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Leisure and Personal Development in an Evangelical Christian Theater Group

Lazer e Desenvolvimento Pessoal em um Grupo de Teatro Cristão Evangélico

Ocio y Desarrollo Personal en un Grupo de Teatro Evangélico Cristiano

Loisirs et Développement Personnel dans un Groupe de Théâtre Évangélique Chrétien

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this study was to investigate whether participation in an evangelical theater group contributes to the personal development of the participants. The choice of venue and participants was intentional and the number of participants was determined according to the technique of data saturation. Responses were examined by the constant comparison technique. There were six participants, three of each sex, with a mean age of 18.2 (± 1.8) years, all unmarried and belonging to the same Evangelical Baptist Church in the city of Belo Horizonte, MG. The main results demonstrate that participants understand leisure as an activity, that participation in the theater group in the evangelical context can be understood as a leisure experience, promotes the development of outcomes related to spirituality, creativity, communication and socialization. We conclude that participation in a theater group in the evangelical context enables leisure experiences and personal development.

KEYWORDS: subjectivity, art, young, idleness.

RESUMO:

O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar se a participação em um grupo de teatro evangélico contribui para o desenvolvimento pessoal dos participantes. A escolha do local e dos participantes foi intencional e o número de participantes foi determinado de acordo com a técnica de saturação dos dados. As respostas foram examinadas pela técnica de comparação constante. Foram seis participantes, sendo três de cada sexo, com idade média de 18,2 ($\pm 1,8$) anos, todos solteiros e pertencentes à mesma Igreja Batista Evangélica da cidade de Belo Horizonte, MG. Os principais resultados demonstram que os participantes entendem o lazer como uma atividade, que a participação no grupo de teatro no contexto evangélico pode ser entendida como uma experiência de lazer, promove o desenvolvimento de resultados relacionados à espiritualidade, criatividade, comunicação e socialização. Concluímos que a participação em um grupo de teatro no contexto evangélico possibilita experiências de lazer e desenvolvimento pessoal.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: subjetividades, arte, jovens, ócio.

RESUMEN:

El objetivo de este estudio fue investigar si la participación en un grupo de teatro evangélico contribuye al desarrollo personal de los participantes. La elección del lugar y los participantes fue intencional y el número de participantes se determinó según la técnica de saturación de datos. Las respuestas fueron examinadas por la técnica de comparación constante. Hubo seis participantes, tres de cada sexo, con una edad media de 18.2 (± 1.8) años, todos solteros y pertenecientes a la misma Iglesia Evangélica Bautista en la ciudad de Belo Horizonte, MG. Los principales resultados demuestran que los participantes entienden el ocio como una actividad, que la participación en el grupo de teatro en el contexto evangélico puede entenderse como una experiencia de ocio, promueve el

desarrollo de resultados relacionados con la espiritualidad, la creatividad, la comunicación y la socialización. Concluimos que la participación en un grupo de teatro en el contexto evangélico permite experiencias de ocio y desarrollo personal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: subjetividades, arte, jueve, ocio.

RÉSUMÉ:

L'objectif de cette étude était de déterminer si la participation à un groupe de théâtre évangélique contribuait au développement personnel des participants. Le choix du lieu et des participants était intentionnel et le nombre de participants a été déterminé en fonction de la technique de saturation des données. Les réponses ont été examinées par la technique de comparaison constante. Il y avait six participants, trois de chaque sexe, âgés en moyenne de 18,2 (\pm 1,8) ans, tous célibataires et appartenant à la même église baptiste évangélique de la ville de Belo Horizonte, MG. Les principaux résultats montrent que les participants comprennent le loisir comme une activité, que la participation à une troupe de théâtre dans le contexte évangélique peut être comprise comme une expérience de loisir, et que favorise le développement de résultats liés à la spiritualité, la créativité, la communication et la socialisation. Nous concluons que la participation à une troupe de théâtre dans un contexte évangélique permet des expériences de loisirs et un développement personnel.

MOTS CLÉS: subjectivités, l'art, jeune, loisir.

