Significações da maternidade nas vozes de professoras que não foram mães: uma revisão bibliográfica

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Resumo

O presente artigo resulta de uma pesquisa em andamento que investiga as significações da maternidade por parte de professoras que não foram mães e foi produzido a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica, na qual buscamos trabalhos que apontassem possibilidades de diálogos com a investigação proposta. Em um primeiro momento, realizamos buscas nos anais das seis últimas reuniões da Associação de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação (ANPEd), mas depois a pesquisa se estendeu, também, para outras fontes de pesquisa que pudessem dar suporte ao estudo, desde que, dentro dos parâmetros de áreas afins das Ciências Humanas e Sociais. O resultado levantou possibilidades de recortes teóricos e metodológicos contemporâneos no que diz respeito às seguintes temáticas: gênero e educação; história das mulheres na carreira docente; os significados da não maternidade e a pesquisa com entrevistas narrativas.

Palavras-chave: Docência. Gênero. Maternidade. Narrativas.

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Meanings of motherhood in the voices of teachers who did not have children: a literature review

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Abstract

The present article is the result of an ongoing research that investigates the meanings of motherhood to teachers who were not mothers. Through a bibliographical research, we searched for works that indicated possibilities of dialogues with the proposed investigation. At first, we carried out searches in the annals of the last six meetings of the Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPEd), but later the research was also extended to other research sources that could support the study, provided that within the parameters of related areas of Human and Social Sciences. The result raised possibilities for contemporary theoretical and methodological perspectives with regard to the following themes: gender and education; history of women in the teaching career; the meanings of non-motherhood and research with narrative interviews.

Keywords: Genre. Maternity. Narratives. Teaching.

Significados de la maternidad en las voces de maestras que no fueron madres: una revisión de la literatura

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Resumen

El problema de investigación que propongo investigar es profundizar las reflexiones sobre los significados de la maternidad en la sociedad brasileña contemporánea a través de la comprensión de cómo piensan las maestras que no fueron madres. El presente artículo se produjo a partir de una búsqueda, en un primer momento, en los anales de las últimas seis reuniones de la Asociación de Postgrados e Investigaciones en Educación (ANPEd). Se buscaron trabajos producidos que apuntaran posibilidades de diálogo con el problema en cuestión. Las búsquedas también se ampliaron a otras fuentes de investigación que pudieran sustentar el estudio, siempre que se dentro de los parámetros de áreas afines de las Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales. El resultado abrió posibilidades para enfoques teóricos y metodológicos contemporáneos en relación con los siguientes temas: género y educación; historia de la mujer en la carrera docente; los significados de la no maternidad y la investigación con entrevistas narrativas.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza. Género. Maternidad. Narrativas.

Introduction

This article results from an ongoing research project that investigates the meanings of motherhood in contemporary Brazilian society by understanding the perspectives of female teachers who are not mothers, using narrative interviews as the methodological tool. We aim to analyze how these women and teachers represent themselves in a society that overvalues motherhood; identify the relationship between personal projects and professional life, given that they do not experience the burden of motherhood; and investigate the relationship between the choice of a teaching career and ideals of motherhood, while also exploring the history of women's entry into this profession.

The choice of teachers to collect these narratives was made to address the significant discourses about motherhood circulating in school environments, leading us to delve deeper into this issue, especially with respect to understanding gender relations. Thus, the teaching career is a privileged field for such a study, as it has concentrated a large number of women since the mid-19th century. Additionally, the image of the early years' basic education teacher has always been associated with a substitute mother (LOURO, 2007).

Choosing women who have not been mothers to discuss motherhood is justified by the belief that there is a different perspective in their self-representations. We assume that they play a different social role than that assigned to women in Western culture, which is associated with motherhood and caregiving. In this research, we focus on female teachers who have not had children, aged between 40 and 70 years, which marks the end of the reproductive life stage.

