

Woman, Mother, and Professional: Discursive Incidences in Contemporary Society

Mulher, Mãe e Profissional: Incidências Discursivas na Atualidade

Mujer, Madre y Profesional: Incidencias Discursivas en la Actualidad

Femme, Mère et Professionnelle : Les Incidences Discursives dans l'Actualité

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Abstract

This article reflects on the social positioning of women who are mothers within contemporary discourses, the impact of the capitalist discourse as conceptualized by Lacan, and the possible pathways available to subjects who identify themselves in this way today. Recognizing that the subject is inseparable from the social context, the study provides a historical contextualization of social changes surrounding the figure of women, with particular emphasis on motherhood and work. It offers an overview of what work and professional life may represent, in subjective terms, for women. It should be noted that the article focuses predominantly on the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual women. The analysis is grounded in Lacan's theory of discourses, as well as in the contributions of authors who address this topic, to examine cultural ideals, the forms of suffering produced by capitalist discourse, and possible avenues of response. Lacan theorizes the possibility of discursive shifts, indicating potential exits from the rigidity that tends to emerge when the subject is situated within this discourse. While some women appear engulfed by ideals and narratives of totality and fulfillment, impossible to attain, and suffer in this position of subjection, others are able to occupy subjective positions of questioning. This is not without suffering, but it allows for the circulation of desire. Cultural spaces and movements that support such questioning positions foster conditions in which motherhood, combined with professional life, can take place in ways that respect each woman's singularity and sustain the circulation of desire.

Keywords: woman, maternity, work, psychoanalysis, discourse theory.

Resumo

O presente artigo visa refletir sobre o lugar da mulher que é mãe nos discursos sociais, a incidência do discurso capitalista, conforme conceitualizado por Lacan, e as saídas possíveis aos sujeitos que se nomeiam dessa forma na atualidade. Considerando que o sujeito não está desvinculado do contexto social, busca-se contextualizar historicamente as mudanças sociais em torno da figura da mulher, dando ênfase especial à maternidade e ao trabalho. Faz-se um apanhado geral sobre o que pode representar o trabalho/ a vida profissional em

termos subjetivos para as mulheres. Cabe salientar que o artigo se refere a um recorte preponderante do universo de mulheres cisgêneros e heterossexuais. O estudo é baseado na teoria dos discursos de Lacan, bem como nas ideias de autores que versam sobre o tema, para pensar os ideais da cultura, os sofrimentos advindos de um discurso capitalista e possíveis saídas. Lacan teoriza sobre a possibilidade de giros discursivos, apontando saídas possíveis frente ao engessamento que tende a acontecer quando o sujeito se situa nesse discurso. Enquanto algumas mulheres mostram-se engolfadas em ideais e ditos de totalidade e plenitude – impossíveis de serem alcançados – e sofrem nessa posição de assujeitamento, outras conseguem ocupar posições subjetivas de questionamento. Não sem sofrimento, mas fazendo possível a circulação do desejo. Espaços e movimentos da cultura que permitam tais posições questionadoras favorecem que a maternidade, conciliada à vida profissional, possa acontecer considerando as singularidades de cada mulher e a circulação do desejo.

Palavras-chave: mulher; maternidade, trabalho, psicanálise, teoria dos discursos.

Resumen

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre el lugar de la mujer que es madre en los discursos sociales, la incidencia del discurso capitalista, según lo conceptualizado por Lacan, y las posibles salidas para los sujetos que se nombran de esta forma en la actualidad. Considerando que el sujeto no se encuentra desvinculado del contexto social, se busca contextualizar históricamente los cambios sociales en torno a la figura de la mujer, con especial énfasis en la maternidad y el trabajo. Se realiza un panorama general sobre lo que puede representar el trabajo y la vida profesional en términos subjetivos para las mujeres. Cabe señalar que el artículo se refiere principalmente al universo de mujeres cisgénero y heterossexuales. El estudio se basa en la teoría de los discursos de Lacan, así como en las ideas de otros autores que abordan el tema, con el fin de pensar los ideales de la cultura, los sufrimientos derivados de un discurso capitalista y las posibles vías de salida. Lacan teoriza sobre la posibilidad de giros discursivos, señalando salidas posibles frente al enquistamiento que tiende a producirse cuando el sujeto se sitúa en dicho discurso. Mientras algunas mujeres se muestran absorbidas por ideales y enunciados de totalidad y plenitud —imposibles de alcanzar— y sufren en esa posición de sujeción, otras logran ocupar posiciones subjetivas de cuestionamiento. No sin sufrimiento, pero posibilitando la circulación del deseo. Los espacios y movimientos culturales que permiten tales posiciones cuestionadoras favorecen que la maternidad, conciliada con la vida profesional, pueda acontecer considerando las singularidades de cada mujer y la circulación del deseo.