Leisure studies is an interdisciplinary field of studies that draws upon different epistemological and theoretical conceptions (Baptista, 2016; Cuenca, 2014; Heintzman, 2015, 2017; Maciel, Saraiva & Martins, 2018; Spracklen, 2017). According to Baptista (2016), there are different ways of thinking about leisure within Anglo-American and Ibero-American societies. One is a sociological perspective on leisure, in Western society during the period following the Industrial Revolution, which is characterized as a time of non-work and absence of social obligations (Dumazedier, 1967; Marcellinno, 2010; Pronovost, 2011). However, leisure is currently understood as more than activity that takes place during free time (Sanchez, 2014). It is also considered, a social right (Gomes & Isayama, 2015), and a means of social emancipation (Hungaro, 2008).

Cuenca (2000, (2014) discusses leisure in the context of human development. For this author, leisure is based on positive values related to individuals and communities that promote satisfactory experiences and human development. Moreover, leisure is understood as a subjective experience characterized by satisfaction, the perception of freedom of choice, and intrinsic motivation (Monteagudo, 2018; Monteagudo, Cuenca, Bayón & Kleiber, 2013). Gomes (2014) understands leisure as a human need and a cultural dimension, that is, as a complex social practice that encompasses a multiplicity of contextualized and historically located components.

Leisure in its different cultural manifestations may be linked to religious practices (Camilo & Schwartz, 2016; Costa, 2017; Pich, 2017; Rocha, 2017). Culture has a large influence upon religious practice, worldviews, behaviors and values (Paiva et al., 2004; Prandi, 2008).

Psychological studies of religion and the arts have analyzed the relationship between religious and aesthetic experiences (Silva, 2008). According to Silva (2008), art can trigger complex psychological processes that involve the senses, cognition, and affections, as well as lead to the immediate apprehension of religious meanings. In other words, art can lead people to high levels of self-reflection, re-evaluation of experiences, as well as connection with the sacred, with oneself and with the other.

Authors such as Silva (2008) and Wright (2006) have explored the relationship between religion and art. For Silva (2008) art, in general, can bring together religious, ethical and political values, that are linked to culture as a whole, thereby providing value reflections that influence people's behavior, both in those who create the art and those who enjoy it. Wright (2006) states that art permits an integration between mind and body, creating a unified person who is centered upon God. Art, according to Wright, helps us to rediscover the creativity that is given by the creator, can bring the restoration of emotions, and give new breath to our souls.

One of the forms of cultural activity is the theater. According to Furtado, Levitan, Titon, Castilho and Velarde (2011), theatre contributes to human development by stimulating the improvement of socialization, self-knowledge, communication, self-esteem and creativity. Because of its great power of communication, the theater is one of the cultural manifestations developed in the Evangelical Church (Heitor, 2013), as a means of worship, evangelization, spiritual development, and leisure.

Maciel, Falleti, Saraiva and Carvalho (2017) reported an increase in ministries that promote artistic activities within Brazilian evangelical churches. These churches adopt the term ministry to designate a group of people who work in specific activities to provide services to the members of the church or people outside it. Among the artistic activities offered are liturgical dances, theater, music, choral activities. These cultural activities are performed during worship services and also at other times and places as a means of evangelization.

Maciel et al. (2017) studied an adult choral and urban dance group formed by young people in a Baptist church to determine if they experience leisure within this religious context. The results demonstrated that the participants experienced leisure during their rehearsals, presentations during worship services and evangelistic events. Given the diversity of religions, it is important to conduct research that determines whether there are commonalities of how the members of these religions experience leisure in their diverse religious contexts.

Brazil is characterized by religious eclecticism. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010), demographic census indicates that the largest religious group is Christianity, with 86.3% of the entire population, including Catholics who make up 64.1% of the population and Evangelicals who account for 22.2% of the total. In total there are 42.3 million Evangelicals in Brazil. Given the growing representativeness of Evangelicals, without disregarding the relevance of other religions, there is a need to conduct investigations that seek to understand the activities, including artistic endeavours, of this branch of Christianity. Therefore, the research question that guided this study was: does participation in an evangelical theater group contribute to personal development? These research objectives were: a) to investigate if the participation in an evangelical theater group contributes to the personal development; b) to explore of youth leisure and to determine if participation in an evangelical theater group can promote leisure experiences.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study follows a phenomenological perspective and is characterized as an organizational case study (Yin, 2001). According to Yin (2001), this modality of research, which is both descriptive and exploratory, aims to understand complex social phenomena, while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. To this end, it adopts research strategies with specific approaches to data collection and analysis, that investigate the subjective experience and the perceptions of the people involved in the phenomenon studied.