To address these issues, it is necessary to engage in a dialogue with other authors who support the theme we propose to research. Thus, we analyze what educational research can offer in terms of theoretical and methodological frameworks for the development of this research through a bibliographic review.

This review primarily referenced research from the Working Groups of ANPEd (National Association of Postgraduate and Education Research), prioritizing the last three meetings: 39th, 38th, and 37th, corresponding to the years 2019, 2017, and 2015, respectively. Initially, two working groups were selected that seemed to include work related to motherhood/teaching/gender/narratives: GT8 - Teacher Training and GT23 - Gender, Sexuality, and Education. However, after reading the titles of the papers, we expanded the search to include two more working groups: GT2 - History of Education and GT14 - Sociology of Education, as the topic necessarily demands interdisciplinarity.

The texts were selected based on the presence of one of the descriptors in their titles. We then read the abstracts.

We also searched the 2017 to 2021 editions of UEMG's journal, "*Educação em Foco*." In this search, what seemed most pertinent to the research problem was the bibliography contained in the articles rather than the articles themselves.

The selection from ANPEd's working groups was guided by the following criteria: choice of working groups, selection by titles of papers presented in the groups, and reading of abstracts of selected papers. After reading, we discarded some papers that did not seem relevant to the research topic. We selected those whose abstracts indicated a possible relation to the research theme for a complete reading of the article.

From this initial immersion in the bibliographic review, it was noted that there is a scarcity of work in the field of education on the researched topic and a need to explore other areas. We then sought papers presented at the ANPOCS (National Association of Research in Social Sciences) meeting of 2020, looking into 5 working groups: "Art, Culture, and Social Sciences"; "Social Sciences and Education"; "Gender, Family, and the Care Crisis"; "Care on the Political Agenda"; "Sexuality and Gender: Politics, Agency, and Rights in Dispute." We selected only 5 articles that seemed related to the topic of motherhood and pertained to the field of education.

The search continued on Google Scholar with the keywords "Teaching and Ideal of Motherhood" and "Non-Motherhood," which are quite broad but yielded a plethora of papers, with few in the field of education and most related to social psychology. In this search, we prioritized papers published on Scielo and in educational journals from universities recognized in the academic field.

Considering all the mentioned sources, 90 papers were selected based on titles/education filter and the abstracts were read. After this initial reading, 50 were discarded for not relating to the research objectives. Then, in a second, more thorough reading of the remaining 40 abstracts, another 10 were discarded for the same reasons; however, we analyzed the bibliographies of all these papers in search of new theoretical references for our work. Among the 30 that remained, prioritizing those from ANPEd, we carefully read the publications. Twenty research papers were from the last six ANPEd meetings (34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, and 39th), from which we selected only 9 that seemed to

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engage with the research problem, as shown in the following table. Among these, most served as references for the theme, while others did not discuss the topic directly but suggested establishing relationships. From other research sources, we selected one master's thesis and one doctoral dissertation that significantly contributed to expanding the theoretical and methodological framework.

Below, we will present the methodological cuts that underpin our research and the theoretical repertoire gathered from this bibliographic review, which guides us in interpreting and establishing a dialogue with the meanings of motherhood brought out in the narratives of the childless teachers interviewed.

Methodological Cuts of the Research

All the articles selected for the bibliographic review, as detailed in the table presented below, framed their research within a qualitative methodology. As Louro states, "the choice of a particular methodological path is tied to the theoretical formulations adopted" (2007, p. 215). The fields of study through which we navigate, particularly gender studies, often start from qualitative investigation, especially when seeking to understand experiences and meanings from the subjects' own realities. This methodological choice permeated all the research listed here, despite the varied data collection strategies, such as: semi-structured interviews (ROLA, 2020), narrative interviews (GONÇALVES, 2007), focus groups and interviews (DAL'IGNA, 2012), fieldwork of an ethnographic nature with cross-referencing of documentary information (KLEIN, 2011), and life history within a longitudinal, ethnographic-inspired study (SCWENBER, 2015). Other works, especially those related to the History of Education (LEON and FARIA, 2015) and the profile of pedagogues (LUCINDO, 2015), use documentary sources. The latter combines this data collection method with the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews within a qualitative approach, developed from a biographical perspective.