Palabras clave: mujer; maternidad, trabajo, psicoanálisis, teoría de los discursos.

Résumé

Le présent article vise à réfléchir sur la place de la femme en tant que mère dans les discours sociaux, l'incidence du discours capitaliste tel que conceptualisé par Lacan, ainsi que les issues possibles pour les sujets qui se désignent ainsi dans le contexte contemporain. Considérant que le sujet n'est pas détaché du contexte social, on cherche à contextualiser historiquement les changements sociaux autour de la figure de la femme, en mettant un accent particulier sur la maternité et le travail. Un aperçu général est fait de ce que le travail/la vie professionnelle peut représenter en termes subjectifs pour les femmes. Il convient de souligner que l'article se réfère principalement à un segment prédominant de l'univers des femmes cisgenres et hétérosexuelles. L'étude s'appuie sur la théorie des discours de Lacan, ainsi que sur les idées d'auteurs qui traitent du sujet, afin de réfléchir aux idéaux de la culture, aux souffrances engendrées par le discours capitaliste et aux issues possibles. Lacan théorise sur la possibilité de tournants discursifs, en indiquant des issues possibles face à la rigidité qui tend à survenir lorsque le sujet se trouve dans ce discours. Alors que certaines femmes se montrent submergées dans des idéaux et des discours de totalité et de plénitude – impossibles à atteindre – et souffrent dans cette position d'assujettissement, d'autres parviennent à occuper des positions subjectives de questionnement. Non sans souffrance, mais en rendant possible la circulation du désir. Les espaces et mouvements culturels permettant de telles positions interrogatrices favorisent une maternité, conciliée à la vie professionnelle, qui tienne compte des singularités de chaque femme ainsi que de la circulation du désir.

Mots-clés : femme, maternité, travail, psychanalyse, théorie des discours.

Interested in reflecting on the conflicts and forms of suffering commonly expressed by women today, particularly when occupying the positions of woman, mother, and professional, we turned our attention to the discursive forces that shape subjectivity, especially those related to capitalist discourse, as they affect subjects who identify themselves as women, mothers, and professionals. Our point of departure is the notion of parenthood, defined by Iaconelli (2020, p. 17) as the production of discourses and the conditions offered by the previous generation so that a new generation may constitute itself subjectively in a given historical moment. Thaís Garrafa (2020) argues that once individuals are inserted into the world of

language, they are inevitably required to take a position in relation to the names that concern them. Thus, naming oneself as a father or mother, by assuming these signifiers, implies occupying a position within the family, within society, and in relation to the one who will be recognized as a child. Parenthood therefore involves acts of nomination and recognition of positions, considering both the singularity of each subject and the social field that binds those who assume this task.

If parenthood is understood as the production of discourses that enable the subjective constitution of a new generation, and if parental discursive productions are themselves traversed by social discourse, it becomes particularly relevant to examine motherhood through the lens of Lacanian theory. This examination is especially pertinent given that, for many women, motherhood shares space with professional life.

Culture and social discourse assign women a specific place, one that is frequently experienced as marked by overload and guilt. Overload refers to the accumulation of tasks, demands, and responsibilities placed upon women, particularly regarding childcare, household duties, and family care. In Eastern cultures, women are still predominantly responsible for caregiving activities, rather than men (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018). Regarding guilt, we observe that the figure or name “mother” often overlaps with the name “woman,” and that this overlap tends to generate intense feelings of ambivalence and guilt when women do not prioritize “being a mother.” Even today, culture continues to position motherhood as women’s destiny, despite the fact that many women choose not to have children. This persistence remains evident. However, motherhood cannot be considered the sole outlet for female desire, nor can it be regarded as a universal desire shared by all women (Badinter, 1985; Iaconelli, 2015).