We intentionally chose to conduct research at an Evangelical Baptist church in the city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. This church was chosen because it promoted different artistic ministries such as liturgical dances, music, choral performances, and theater, for its members as well as for people from other religious denominations, including different age groups and both sexes. Likewise, the choice of the ministry, a theater group, and the participants were intentional (Creswell, 2010; Fontanella et al., 2011). The choice of the theater group was due to the authors of this study having investigated other artistic ministries provided by the same church. Therefore, the aim was to explore groups not included in the previous study.

The research focused on a theater group consisting of young people. This ministry, created in 1999, began with 17 members. The meetings were held twice a week, on Tuesdays from 7 pm to 9 pm, and on Saturdays from 2 pm to 5 pm. These meetings were divided into two parts. The first consisted of sharing personal experiences from the preceding week, followed by a time of prayer and songs of praise to God. Then, ideas

were developed for the development of the theatrical performance followed by the rehearsal of the play for presentation in the church or in evangelistic events. To conclude the meeting, the young people would have a short period of prayer.

One of the researchers, with the support of a ministry official, invited people who regularly participated in the theatre group's activities to participate in the study. The number of people participating in the research was determined according to the data saturation technique (Fontanella et al., 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). For the data collection, we adopted a semi-structured interview script. This approach consisted of obtaining sociodemographic data, as well as answers to open questions related to personal experiences when participating in the activities developed by the ministry. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed – typed to the text editor – for a better analysis of the data.

All responses to each of the four open-ended questions were inserted into a table that contained all the answers for that question. Then the responses for each question were examined for common themes and contradictions by using a constant comparison technique (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). To what extent were answers similar or different. What themes, or consistent responses, appeared for each question. Similar responses were grouped together. Analysis, and therefore themes, focused on aspects of the theatre ministry related to the questions used in the interviews, namely: understanding leisure; perception of the theatre experiences as leisure; identification of the reasons for participating in the theatre group; and the contribution of the theatre activities to personal development.

For the implementation of this research, we considered all the ethical procedures, involving human beings, of the National Health Council (Brasil, 2012). This research project was duly approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the University of the first author. All participants signed the informed consent form. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, we identified them by fictitious names, followed by their age, for example, Fábio (19).

RESULTS

The present study consisted of the participation of six young people between the ages of 15 and 21 years, with a mean age of 18.2 (± 1.8 years), who all declared themselves as evangelical Christians who belonged to the church where the study was conducted. Three of the participants were male and three were female; one had completed high school, two were attending high school, and three were in higher education.

The first interview question asked the participants for their understanding of leisure (see Table 1). Two of the participants included the word “activity” in their understanding of leisure. Bruna described leisure as “an activity that relaxes us”, while Vagner defined leisure as “some activity that satisfies you.” Two other participants, who did not include the word “activity” in their definitions, alluded to the idea of leisure as activity as they explained that leisure was something that they did. Isabel defined leisure, as “something you enjoy doing,” while Yuri stated that leisure “is doing what you like.” Bruna, who had described leisure as activity also said that it was “something we do.” In contrast, Fábio defined leisure in terms of a time “a moment in which I can relax, moment without stress.” The one other participant did not define leisure in terms of an activity or a period of time, but rather in terms of leisure's function or outcome “it is what drives us away from the overwhelming routine and brings the energy back” (Ana).

