully to his grandfather's teachings. All of this, he believes, has to do with maternal values. His dream of reuniting his family also came true and he now lives with his younger sister. He then emphasised:

So I like to talk to people, but today I avoid some kinds of conversations. If the conversation isn't uplifting, I don't want it [...] today I like the silence, you know, the quiet. So if I'm in a noisy place, I'd rather go away [...] I can spend an hour listening to the nothingness... the silence. Or I ask someone to explain things to me, you know. Today I learn more from people than from books.

As for aging, Hermes said he's aware that he'll probably soon be unable to do many things he used to do. But on the other hand, the things that have always been important to him will remain: the conversations, the stories, the joy and being with family members. He also feels he can continue to instill values in his children even if he can't keep up with the current challenges. But he insists on keeping the dialogue flowing and tries to bring in as much of his life experience as he can.

The moment I'm in right now, in terms of childhood...I'm going back to childhood. I'm making the turn, closing the circle, you know [...] the circle closes more and more [...] there's only chronological distance,

only age... But maybe there is a convergence, you know, I'm starting to revise...I'm talking about a revisionist thing, but not in the denial sense. Actually, revise, rethink, maybe that's the right word, right?

At the end he explained that photos are important because they remind him of people. He ended the interview by talking about the meaning of all the people that have passed through his life and the legacy he left to the people he met.

Discussion

Childhood: paradise lost

Hermes' description of the childhood photograph quickly made it clear that the central element of his story is the mother, whom he portrays in an emotional and affectionate manner. The description of his early years, which took place in the midst of an orchard, is marked by strong maternal attributes. In this context, the sense of ancestry, community life, and simplicity were feelings he frequently expressed when referring to the environment of those years. Even the father figure, though mentioned, was only one element in this scenario. Hermes' account brought to light his experience of what it meant to be nourished. Therefore, his memories of those years go far beyond the personal mother figure. As a representative of the maternal archetype, the personal mother was thus associated with care and nurturing (Jung, 1969a). The maternal atmosphere was not limited to the mother figure, but embraced the entire sphere of the child's life (Kast, 1997; Jung, 1969a).

In these early memories it was possible to find echoes of the merging moment typical of childhood, when the child does not yet have a formed ego and there is no clear distinction between subject and object. Although the separation between child and mother has already taken place organically, the child is still in a state of *participation mystique* with the mother (Neumann, 1995; Jung, 1969a). This means that there is not yet a differentiated body image, but a state of partial identification with the perceived object (Jung, 2013). At this stage, the child's experience of the world is unified and not polarized.

However, the narrative soon changed when Hermes recounted his perceptions as a boy. More specifically, when he realized there was a world beyond his family and home. This fact indicated the beginning of differentiation of his body image from that of his mother (Neumann, 1988). At this point there was already an individual Self as well as a partial ego identity (Edinger, 1961; Neumann, 1988). The world began to take on clearer contours and the child already perceived himself as a subject confronted with the objective world. At the same time he gained more experience.

It is therefore significant that the photo reminded him of the nascent city as he became aware of the world around him. The dramatic memory of getting lost from his family in the midst of a crowd seemed to emerge as a milestone of this passage. He also became aware of the difficulties in his

family and the problems in the outside world. Tensions and conflicts became part of life (Edinger, 1961). Gradually, the narrative lost its emotional tone and took on more realistic contours. In later moments of the interview, Hermes described childhood as a paradise left behind.

Adolescence: seeing time

The emerging ego is a complex characterized by a core of consciousness that emerges from the totality represented by the Self (Jung, 1979). At this point, the experience is no longer unified, and the elements that make up the subject's sense of identity tend to move away from the Self. During this process, which Edinger (1961) calls ego-Self alienation, an opposition is formed between the conscience and the unconscious. This is the so-called ego-Self axis (Neumann, 1995; Edinger, 1961).

But the actual “psychological birth” usually does not take place until puberty, with the differentiation from the parent figures. At this point, psychological development is only possible through the sacrifice of childhood (Jung, 2001). Hermes' memories of this period relate to a difficult transition that involved the death of his mother, being forced to separate from his family, and entering a new school. Interacting with classmates and taking part in the school's cultural activities meant a lot to Hermes at the time. Identification with the group was an important and healthy process for the adolescent because it compensated for the damage done to the parental archetype. This made the rupture less traumatic (Henderson, 2005).

Hermes described this phase, precisely, as “seeing time”, since he was already observing what was happening beyond the walls of the school. He called it a moment of commitment and decision making. By this time, the idea of community life from his childhood had transformed into a political consciousness. The will to act in the world prevailed, and the boy became involved in the student movement. He also began to question the mentality prevailing in the school. This phase initiated the constellation of the hero archetype, through which the ego strives for relative autonomy from the primordial state of totality (Jung, 1976; Jung, 1979). This archetype is essential to the difficult transition between adolescence and adulthood as it acts as the organizer of ego functions (Henderson, 2005).