Many women have increasingly invested libidinal energy in professional life alongside motherhood. Culturally, there is even a movement that encourages women to achieve professional success. Thus, whether driven by financial necessity, personal desire, or capitalist demands, professional life coexists with motherhood while imposing expectations of fulfillment, satisfaction, and success across all domains of life: woman, mother, and professional. As subjects, all individuals, including women, are susceptible to the effects of capitalist discourse, which dictates success in every sphere. Clinically and in everyday discourse, however, it is common to observe that many women experience conflict in attempting to reconcile these roles simultaneously. There is a recurring concern with “doing it all”—caring for children, managing the household, sustaining family relationships, and maintaining a professional career. To better understand these conflicts, it is necessary to reflect historically on the place attributed to women, the demands imposed upon them, and the discourses that shape the subjectivities of those who identify with this position.

In Western culture, women’s history has long been marked by reproduction—given that they experience pregnancy and childbirth—and by forms of power exerted over their bodies. For centuries, women were subjected to social arrangements that positioned them as subordinate to male authority, whether that of the father or the husband. Motherhood and submission were historically attributed to women, with the figure of the woman closely intertwined with that of the mother. In *The Myth of Motherhood*, published in 1985, philosopher Elisabeth Badinter examines women’s history in society and the role assigned to motherhood. Her work addresses the transformations that were already underway at the time and the emergence of new spaces for women who approached the female destiny differently. Beyond demonstrating that maternal love is not innate, Badinter (1985; 2011) points toward new horizons beyond motherhood—horizons that women increasingly sought in society, thereby demystifying cultural and social models inherited from previous centuries. Through her analysis, she contributes to the construction of alternative pathways for female desire.

Regarding motherhood as one possible destiny for women, Freud (1932/1996) argued that it should not be considered the only possible one. Referring to motherhood as a possible destiny implies that it should not be closed off as the sole option. Freud observed the social conditions of his time, in which most women, due to social forces and power structures that subordinated them, tended to have motherhood as their primary possible destiny. However, the emphasis on *one* destiny points precisely to the possibility of other outcomes for female desire.

Iaconelli (2015) identifies a certain malaise surrounding motherhood, emphasizing that being a mother is far from a state of pure love and grace, an image that persists within cultural ideals of instinctive and wholly loving motherhood. Contrary to this ideal, motherhood is subjectively and singularly constructed, while simultaneously depending on the social Other. It requires libidinal investment and the recognition of positions and nominations. As subjects who identify as women, we are influenced by the Other and its discourses at both macro levels (culture, State, society) and micro levels (family and close relationships). When women began investing as much time and energy in professional life as men, they did not cease to experience cultural pressure regarding responsibility for childrearing and caregiving activities more broadly (household and family tasks). This is evident in the numerous reports of women who feel overloaded by simultaneously performing the roles of mothers and workers (Silva et al., 2020). Women thus came to accumulate the traditionally feminine role of caregiver alongside professional responsibilities, with expectations of success in both. Consequently, a recurring concern emerges around the idea of “doing it all.”

However, that women are plural and do not experience social impacts uniformly. Gender, sexuality, race, and social class shape these experiences in distinct ways. Accordingly, this study primarily contextualizes the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual, and white women.

The feminist struggle for autonomy, recognition in the labor market, equal social and civil rights, and the advent of contraceptive methods enabled greater control over women's bodies and life choices. Today, women can choose whether or not to have children and may invest in other bonds and objectives, such as professional life. These transformations have produced significant subjective, social, and cultural changes (Santos & Brandão, 2015). Nevertheless, occupying multiple roles often generates contradictory feelings. Contemporary culture strongly promotes a discourse that demands women be good mothers, successful professionals, physically attractive, healthy, and good partners within their romantic relationships. As Ongaratto (2019) aptly states, this equation simply does not add up. This expression, also invoked by Iaconelli, invites reflection on the operation of castration, the operation that, in psychoanalytic theory, founds the desiring subject. For women occupying the positions of mother and professional while sustaining the circulation of desire, it is necessary to create conditions that allow for the exercise of lack, based on the premise that it is impossible to do everything, at least not according to ideals of perfection and completeness. Considering the recurring discourse of "doing it all," which often results in overload, conflict, suffering, and guilt, we draw on Lacan's theory of discourses (Lacan, 1992; 2003c; 1978/2017) as a framework for understanding such experiences.