Table 1. *Understanding of participants' leisure*

Participants	Responses
Ana (15)	It is what drives us away from the overwhelming routine and brings the energy back.
Isabel (21)	Something you enjoy doing, you have no obligation, and you do such a thing because you want to do it.
Bruna (16)	Something we do without being seen as a burden. An activity that relaxes us.
Fábio (19)	I understand it as a moment in which I can relax, moment without stress, where I can rest my body and my mind.
Yuri (19)	It is doing what you like.
Vagner (19)	Some activity that satisfies you and gives you peace, joy, well-being.

TABLE 1
Understanding of participants' leisure

Similar to Ana, other participants also suggested that leisure had beneficial outcomes. Bruna mentioned that leisure is an activity “that relaxes”, while Fábio noted that it “is a moment in which I can relax, moment without stress, where I can rest my body and my mind”. While the beneficial outcomes of leisure for Ana, Bruna and Fábio all revolve around restoring energy, relaxation and rest, the outcomes for Vagner were peace, joy, and well-being.

Two of the participants alluded to the notion that they freely chose to participate in their leisure activity. Isabel stated “you have no obligation, and you do such a thing because you want to do it.” Similarly, Bruna noted that leisure is “something we do without being seen as a burden.” Three of the participants suggested that actually engaging in leisure itself is enjoyable or satisfying:

- “Something you enjoy doing” (Isabel);
- “It is doing what you like” (Yuri);
- “Some activity that satisfies you” (Vagner);

Question two asked the participants if they perceived their participation in the theatre ministry to be leisure (see Table 2). Most participants did indeed perceive their participation in the theatre ministry as a leisure (Ana, Isabel, Bruna, Yuri). For Vagner, as indicated by his use of the word “also”, participation in the theatre ministry was leisure but it was also more than leisure “I also know the responsibility and the purpose with which I do [the theatre], not for the fun, but for the greater good”. Thus, for Vagner the theatre was both leisure and a ministry responsibility. Fábio was the only participant who did not consider the theatre ministry leisure “I do not consider it a leisure moment”.

Table 2. *Perception Of Theater Participants As A Leisure Experience*

Participants	Responses
Ana (15)	Yes! In addition to connecting with my body, I challenge myself in creativity, improvement with group development and of course, acting. Even if in this instance this leisure requires discipline and dedication, it is a source of pleasure.
Isabel (21)	Yes. No the end is always worth all the effort and dedication. O which can sometimes be tiring or even a little stressful in the process. But if we are committed to being there, it has to be done with excellence, we have to improve and improve, and this is done with research and trials.
Bruna (16)	Most of the time, yes The rehearsal is a lot of fun. it's a moment of commitment along with distraction. Certainly, the people who are with me in this group make it all lighter.
Fábio (19)	I do not consider it a leisure moment, for what we do in rehearsals is to improve ourselves both technically and spiritually, so that we prepare ourselves for our ministry for the Lord everything must be done with perfection and dedication. In the rehearsals we strive, we dedicate ourselves and we give up being in our area of comfort to serve the Lord perfectly.
Yuri (19)	Yes. Because I love what I do. The rehearsals, the rush to organize everything, the anxiety before entering the stage, my performance and the feeling of accomplishment is very pleasurable.
Vagner (19)	Also. As much as I enjoy doing this, I also know the responsibility and the purpose with which I do, not for fun, but for a greater good.

TABLE 2
Perception Of Theater Participants As A Leisure Experience

When the answers to question two were analyzed further it was discovered that the majority of participants (four of six) not only viewed the theatre ministry as leisure but characterized it as pleasurable, fun or enjoyable: a “source of pleasure” (Ana); “lot of fun” (Bruna); “very pleasurable” (Yuri), and “I enjoy doing this” (Vagner). While a fifth participant, Isabel, did not specifically mention that she associated her

participation in the theater ministry with pleasure, fun or enjoyment, she did seem to indirectly suggest, that it brought some level of satisfaction “the end is always worth all the effort and dedication”.