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Table 1 - – Mapping of the articles found in the bibliographic review

Research sources	Selected works for abstract review	Works discarded after reading the abstract	Reading of the Work	Use in the literature review article	Selection of bibliography for later reading
Journal 'Educação em Foco' (2013 to 2021)	08	07	01	-	01
Proceedings of ANPEd Meetings (34th to 39th)	30	10	20	6	14
Proceedings of the 44th ANPOCS Meeting (2020)	05	05	-	-	05
Theses defended at UEMG (2011 to 2021))	05	02	03	-	01
- Google Scholar/descriptors: - Teaching and ideal of motherhood. - Teaching as a substitute of motherhood. - Single women. - Non-motherhood by choice. - Profile of childless teachers. - Old maid teacher. -Representations of motherhood	04 04 03 06 05	04 03 01 05 03	- 01 02 01 02 02 01	- - 02 - -	- 01 - 01 02 02 01

	11	09		-	
	08	07		-	

Source: prepared by the authors.

As we can see in Table 1, most of the works used here were found in the Annals of the ANPED meetings (6 works), corresponding to the years 2011, 2012, and 2015, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Details of the Analyzed Articles

ARTICLE REFERENCE	AUTHOR'S NAME, TITLE OF THE ARTICLE AND/OR DISSERTATION/THESIS
34 National ANPED Meeting, GT23	KLEIN, Carin – The Education of Poor Mothers for a Better Childhood. 2011
34 National ANPED Meeting-GT23	SCWENGBER, Maria Simone V. – The Media Teaches: The Imperative of Responsible Motherhood and Fatherhood. 2011
35 National ANPED Meeting – GT23	DAL'IGNA, Maria Cláudia – Family and School: The Making of the Mother-Woman in Times of Neoliberal Governmentality. 2012
37 National ANPED Meeting – GT2	LEON, Adriana Duarte & FARIA FILHO, Luciano Mendes de – Tradition and Modernity: The Catholic Church and the Articulation of a New Space for Women, 1930/1935. 2015
37 National ANPED Meeting- GT8	LUCINDO, Nilzilene Imaculada – Profile, Training, and Trajectory: A Study on Pedagogues Working in Public Educational Institutions of the S.R.E. of Ouro Preto. 2015

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37 National ANPED Meeting.GT23	SCWENGBER, Maria Simone V. – My Children and His: The Children of Hope. 2015
Ph.D. Thesis in Social Sciences, UNICAMP	GONÇALVES, Eliane – Lives in the Singular: Notions about Single Women in Contemporary Brazil. 2007
Master's Thesis in Psychology, University of Porto	ROLA, Maria José Lopes – Single but Not Old Maids: Perceptions, Meanings, and Experiences of Older Single Women. 2020

Source: prepared by the authors.

of constructing the history of subjects by considering the continuous struggle between the subjective 'self' and the socially and culturally circulating voices, thus producing identities (SCWENGBER, 2015, p. 2). According to Gonçalves (2007, p.2), "drawing on the arguments of Michel Foucault (1992), Clifford Geertz (1983, 1997), and Donna Haraway (1995), I consider the different 'corpora' of notions as a set of partial, localized, interested, positioned, and context-specific discourses that are open to interpretation." This tendency, according to Louro (2007), involves an investigative stance that focuses on detailed processes. A thorough approach assumes a text or writing in which description is highlighted. The author adds that "observing and describing, with as much detail as possible, the mechanisms through which references of normality and difference, normal subjects and 'different' subjects, are established, are fundamental procedures" (2007, p. 217)

The narratives of teachers who have not become mothers constitute another aspect of our research problem. Inspired by and engaging with this approach, Gonçalves (2007) works with narratives of middle-class women without children. According to her, their statements, grounded in their "experience of themselves," could be considered "more truthful".