Discourse Theory and Motherhood

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) theorized discursive structures through which the subject of the unconscious is positioned and establishes a bond with the social. He initially formulated four fundamental discourses and later introduced the discourse of the capitalist, which is the focus of this section. For Lacan (1978/2017), capitalist discourse attempts to seal over lack, lack, interval, castration, or flaws, which are marks that constitute the subject in psychoanalytic accounts of desire. This discourse does not support the exercise of singularity or the flow of desire. At the level of the unconscious, we are subjected to a discursive action within the capitalist field that produces a particular subjection in how one relates to the world. The desiring subject becomes suffocated, alienated to a discourse that demands totality, success, and plenitude.

To clarify how this concept is developed in Lacan (1978/2017) and how it operates subjectively for those who identify as women, mothers, and professionals, it is common to begin from the claim that capitalist discourse predominates today. According to Dunker (2019), the only time Lacan wrote about the discourse of the capitalist, in the form of a *matheme* that is distinct from the discourse of the master, was in Milan on May 12, 1972, in the lecture originally titled 'On the Discourse of the Psychoanalyst' (p. 109). This meeting became known as the "Milan Conference of 1972," giving rise to the idea that the capitalist discourse replaced the discourse of the master. Notably, Lacan already characterized capitalist discourse, from its outset, as destined to explode. As he states (Lacan, 1978/2017, p. 49):

(...) the crisis is not of the discourse of the master, but of capitalist discourse, which is its substitute, and it is already open. I am not saying that capitalist discourse is mediocre; on the contrary, it is something madly astute. Madly astute, but destined to explode.

In that lecture, Lacan (1978/2017) argued that meaning and signification emerge as an effect of the slippage of signifiers. Signifiers operate as a kind of style, a style preceding the subject. What matters is not the one who speaks but the one who is spoken by the speaking being, i.e., the subject of the unconscious, who enters the chain of signifiers through language. The world succumbs to language, Lacan (1978/2017) maintained, emphasizing that the incidence of signifiers in language constitutes how we apprehend the world. Dunker (2019) highlights Lacan's insistence on the term *slippage* in this lecture. The "slippage of the signifier" refers to non-fixity and to the possibility of discursive turns, i.e., movement from one discursive structure to another.

Discursive turns are possible for the subject (for example, from the master to the university discourse or to the hysteric) as Lacan (1992; 2003c) had already indicated years earlier in *Radiofonía*. However, capitalist discourse is characterized by an inversion between the master signifier (S1), previously located in the upper-left position, and the subject (\$), which moves to the lower-left position. This inversion renders the discourse unsustainable and gives it features that differ from the other four discourses. Lacan (1978/2017) states:

(...) the capitalist discourse is there, you see (...) a tiny inversion simply between S1 and \$ (...) that is enough for it to run as if on wheels; it could not run better, but precisely, it runs too fast, it is consumed, it is consumed so well that it is consummated (p. 48).

Dunker (2019) suggests that this involves a kind of premeditated, accelerated, and controlled manipulation of slippage, producing the astuteness and novelty of this discourse. He also identifies three modifications in capitalist discourse implied by Lacan's formulation: i) the inversion between the master signifier (S1) and the subject (\$) recalls the theme of ideology as an inversion between the real and the ideal; ii) acceleration in the rhythm of exchange produces structural discursive transformations; and iii) the phrase it is consumed so well that it is consummated (p. 48) indicates a radicalization in which consumption converges with destruction. Dunker (2019) argues that, already in 1972, Lacan was attentive to shifts within

capitalism, moving from a liberal to a neoliberal matrix. On this basis, he describes a transition from a Freudian superego that says “no” to a Lacanian superego that commands enjoyment: “enjoy” (p. 126).