Another characteristic of participation in the theatre ministry, that became apparent from the answers to question two, was that of intense involvement as suggested by the following quotes:

- “I challenge myself in creativity (...) this leisure requires discipline and dedication (...) we have to improve and improve” (Ana);
- “all the effort and dedication (...) which can sometimes be tiring or even a little stressful” (Isabel);
- “it is a moment of commitment” (Bruna);
- “we dedicate ourselves and we give up being in our area of comfort” (Fábio);
- “the rush to organize everything, the anxiety before entering the stage” (Yuri);
- “I also know the responsibility and the purpose with which I do, not for fun, but for the greater good” (Vagner)

Two other characteristics of this leisure identified by only one participant each, were that of distraction, “it’s a moment of commitment along with distraction” (Bruna), and accomplishment, “the feeling of accomplishment” (Yuri).

Fabio was the only participant who did not agree that participation in the theater ministry was a leisure experience. His answer to this question may not be surprising given his answer to question one regarding his understanding of leisure. He was the only participant who described leisure as a period of time, and furthermore, he viewed this period of time as a time of relaxation and rest “I understand it [leisure] as a moment in which I can relax, moment without stress, where I can rest my body and my mind.” However, his description of his activities associated with the theatre ministry is the exact opposite of a time of relaxation and rest:

- “(...) what we do in rehearsals is to improve ourselves both technically and spiritually, so that we prepare ourselves for our ministry (...) everything must be done with perfection and dedication. In the rehearsals we strive, we dedicate ourselves and we give up being in our area of comfort (...)” (Fábio).

Furthermore, with the possible exception of Isabel, Fabio was the only participant who did not associate participation in the theatre ministry with pleasure, fun or enjoyment, and thus it is not surprising that he did not perceive his participation in the theater ministry as a leisure experience.

In regards to the third question (see Table 3) regarding the original reason for participating in the theatre ministry, all six of the participants indicated that their participation in the theater ministry had extrinsic motivations associated with the ministry of the church:

Table 3. *Reasons To Begin Participation In Religious Theatre*

Participants	Responses
Ana (15)	I understand that art and culture in the church is something that needs to be worked on. There are problems with consistency and awareness in this regard. I always wanted to do something different, to be the light within the church itself.
Isabel (21)	I always liked to pass on to people something that was good and useful. Through the arts I was able to demonstrate the love of God so that people, too, could see their wonderful goodness.
Bruna (16)	The desire to discover more of my abilities, to get more involved in the church, and to “not stand still” when it came to doing things in Jesus’ name.
Fábio (19)	In the beginning was a shy boy, and saw the theater as a tool to worship God and also a tool that would help me to evangelize others and fulfill my mission call.
Yuri (19)	In addition to always sympathizing with the area, I am willing through the art to be able to impact people’s lives and preach the gospel in an informal way.
Vagner (19)	Aside from the identification and passion for the area, it was a way I saw of bringing the love of God to the people.

TABLE 3
Reasons To Begin Participation In Religious Theatre

- “I understand that art and culture in the church is something that needs to be worked on (...) I always wanted to do something different, to be the light within the church itself.” (Ana);

- “Through the arts I was able to demonstrate the love of God (...)” (Isabel);

- “to get more involved in the church and ‘to not stand still’ when it came to doing things in Jesus’ name” (Bruna);

“[I] saw the theater as a tool to worship God and also a tool that would help me to evangelize others and fulfill my mission call” (Fábio);

“(...) I am willing through the art to be able to impact people’s lives and preach the gospel in an informal way.” (Yuri);
 “it was a way I saw of bringing the love of God to the people.” (Vagner);

It is not surprising that the reasons to begin participation in theatre were extrinsic since it was a theatre ministry rather than a recreational theatre company – ministry implies that other people are being served through the activity, in this case the activity of theatre performance.

Two of the six participants also mentioned intrinsic motivations for participating in the theatre ministry. Yuri mentioned “always sympathizing with the area” [theatre], while Vagner noted his “identification and passion for the area” [theatre]. Thus for these two participants their motivation for beginning to participate in the theater ministry was a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. While the other four participants only mentioned extrinsic reasons for beginning in the theatre ministry, their answers to question two suggest that for two of them, intrinsic motivations may also play a role in their continued involvement in the theatre ministry. As noted above, Ana views the theatre ministry as “a source of pleasure”, while Bruna experiences it as “a lot of fun.” Thus for Ana and Bruna, their motivations for ongoing in the theatre may be mixed – extrinsic and intrinsic.