> The experience of oneself cannot be detached from its relations with a domain of knowledge and a set of normative practices. According to Jorge Larrosa (1994, p. 56), it is: the result of a historical complex of fabrication in which intersect the discourses that define the subject's truth, the practices that regulate their behavior, and the forms of subjectivity in which their own interiority is constituted (GONÇALVES, 2007, p. 4).

Another point highlighted in the consulted works of this literature review is the importance of focusing on the nuclei of meanings that emerge through narratives. Scwengber (2015) warns us to

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pay attention to the words that guide the narratives of interlocutors and build networks of meanings always connected to the logic of the context in which they were produced.

As previously indicated, we are using narrative interviews with teachers who have not had children, aged between 40 and 70 years. This age range is chosen because it is assumed that most women either have already become mothers or have decided against it by this age, as women approach the end of their reproductive years after 40. It is important to emphasize that the focus on women who have not had children is different from those who have not been pregnant. Among the latter, there may be those who have adopted a child, "rented a womb," among other cases, and thus have been mothers. We intend to interview women who have not had children for various reasons: choice, lack of opportunity to find a partner, infertility of the woman or partner, lack of resources for infertility treatment, etc. These reasons will certainly emerge during the interviews.

The criterion for selecting interviewees has been their recommendation, provided each agrees to be interviewed, is accessible, and fits within the age range. One informant may suggest another, as long as this enhances our understanding. Thus, recommendations will follow a "snowball" or "chain" process (BOLÍVAR, 2002). We aim to include a broad range of social conditions, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, among others.

The narrative interview is a qualitative research tool that, unlike the semi-structured interview, is based on a single generative question capable of provoking a narration from the subject on the study topic, which will stimulate the subject's main narrative (FLICK, 2004). According to this author, the interviewee should feel comfortable telling their story. Their narrative should not be interrupted by the interviewer, who may signal understanding through non-verbal encouragement. Only after the narrator has completed this initial part of the interview, called the main narrative, may the interviewer encourage the narrator to provide new details or elements that help deepen the understanding of the narrated story. In this second phase of the interview, called narrative investigations, such encouragement is done with other generative narrative questions. Once these questions are exhausted, the interview reaches the balance phase, where a final synthesis is sought, focusing on questions of the type "how" and, later, at the end, questions of the type "why." Some authors, such as Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2003), recommend stopping the recording at this final phase of the interview and making immediate notes right after the interview.

According to Teixeira and Pádua (2006), the interview is a socio-anthropological encounter between subjects with different cultural backgrounds, which demands a keen ear from the researcher. The interviewee lends their life to the interviewer, and this relationship should be handled with great delicacy. The interviewer must seek informality, spontaneity, and the trust of the subjects. Additionally, according to the authors, another important aspect is the temporality inscribed in the interview. The choice of the date and time of the interview by both the interviewee and the interviewer should be made at a time when they can be free from other tasks that might interrupt the narrative, and care should be taken with the duration of the interview. It is important to listen to silence without breaking it, allowing it to flow. Capturing gestures, emotions, and the body language of the interviewee is also crucial. In this sense, a field notebook is useful for recording the interview situation.

However, to understand the meanings of these interviewed teachers, it is essential to build a theoretical repertoire capable of engaging in dialogue and interpretation with them. In this direction, we present below the main results of the bibliographic research conducted, organized into three axes: Gender and Education; Women and the Teaching Career; and Non-Maternity and Its Meanings.

Gender and Education

The theme of gender and education is quite prevalent in the working groups of ANPEd, especially since 2004, when GT 23 – Gender, Sexuality, and Education was created. According to Ferreira and Nunes (2013), before this, productions on gender and sexuality presented at the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPEd) meetings were dispersed across other GTs, particularly GT2 – History of Education.