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud (1930/1988) described the malaise produced by the civilizing process as rooted in three forces: nature, the body’s decline, and relations with other people. Regardless of technological development, we cannot fully master nature, decline, or the other. Failure and lack are part of the human condition; we do not always reach our goals or ideals.

This raises a central question: what happens when a capitalist cultural ideal insists “yes, we can,” “we can do everything,” supported by a superego that commands “enjoy”? What kind of malaise emerges under these conditions? Braunstein (2010) argues that capitalist discourse renews the millennia-old discourse of the master. The subject (\$) itself assumes the dominant position previously occupied by the master signifier. In the formula of capitalist discourse, the agent is the same as in hysteria: the divided, desiring subject (\$), the subject of the unconscious. Yet the circuit is not one in which the agent (\$) addresses knowledge (S2) to produce object a by compelling it to operate according to the subject’s will. Rather, as the arrows form a closed circuit, the movement is reversed: it sustains the subject’s disavowal of division and lack. Braunstein (2010) writes:

The agent of capitalist discourse “makes a semblance” of being the master, believing itself to be subjected to nothing. It is the subject unaware of its incurable division and its servitude to a “truth” that transcends it; it is the subject that contemporary sociological phenomenology, influenced by psychoanalysis, calls “narcissistic.” Narcissism would be the clinical presentation induced by the dominance of capitalist discourse (Braunstein, 2010, p. 152).

Thus, the “fifth discourse”, the four discourses plus one, of the capitalist, or the modern discourse of the master (as proposed by Lacan), designates a transformation of the master’s discourse through its encounter with the sciences. This encounter is announced by technical objects invented through science, which Braunstein calls “servomechanisms.” He also points to a discourse beyond capitalism, already anticipated by Lacan (1978/2017) in the Milan Conference: a successor that is “at our door.” Braunstein (2010, p. 154) calls it the “discourse of markets” or “post-capitalist,” in which the agent’s position would be occupied by a faceless being that speaks no words. Only image? This is the question that emerges.

The discursive logic of markets would appear as a set of cybernetic back-and-forth movements, outside time and space, without subject or purpose. The semblance would be that of the market itself, with its flows of capital, thereby leaving the subject outside. Such a logic would lead the superego to issue the demand: “Enjoy!”, an ideology of the foreclosure of the subject, whose fullest expression is found in the economic doxa that posits markets as self-regulating entities (Braunstein, 2010, p. 157). Braunstein identifies the internet as occupying the position of agent. According to the author, the internet offers imagistic signifiers that can be adjusted. Addressing the internet as agent, the subject asks, “Who am I?”, to which it responds, “You can choose!”, in an operation that excludes the subject from the social bond.

In the discourse of the capitalist, and also in the sixth discourse, the discourse of the market, there is no space for the subject to question the demand or to ask about their own desire. This justifies our assertion that capitalist discourse is one that excludes the circulation of desire and makes it difficult for subjects who identify as women, mothers, and professionals to construct, in a singular way and under the condition of lack, the exercise of these subjective positions. However, as Lacan (1992) proposed in his theory of discourses, the discursive position that a so-called desiring subject may occupy is variable, allowing for a quarter-turn across the four discursive structures he initially theorized. Let us examine what this entails.

Before formulating the discourse of the capitalist, Lacan (1992; 2003c) had been developing a theory of discourses that has been interpreted in different ways. Couto et al. (2018) highlight its use as a conceptual operator that allows for the interpretation of prevailing forms of social bonding throughout the history of the West as well as a way of thinking about the impasses, obstacles, and labyrinths of contemporary society, particularly under current capitalism. In this sense, this theory can assist in thinking about women’s subjectivity in the present and the forms of suffering observed in this field.