Question four asked participants whether their participation in the theatre ministry contributed to their personal development (see Table 4). All six participants were unanimous that their involvement in the theatre contributed to their personal development, although there was considerable variety in the development that took place. One participant actually acknowledged this variety “(...) growth. This is something that varies from person to person”. Two of the participants connected their personal development to their development as Christians:

Table 4. Participation of The Theater Group And Its Contribution To Personal Development

Participants	Responses
Ana (15)	Definitely, helping others, connecting the group, the love of God witnessed, contributed a lot to my growth. This is something that varies from person to person, but simply willingness to grow individually.
Isabel (21)	Yes, for sure! What I learn and live in the group contributes directly to my training, makes me learn how to deal with different situations, teachings that can be brought to my professional area.
Bruna (16)	Very! I learn more and more from the difficulties I encounter within the theater group. I allow myself to be taught by God at all times. In addition, because it is religious, we have contact with the results of our pieces and our events. It is priceless to see how much Christian theater can change a person’s life.
Fábio (19)	Yes, because the word of God tells us that we should be in communion, the theater group allows this. It also allows us to seek to accept our body, our failures, difficulties, limitations, and use that to strengthen us in Christ, so that we accept ourselves in Christ. We know that we must become like Christ, and love ourselves, so that we may fulfill the commandment of God, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves.
Yuri (19)	Of course! Because it encompasses a lot of things, not just the theater. It has responsibilities, stimulation of creativity, teamwork, learning to improvise in necessary hours. In addition, through the pieces I was able to learn new things.
Vagner (19)	Yes! Because we learn to have responsibilities, purposes, notion and conscience.

TABLE 4
 Participation of The Theater Group And Its Contribution To Personal Development

“I allow myself to be taught by God at all times” (Bruna);

“the theater group (...) allows us to seek to accept our body, our failures, difficulties, limitations and to use that to strengthen us in Christ, so that we accept ourselves in Christ. We know that we must become like Christ, and love ourselves (...)” (Fábio);

It is interesting to note that Fábio learned from the failures and difficulties. Similarly, Bruna stated, “I learn more and more from the difficulties I encounter within the theater group”.

Another participant connected her personal development to her area of professional work:

“What I learn and live in the group contributes directly to my training, makes me learn how to deal with different situations, teachings that can be brought to my professional area” (Isabel);

Other participants described their personal development in more general terms:

“Simply willingness to grow individually” (Ana);

“Responsibilities, stimulation of creativity, teamwork, learning to improvise in necessary Hours (...) through the pieces I was able to learn new things” (Yuri);

“We learn to have responsibilities, purposes, notion and conscience” (Vagner);

DISCUSSION

Scholars conceptual leisure in many different ways: the classical state of being view, leisure as activity, leisure as free time, leisure as a function or symbol of social class, the social-psychological understanding of leisure as a state of mind, the feminist perspective of leisure as meaningful enjoyment, and as a holistic way of life (Heintzman, 2013). The majority of participants in this study (four of six), when asked, provided an activity understanding of leisure while one participant gave a time understanding of leisure. It is not surprising that these are the definitions of leisure provided by the participants, as these are the definitions known by the average person. While used by leisure scholars, the general population is not aware of most of the other definitions of leisure (Maciel, Saraiva, Martins, Vieira Junior & Romera, 2019).

The definition of leisure as activity is “non-work activity in which people engage during their free time – apart from obligations of work, family and society” (Murphy, 1974, p. 4). The participants in this study used the terms of “activity” or something “that they do” to describe this understanding of leisure. Dumazedier (1967) believed that leisure as activity had three functions: relaxation (recovery from fatigue), entertainment (deliverance from boredom) and development of personality. The functions of leisure for the participants Ana, Bruna and Fábio all revolve around relaxation and recovery from fatigue: restoring energy, relaxation and rest. These functions have similarities to what Beard and Ragheb (1983) describe as the stimulus-avoidance motivations of leisure, in contrast to intellectual, social or mastery-competence motivations, in that a person seeks rest and unwinds oneself. These functions of leisure displayed by some of the participants may also be seen as outcomes of leisure and in particular, the personal and psychological benefit of stress management – “prevention, mediation and restoration” (Driver & Bruns, 1999, p. 352). Dumazedier also wrote that leisure as activity is “for (...) diversion, or broadening his knowledge and his spontaneous social participation, the free exercise of his creative capacity” (Dumazedier, 1967, pp. 16-17). One participant, Bruna, mentioned this idea of distraction or diversion and another participant, Yuri, mentioned, the idea of creativity.