Based on this observation, we directed our review research focusing on these two GTs and bringing the theoretical references of the research presented within them. Based on the title of each work, we read them to verify if the main subject of the text aligned with the objects of our investigation. Recurring references were identified in these works, especially concerning the concept of gender.

The first major Brazilian reference in the field of gender studies is Guacira Lopes Louro, who with great expertise invites us to study the power dynamics between gender and sexualities, which are often subtle and almost imperceptible to many.

There is a consensus, emphasizes Louro (2007), within gender studies that "all modern feminist meanings of gender stem from Simone de Beauvoir and her assertion that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'" (p. 207). Embedded in this assertion is the notion of constructing a feminine subject or a gendered subject, as it would be referred to later. Working "with the concept of gender means opposing the naturalization of the feminine and, obviously, the masculine" (2007, p. 207).

By problematizing the notion of social construction, Louro introduces the discussion that a body does not exist before or outside of culture:

> the identification or naming of a body (done at the moment of birth, or even earlier through prospective techniques) certainly occurs within the context of a culture, through the languages that this culture provides and, it must be assumed, is influenced by the values that such a culture adopts (LOURO, 2007, p. 209).

Louro further shows us that, despite the diversity of understandings and conceptions adopted,

> apparently, most scholars consider that sexuality entails or implies more than just bodies; it involves fantasies, values, languages, rituals, behaviors, and representations that are mobilized or put into action to express desires and pleasures. Many of those who dedicate themselves to researching this field refer to the studies of Michel Foucault, particularly his work The History of Sexuality (LOURO, 2007, p.210).

This was confirmed in the research found that seeks to understand "the representations and meanings of motherhood(s) in the context of the life narrative (trajectory) of a woman who became a mother during adolescence" (SCWENGBER, 2015, p.2). Following this author's approach, through the narratives of teachers who have not become mothers, we intend to investigate the representations of motherhood by understanding what it is like to experience life as a woman without children.

In the manner of Beauvoir, considering the idea of woman as a construction, something of becoming, the author also references Foucault (1988),

> to think about subjectivities and identities inscribed in the intricacies of self-experiences, time, and history. Women do not constitute a uniformity, but perhaps a unity that brings together diverse meanings; they are indeed a social and cultural effect. Even though in contemporary times female subjectivities and identities are multiple, I understand that categories such as gender and class constitute important elements for understanding how

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women think and construct their daily lives. I already note from the outset that there is no single script for living motherhood (SCWENGBER, 2015, p. 2).

I cannot fail to mention another important and recurring reference in the selected research, undoubtedly the most cited, concerning the concept of gender as a category of analysis: Joan Scott

My definition of gender has two parts and several subsets that are interrelated but should be analytically differentiated. The core of the definition rests on a complete correlation between two propositions: (1) gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes, and (2) gender is a primary way of giving meaning to power relations (SCOTT, 1995, p.86).

The author emphasizes that gender as a constitutive element of social relations involves interrelated elements such as culturally available symbols. In this regard, these symbols often evoke contradictory symbolic representations. She cites Eve and Mary as symbols of women in the Western Christian tradition, expressing dichotomous relations of light and darkness, purification and pollution, innocence and corruption. This question thus posed urges us to investigate which symbolic representations are invoked when we think about motherhood in contemporary society. This orientation is clearly evident in the research analyzed in the GTS of Anped.

Once again, Scwengber (2015, p. 3) brings in her work the interest in understanding the discursive maternal meanings constructed in the narrative of her interlocutor, examining "the edges of a life narrative and the gaps of potential that give mobility to different identity positions." She adds that from this narrative, two cores of meaning emerged: "the dimension of abandonment, the repetition of the cycle of poverty, and the possibility of a new path of support and hope through motherhood" (SCWENGBER, 2015, p. 8).

Through this research, we can perceive the power of narratives in evoking symbolic representations, often ambiguous and contradictory, as noted by Scott (1995).