Adulthood: time of action

Entering the world of adults is a big challenge. According to Campbell (1997, 2004), during this time it is necessary to heed the call to adventure. By this term he meant an event that breaks the order in which the hero lives. This is the challenge that drives the hero to action. For Hermes, this call meant leaving the protective but confining walls of the school. All of this happened in a

turbulent social context, namely the military dictatorship. But he took on an even bigger and riskier challenge: the union struggle. This phase involved real risks for him and achieved the status of a real initiation (Campbell, 2004; Jung, 1976). This process also allowed the libido previously invested in the parents to be redirected to another figure. It was therefore also the time when he married and started a family (Henderson, 2005).

In this way, the liberation from the parental world and the consolidation of the ego took place. However, Hermes also had to put his artistic ambitions on hold as he had to support his family and enter the world of work. This adaptive effort was necessary to expand the ego's sphere of action in the world outside of the psyche. At the same time, this endeavour had the effect of sacrificing psychic potential (Jung, 2001).

Eventually, the union struggle became the fulcrum of Hermes' life as a young adult. However, the moment had come when the risks and sacrifices had already crossed a line. Heroic deeds are of great importance for ego-affirmation. However, this is true until they serve their purpose, which is to adapt to the adult world (Campbell, 2004; Henderson, 2005; Jung, 1981). To persist in the heroic stance beyond this point is to prolong infantile impulses and self-assertion at any cost without considering the consequences. In other words, ego inflation, namely identification with the collective unconscious, is a necessary step for the heroic archetype to manifest in individual life. However, if it persists, it can be detrimental to conscious life (Campbell, 2004). This means that ego development alone is not enough. In addition to acquiring consciousness, there remains the task of developing it in a meaningful way, both for the individual and for society (Campbell, 2004; Henderson, 2005).

Midlife: consolidation period

The hero sacrifice was necessary as the adventure was already becoming too dangerous. So Hermes had to find a compromise solution and pursue less ambitious but more realistic goals. This shift also highlights the problem of the persona, an archetype associated with the ego complex whose function is to serve as a bridge between the individual and society (Jung, 1953). Hermes' narrative seemed to show that the role of union leader was the main feature of his persona at that time. However, this structure was doomed to fail because it relied on unconscious collective content that masked his true individuality. He could not play this role for long, since it would cost the development of the individual consciousness itself (Jung, 1953).

However, in order for someone to live in society, the persona must be partially maintained. Otherwise, difficulties in social interaction may arise (Jung, 1953). Thus the conscience finds a compromise by adopting a new, more flexible identity. The next step, which coincided with midlife,

was marked by a shift in priorities. The tasks now focused on more meaningful activities for Hermes, which enabled him to continue his social commitment and to pursue his cultural and creative goals. The aspirations of youth have adapted to a more realistic vision that matched his true personal expression. Another significant change was the return to study with admission to the university.

These transformations reveal the reorientation of consciousness, which takes place, typically, in the second half of life (Jung, 2001; 2015). During this phase, there is usually a regressive movement of the libido toward the inner world. The ego suddenly becomes more permeable to unconscious influences. This includes aspects of the Self that have not yet been integrated into consciousness. The search for meaning takes precedence over external achievements (Jung, 2001; 2015; Hollis, 1993; Corbett, 2014). This does not mean that the individual will isolate himself from the world. The tasks of the ego continue, but with a less one-sided attitude. This means that the person is no longer oriented towards collectivism or individualism only. The reconciliation of these opposites leads to a more conscious contribution to the collective (Campbell, 2004; Jung, 2013; Von Franz, 1999).

Old age: the synthesis

Regarding the last photo, Hermes was aware that he has reached the so-called old age. But having crossed that threshold only recently, he still felt in transition. This was the climax of the interview, in which Hermes referred to the five photographs and listed the main themes of his existence. First, he emphasized the legacy he wants to leave for his children. For him, the search for meaning is linked to the idea of the continuity of this legacy. In this way individual life is brought to archetypal potency and also leads to a sense of being out of time and attaining immortality (Jung, 1969b). The Self of the father is projected onto his descendants in a new form of *participation mystique*, but this time at the other extreme, in the final stage of life.

This cyclical dynamic was further emphasized when Hermes mentioned that he was about to become a child again. For Jung, childhood and old age have one thing in common, namely immersion in the unconscious psyche (Jung, 2001). Collectively, the motif of the child is present in all cultures and in various myths, as it stands for renewal and a potential future. The same applies to the psychology of the individual. While the progressive differentiation of consciousness throughout life leads to a one-sided attitude, the child's motive gradually supports the change in personality focus from ego to Self. In this sense, the child's image represents a future transformation since "in the individuation process, it anticipates the figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements of the personality" (Jung, 1969c, p. 164, CW 9.1, § 278). So while the child

emerges from the unconscious and its experience is unified and undifferentiated, the older adult returns there. However, the return to the unconscious occurs with a different status than that of the child. Life experiences lead to a synthesis that Jung (1969c) understands as a dynamic balance between the opposites of personality.