Five of the six participants in the study viewed their participation in the theatre ministry as leisure. These findings supports those of Maciel et al. (2017) who investigated the experiences of five men and five women, aged 21 to 44, who participated in artistic, dance and choral activities held in an evangelical Baptist church to determine if these experiences were considered leisure experiences by the participants. These researchers concluded that these activities had characteristics similar to leisure experience and that the participants identified their participation in these artistic, dance and choral activities as leisure.

Analysis of the interview data suggests that participation in the theatre ministry may reflect a few of the characteristics of the psychological understanding of leisure as a state of mind (subjective leisure) but definitely not all. Subjective leisure is primarily characterized by perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Neulinger, 1974). With intrinsic motivation, satisfaction obtained from an activity derives from participating in the activity itself, in other words “an activity done for its own sake” (Neulinger, 1974, p. 17). Likewise, Mannell and Kleiber (1997, p. 108) define intrinsic motivation/goal-orientation as a “perception that participation in an activity is for its own sake or enjoyment and as a final end in itself and not as instrumental for gaining something else”. In contrast, with extrinsic motivation, satisfaction is derived from some result of engaging in the activity, in other words the activity is done for some other reason than its own sake. The data analysis did not find that participation in the theatre ministry was characterized by intrinsic motivation. Rather the participation was characterized by extrinsic motivation – religious motivation to serve others. Thus, the participation was instrumental for achieving a specific outcome.

As observed in the results, for a few of the participants there seemed to be a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, which Neulinger (1974) would describe more as “leisure-job” rather than “pure leisure” that is characterized by perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation. Nevertheless, for Neulinger, freely-chosen activities engaged in for extrinsic reasons can still be experienced as leisure. Mannell and Kleiber (1997) have documented how activities that are extrinsically regulated or rewarded can still be perceived as self-determined, freely chosen and leisure. The theatre activities of the participants in this study would seem to be examples of this phenomenon.

Another characteristic of the participants activity in the theatre group was intense involvement which may be considered another attribute of subjective leisure. However, it is interesting that the one participant, Fábio, who did not describe his participation in the theatre group as leisure, was because it involved intense involvement rather than relaxation. His perspective reflects the concern of Kleiber (1999) who has argued that the psychological understanding of leisure as a state of mind has focussed too much on optimal experience as an ideal outcome, characterized by commitment, competence, and concentrated effort, and on a high intensity activity as a source of self-realization and satisfaction. The concepts of relaxation, receptivity, and “just being” advocated by Pieper (1952) have been subordinated and neglected in the state-of-mind view of leisure, as have peacefulness, contemplation, appreciation, contentment, and serenity. In contrast to the optimal experience view, Kleiber stated that leisure is essentially a condition of relaxation, faithful openness to the present, and ease of thinking and moving.

As noted in the results, the majority of participants (four of six) viewed the theatre ministry as pleasurable, fun or enjoying. This is what is known as the enjoyment/pleasure affect attribute of leisure “the perception that activities or context provides positive affects and moods” (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 108). Two participants mentioned two other attributes of subjective leisure, however since only one participant mentioned each of them, they are not reflective of all participants. Bruna mentioned that the theatre was a “distraction” which is consistent with the sense of separation attribute of leisure “perception that participation in an activity or context provides escape from the everyday mundane, routine world and its pressures” (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 108). Yuri’s “feeling of accomplishment” is consistent with the leisure attribute of “opportunity for self-realization/self-expression” (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