Also, a highly recurrent theoretical reference in the research investigated in this review is the notion of identity construction through a set of discourses based on Butler's (2003) analyses. This author leads us to think of identities as constructed by a set of familial, political, legal, economic, religious, and public policy discourses. Under the performative power of these discourses, we also learn what it means to be a woman and a man.

Scwengber (2006) combines the notions of Butler (2003), Foucault (2010), and Scott (1995) to work with Butler's concept of "social intelligibility," which is "that which is produced as a

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consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms" (2006, p.12). In analyzing the narratives of her interlocutor, the author emphasizes that "the condition of being a woman for her fundamental mission of being a mother grants her an identity position that corresponds to the appeals of a traditional feminine logic, which has the home (family) and motherhood as its horizon." (SCWEMGBER, 2006, p.9).

Women and the Teaching Career

The analysis of the theoretical framework of some research in GT2 of ANPED – History of Education – indicated a connection with our research problem, especially regarding a historical reflection on the inclusion of women in the teaching profession. Studies on the feminization of teaching, such as those by Carvalho (2018); Castanha (2015); Munhoz (2022); Hahner (2011); Uekane (2010); and Vidal and Carvalho (2001), will be further explored throughout the research.

About sixty years ago, in Brazil, most teachers were unmarried women. They made the profession a substitute for motherhood, extending care and dedication to students as if they were their own children. There were few opportunities for women in the job market, and when they existed, they were associated with the reproduction of their social role as caregivers. Very few had access to formal education. Primarily, they pursued the "*normalista*" course and followed a teaching career.

The transformation of teaching into "women's work" is marked by the mid-19th century, with the opening of normal schools. Although these schools were intended for both men and women, by 1874, for example, there was a greater number of women and a decrease in the number of men. It is worth noting that teaching in Brazil had been initiated by men—religious figures, especially Jesuits, and officials (LOURO, 2008, p.375). The main factor that contributed to men leaving the teaching profession was the industrialization process of the time, which led them to seek more profitable careers. The arguments in favor of the feminization of teaching defended that:

> women had a 'natural' inclination for dealing with children, as they were seen as the first and "natural educators." Therefore, it was considered most appropriate to entrust them with the formal education of young children. If a woman's primary destiny was motherhood, one could simply view teaching as, in a certain sense, "an extension of motherhood," with each student regarded as a "spiritual child." This perspective reinforced the idea that women were inherently suited for teaching, further entrenching the feminization of the teaching profession (LOURO, 2007, p. 376).

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Within this framework, a conception of work outside the home for women was also produced. Such occupation was seen as temporary and "should be abandoned whenever it conflicted with the true feminine mission of being a wife and mother. Working outside the home would be acceptable until marriage or for women who were alone—spinsters and widows" (LOURO, 2008, p.379).

The profile of female teachers was shaped amid apparent paradoxes, as they had to occupy roles both as professionals and as "spiritual mothers." Affection came to be regarded as fundamental for the learning environment, both in school education and in home education—for the teacher and the mother. As a result, it became coherent to encourage the presence of women in teaching courses, reinforcing their role within the educational sphere.

> The school seemed to develop an ambiguous movement: on one hand, it promoted a kind of rupture with the education developed at home […] on the other hand, it fostered, through various means, its connection to the home, insofar as it surrounded teacher training with references to motherhood and affection (LOURO, 2008, p.383).

Research indicates that in the same context, at the beginning of the 20th century (LEON and FARIA FILHO, 2015), the teaching profession was primarily established in primary education, thereby linking it to the characteristics of motherhood. In analyzing the discourses conveyed in the Catholic press, the authors observe that feelings such as affection, love, and care began to be associated with education, and women were seen as the ideal individuals to take on the teaching role.

Referring to the current context, Klein (2011, p. 9) observes that:

> a pedagogy is produced that exalts the positioning of women as educators and caregivers, and a supposed self-sacrifice that must be made when one loves [...] In our culture, love, as well as self-denial, patience, guilt, suffering, and pain, have been persistently and repeatedly associated with the feminine and with motherhood.