This reminds us of the terms Hermes used when he mentioned that all of these experiences have made him what he is today and what is to come. These are the elements that allow him to live this new phase, which he understands as a synthesis. His search for meaning continues as the introversion of the libido drives him to seek stillness and reflection. He also begins to look for activities that best fit his personality. What remains is the idea of simplicity and detachment from material achievements, viewed as means rather than an end. From then on, the most important goals are psychological growth and the cultivation of inner values (Hollis, 1993; Jung, 2001; Sawin, Corbett & Carbine, 2014). He also showed that he has no illusions about the challenges and limitations of advancing age. He stressed that aging is still viewed negatively in the current social context. However, he emphasized the value of wisdom and the urge to stay true to oneself, suggesting he experiences aging in a healthy way (Corbett, 2014; Hollis, 1993).

It is also important to mention the role of the mother figure and its importance in the personality development of the interviewee. The original experience with the mother may have led to the formation of a positive mother complex (Kast, 1997). Jung postulates that one of the characteristics of the mother complex in men is the idealization of the mother figure as she takes on the character of the anima (Jung, 1969a; 1970a). The anima is the unconscious, opposite-gender aspect of the male that takes on the role of a bridge between the ego and the Self. Thus, it functions as an inner guide to access the unconscious (Von Franz, 2005). In the case of Hermes, the mother's early absence seems to have acted as a reinforcing element of this dynamic. Consequently, she acquired an almost supernatural aura (Jung, 1969a). Therefore, she represents an ideal of life throughout his existence and is constantly present in his dreams.

In the second half of life the anima plays an even more important role. It restores the individual's proximity to the sphere of archetypal experience (Clarke, 1992; Von Franz, 2005). Hermes showed this aspect through the ease with which he expressed feelings and developed creatively, as a sign of a fluid relationship with unconscious content. His preference for different art forms seems to stem from the same source. As can be seen, these qualities have been with him since childhood, but as he matures they seem to dominate his outlook on life.

Hermes handled the photo during the interview in a way that enriched his account. His placement of the photos seemed at first to mark a sharp division between adolescence and maturity. This fact testifies to the decisive influence which the first half of his life had on his psychic constitution. He

also highlighted the transition period between adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, the consolidation of the ego was crucial to face the challenges of existence. The fact that he arranged the photographs in a linear fashion ultimately led him to perceive his life as a continuous development with some crucial moments of transition. Above all, the accounts reject the idea that life is a work to be completed. On the contrary, it is a progressive assimilation and amplification towards the totality of the psyche (Jung, 1970a).

Conclusion

The data analysis made it possible to understand how the subject perceives his aging process. The photo elicitation interview was a helpful tool that provided a global view of the life cycle. It proved to be a much broader dynamic than simply recalling facts, as the participant was able to recall important events and still give them new meanings.

Far from being a mere accumulation of experiences, the path to individuation requires the assimilation of vital contents in order to modify and expand the personality. The participant's report illustrated this process through what he called syntheses. He named the phases of his life and assigned each of them a different "task" related to the construction of his current identity.

The interview showed that there is a continuity of development in old age. This fact is consistent with Jung's ideas about the constant transformation of personality throughout life. The findings showed an increase in introversion and misidentification with collective values as aspects that seemed to contribute to the individuation process. On the other hand, the search for meaning had a positive influence on aging perception. Therefore, the participant did not perceive himself according to ageist stereotypes and was open to possibilities, although he was aware of the unfavorable social context related to aging.

Moreover, the study showed that photography can be an important resource for clinical practice. Photography can be used as a tool to access psychological layers related to different stages of development. This suggests that working with photographs in the clinic could facilitate the relationship with the client and help psychotherapists deal with patients who have difficulty accessing their inner images spontaneously. In addition, photos can also be a useful tool in reminiscence therapy for older adults, as they facilitate the recall of past events and emotions.

Limit of the research and future prospective

The main strength of the study was the large amount of autobiographical material that came to light during a single interview. On the other hand, although the case study has led to a deep understanding of the subject's perceptions, due to its brevity we consider the interview itself as a kind of "photograph" of the participant. Thus, the main limitation of the study is that it did not take

place in a psychotherapeutic context, considering that it would be conducted over a larger number of sessions. It is also possible that the participant reported more about the positive and socially desirable aspects of his life and left out more difficult passages. A clinical approach could have provided more data in this regard.

Furthermore, the interview showed that creativity is a characteristic feature of the participant's personality. With this in mind, further research could focus on individuals with different personality traits, for example, to examine whether different psychological types would respond the same to photo elicitation.

Despite these limitations, we suggest that future research attempts to explore the potential of photography in empirical studies of psychotherapeutic interventions with larger numbers of participants.

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Authors' contribution

Morbach assisted with concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript preparation and manuscript editing; Morbach assisted with the generation of the initial draft of the whole manuscript, manuscript editing and data interpretation; Pedroso assisted with manuscript editing and study concept; Pedroso assisted with manuscript editing, data analysis, data interpretation, and study supervision. All authors contributed to and have approved the final manuscript.

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