The answers to question four support what Driver and Bruns (1999) describe as the personal development and growth benefit of leisure. This authors, list 24 different personal development and growth benefits of leisure, many of which overlap with the personal development outcomes identified by the participants in this study: leadership, creativity enhancement, spiritual growth, and problem solving. One criticism of the benefits of leisure literature is that it focuses on beneficial outcomes of leisure and not any negative outcomes. This focus is often the result of researchers asking about beneficial outcomes but not negative outcomes. This study is a good example as it asked whether participation in the theater group contributed to personal development, to which all participants agreed, however participants were not asked if there were any ways that participation in the theater group was detrimental to personal development. Future research could investigate negative outcomes as well as beneficial outcomes.

Kleiber (1999) connects leisure to development in four main ways. First, leisure is derivative in that leisure activity is the result of developmental change. Second, leisure is adjustive in that in response to serious life events or developmental changes, leisure offers a buffer and a respite. Third, leisure is generative in that it provides a context for creating personal transformation and growth. Fourth, leisure is maladaptive in that it hinders development. The contributions to personal development mentioned by participants in this study would fit into the category of leisure as derivative. Especially for teenagers and young adults, such as the participants in this study, leisure “may be influential in taking a person into and through the processes of growing up” (McGuire & Kleiber, 2016, p. 3).

The findings of the current study that participation in the theatre ministry contributed to personal development is consistent with the findings of Maciel et al. (2017) who found that participation in artistic

activities within a religious context contributed to the personal development of these participants. Both studies seem to suggest that the evangelical religious context, permeated by principles associated with the development of values and spirituality, is a context that is favourable to personal development. Furthermore, the theatre context may be understood as a pedagogical opportunity that facilitates cultural expression. Furthermore, according to Furtado et al. (2011) theatre among young people may provide the opportunity to not only develop self-image and aesthetic-creative abilities but to bring together both reason and emotions in such a way as to bring about self-transformation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this research study was to analyze if the participation of young people in an evangelical theater group can contribute to personal development. The results affirmed this possibility.

However, presenting our concluding remarks, we present the limitations of this study that result from the methodological procedures used. Initially, we emphasize the classical criticism of the case study method that is the impossibility of generalizing the findings, which however does not invalidate the results. The objective of this method is to deepen knowledge and not to generalize. Another limitation constantly attributed to the case study is the intentional choice of the place and the participants. However, when considering the research problem and the objective of this investigation, it seemed appropriate to go use this method to obtain primary data that could serve as a guide for future investigations. Another limitation was the small amount of data collected that led to only a few findings. Despite these limitations, we believe that the findings contribute to a better understanding of leisure within the context of a Christian theatre group.

The findings of this study can direct new investigations with improved or different methodological approaches that add new information and clarifications. For example, one could enlarge the number of churches and evangelical denominations, the number of participants – with distinct socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics – with a random sample, and adopt new instruments for data collection and analysis.

The results found in this research study indicate that young people understand leisure as an activity or something that they do this common-sense understanding is in line with some theoretical approaches presented in the literature. Although the participants did not articulate an understanding of leisure as a stand of mind or subjective experience, their participation in the theatre activity reflected some of the attributes of subjective leisure: intense involvement and positive affect (pleasure, enjoyment).

Participation in the theater group by the participants, for the most part, was considered a leisure experience. This finding reflects to some extent that their participation in the theatre group had an element of subjective leisure. The main reason given by the participants to be part of the theater group was to promote an evangelization of their faith; therefore, they were extrinsically motivated. However, this aspect did not prevent the existence of some attributes of subjective leisure such as intense involvement and positive affect (enjoyment, pleasure) as mentioned above.

Finally, participating in the theater group in the religious context, according to the data presented, contributed to the personal development of young people in this study. We recognize the relevance of theater as a pedagogical medium that contributes to the promotion of different skills such as communication, self-expression, creativity, and socialization. But we also identified that for two of the participants, participation in the theatre group led to spiritual growth and development.

In summary, the study made it possible to identify that the participation of young people in an evangelical theater group can promote leisure experiences, spiritual growth and personal development.

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