The large contingent of teachers continues to be predominantly women, especially in basic education. According to the 2017 school census, out of 2.2 million teachers who teach up to high school, 1.8 million are women. However, at the university level, where salaries are higher, women represent 45.28% compared to 54.72% for men. In early childhood education, women make up almost the entire workforce.

The repercussions of this historical association between women, motherhood, and values such as care, docility, and patience are still evident today, particularly in early childhood education. Zibetti (2007), based on research with teachers at this level of education, notes that the discourse persists among the educators themselves that women possess inherent skills for working with young children.

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Regarding single women, Louro (2021) notes that, historically, those who first dedicated themselves to teaching were single women, orphans, and widows. The image of the teacher was initially associated with the "spinster" a woman who was unable to marry. In fact, they were practically prevented from marrying: "For a long time, the teacher was associated with the spinster, the woman who couldn't marry. If marriage and motherhood were the 'natural' and desired destiny for all women, those for whom this seemed somehow unattainable would be left to devote themselves to tasks that had an analogy with such a mission." (2021, p.108)

The process of feminization of teaching, according to Vianna (2001), is associated with poor working conditions, lower salaries, and the sexual stratification of the teaching profession, as well as the reproduction of stereotypes by the school.

Vianna's (2001) research indicates that societal changes in recent decades have shifted women away from their traditional roles. Women can now dedicate themselves exclusively to work, choose not to have children or a husband, and invest in personal projects. However, balancing work and domestic tasks remains challenging for women. Perhaps this is why many opt to forgo marriage and motherhood.

Non-Motherhood and Its Meanings

In our searches within the GTs of ANPEd, we found very few studies related to education that address non-motherhood. No research was found in these GTs that specifically looks at the meanings of motherhood from the perspective of teachers who have not become mothers, nor at the significance of this experience for education and the individuals themselves.

The category "women who are not mothers" is very underexplored in the field of education, although it is more thoroughly researched in social psychology. In our subsequent searches on Google Scholar, using various descriptors previously mentioned, the studies most related to this research problem were found under the descriptors: spinster and single teacher, even so, with fewer results compared to other descriptors used. As can be seen, unmarried women are often addressed in a pejorative manner.

One recent master's thesis caught our attention, which we read in its entirety. In this work, Rola (2020, p. 30) asserts that "investigations focusing on groups of single people, and especially single women, are sporadic." The author interviews women between 65 and 78 years of age and presents an interesting theoretical framework that can dialogue with our research topic. Using Goffman's (1982) framework, Rola suggests that these women can be considered deviant for not conforming to hegemonic social norms. The author also references Bourdieu (1996, p. 20) to argue that "single women are perceived as inadequate, incomplete, and socially marked as a group in social suffering, due to their contestation of the heterosexual, pro-marriage, and family cultural hegemony"

We hypothesize that women who have not become mothers occupy a different social role than the one traditionally assigned to women in Western culture. This rejection of an idealized social role brings us to Strathern's (1995) work, which studies women who want to have babies without sexual relations. Strathern emphasizes that ideals must be protected to maintain the social system, and that women are the guardians of this ideal. They are the ones who must demonstrate that procreation is a natural fact, establish the possibility for their child to have a father, and by engaging in sexual intercourse, show that children are necessarily born from relationships. We refer to this to consider the case of women who have not become mothers. Is what's at stake here the rejection of the symbolic meaning of motherhood? In this sense, could we think of them as non-guardians of the ideal of motherhood?

This is the aspect upon which our research is being built. Following Butler (2014), we maintain a skeptical perspective that in the narratives of these women, discourses of resistance to the gender regulations imposed by society may emerge. According to Butler, challenging the authority of the symbolic means "insisting that the norm, in its necessary temporality, is open to displacement and subversion from within" (BUTLER, 2014, p.12). However, since people are regulated by gender, this regulatory power be it medical, legal, or otherwise soon produces parameters for people, constructing individuals according to abstract norms.

Is the ideal of motherhood being shaken in our society? We can observe a loosening of the imperative to form families. Statistics show, for example, that the percentage of women over 40 without children in Brazil has increased, although these women still represent a minority (IBGE data from 2014). At the same time, assisted reproductive technologies have also increased, along with a trend towards delaying motherhood. Data from the Ministry of Health (2015) show a 49% increase

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over two decades in the number of women having children after the age of 40. This data reflects the idea of postponing motherhood, often due to work or professional achievements, rather than abandoning the desire to become a mother.

Research conducted with women who do not wish to have children, in the middle-class context of Rio de Janeiro (BARBOSA & COUTINHO, 2012), indicates that the ideal still seems to reside in a woman's attempt to reconcile motherhood with professional fulfillment, as it is often believed that only with the arrival of a child does a woman become complete. However, this research acknowledges that, at the individual level, there are significant changes in open choices. According to one respondent in this study, "social constraints are strong, but it is up to the woman whether she wants to endure being pressured or not." This statement reminds us of Butler's (2014) assertion that subjectification is the process by which regulation produces gender. There must be subjects to be subjected to this regulation. What kind of questioning do childless women face in their feminine condition? To what extent will they endure social pressures to have children? How do those who do not submit experience these pressures?

Denying motherhood is apparently easier than wanting and being unable to, in biological terms. But it is symbolically more difficult. We are interested in analyzing this negative symbolism, something that is denied to a condition that should be "natural." The issue is not the absence of a child but the impossibility of occupying a "place" without the intersection of the maternal condition. In this sense, what are the social constraints faced by women who do not wish to have children?

Despite changes in behaviors and ideas in contemporary times, stereotypes and prejudices still mark our daily lives. In a survey conducted by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) in 2013, nearly 60% of respondents agreed totally or partially with the statement that "a woman only feels fulfilled when she has children."

As Butler (2017) reminds us, stereotypes serve a controlling function, confining women to certain models and social standards, especially those that distance them from public life. The patriarchal culture, combined with mass media, continues to operate in a way that places responsibilities for child-rearing, household maintenance, and contraception on women.

Final considerations

Charlot teaches us that "when we know what we want to understand, we have the foundation for a research project" (2006, p.10). Our initial desire is to understand how childlessness is experienced and, in this pursuit, we have developed strategies to achieve it. This literature review, therefore, is part of these ongoing and evolving paths.

Our focus, while reviewing the literature, has been directed towards what has been produced by researchers in the field of education concerning: the concept of gender used, the teacher and the association of career with motherhood, the denial of motherhood, and the production of narratives.

This review has expanded our theoretical and methodological options and, combined with the references previously researched, has contributed to defining the theoretical-methodological framework of our ongoing research. To understand this movement and the issues raised along these paths, we draw an analogy to the metaphor of the lantern used by Santos (2019, p.11) when discussing the importance of Southern epistemologies:

> In a time like this, those fighting against domination cannot rely on the light at the end of the tunnel. They will have to carry with them a portable lantern, a light that, even if trembling or faint, illuminates enough to allow them to identify the path as their own and thus avoid fatal accidents.

Considering the childless woman and especially focusing on the life histories of teachers the childlessness and its relation to their personal projects and career current research in the field of education has explored this topic minimally. We have found that studies addressing the representations of teachers who are not mothers and the significance of this experience for education and for the individuals themselves are scarce. There are many stereotypes about childless women and little scientific investigation. What are the experiences related to childlessness for these women? What narratives and reflections do they have about these experiences?

As social scientists, we have consolidated knowledge and ethical positions that place us within a particular space in the realm of knowledge and establish dialogues with partners. Based on the narratives of the interviewed women, we aim to demonstrate that there are diverse representations in society and the importance of learning to coexist with and respect diversity, highlighting various possibilities of existence.

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