It is relevant to emphasize what Lacan (2003c), in *Radiofonía*, stated regarding the unconscious having nothing to do with knowledge but rather with a form of knowing. Knowledges are animated by a discourse. For Lacan (2003c), the unconscious produces a function in progress. It is through a tipping point of the unconscious that a discourse emerges. This concept is important because it situates discourse within the field of the unconscious, establishing a link with the social and conferring upon the unconscious a dimension of experience and act. Discourses are thus attributed a dimension of non-fixity, of the possibility of rotation, which is also of interest here. This allows us to conjecture possible exits in the face of the engulfment of the desiring subject by capitalist discourse.

Between knowledge and truth there is always a disjunction, Lacan theorizes, pointing to impotence, to a barrier to jouissance. Thus, the truths that result from discourses are traps, fictions. As D’Agord (2013) states:

The matheme of the four discourses reveals that there is no way for knowledge to cover truth. Therefore, truth has the structure of fiction. This is not something that condemns us, but precisely what frees us from the absolute (p. 445).

The dimension of the Real is present in every discourse: it is, at once, what produces it and what sustains it. From this perspective, the Real belongs to the order of the impossible and cannot be demonstrated, although it is there, producing and sustaining the discourses in which a subject may be situated. Discourses are thus ways of dealing with the Real, with the void, or with the lack that never ceases not to be inscribed (Couto et al., 2018). This means that every discourse in which a subject can be situated contains a dimension of incompleteness and unsustainability, and is therefore dynamic in nature. The truth that discourses veil is that there will always be a lack, a dimension of incompleteness that constitutes us. Lacan (1992) states that every discourse carries within it something of impossibility or impotence. This is why he says that the subject is the failure of the ideal, precisely because it is incomplete.

In order to think about possible exits for the subject in the face of the engulfing demands of capitalist discourse, we therefore turn to the discourses initially proposed by Lacan (2003c): the master's discourse, the university discourse, the hysteric's discourse, and the analyst's discourse. Freud's reference to the impossible professions (educating, governing, and analyzing) can be recalled here, in approximation to the master's discourse (governing), the university discourse (educating), and the analyst's discourse (analyzing). The hysteric's discourse, in turn, is capable of questioning the master by showing that the master is castrated and lacking.

In Seminar 17, Lacan (1992) proposes that discourses have the structure of mathemes, composed of four elements: S1, S2, a, and \$, elements that mark the discourses but are not fixed, as they are interchangeable (Lacan, 2003c). In the mathemes, there is a circuit of elements that may occupy any of the four positions, provided that their order is maintained. The serialization or ordering of the elements is a limit, a 'no' that defines the structure of the matheme of the four discourses (D'Agord, 2013, p. 442). D'Agord (2013, p. 442) explains:

In *Radiofonia*, Lacan makes this limit of the matheme explicit: 1. it is limited by a no, by the impossibility of a vector reaching truth; 2. it is limited to the number four by a non-permutative revolution of its position in four terms. The operators would be progression and regression in relation to truth: the truth of castration. Here, the law appears not in the requirement of a quarter-turn rotation of the elements across the four positions, but in the impossibility and impotence of evading castration.

This passage from D'Agord (2013) points to the mark of castration present in the four discourses. Thus, in the discourses initially proposed by Lacan, which define the subject through the effects of language and the social bond, there is a non-interchangeable serialization (S1–S2–a–\$). This serialization marks the subject's impossibility and impotence in evading castration, that is, it marks the presence of a no, of a constitutive lack. This series can undergo a quarter-turn, backward or forward, allowing the subject to occupy different positions among the four structurally fixed places (agent, other/knowledge, truth, production). To state that the subject may be situated in different discursive positions, at times in the master's discourse, at times in the university, hysteric, or analyst discourse, is essential for thinking about subjective suffering and the possibilities of displacement in confronting it.

When introducing the discourse of the capitalist, Lacan (1978/2017) theorizes a discursive structure that closes in on itself, tending to seal off the in-between, the interval, that is, the subject's lack within the structure that constitutes it. It should be recalled that, for the desiring subject to exist, this mark of incompleteness must be present.

In *The Analytic Act*, Lacan (2003b) states that many impasses arise in the exercise of parental functions, since performing them confronts the subject with their own biography as a sexed subject (divided and lacking). The author observes that, more than ever, subjective positions of being are put to the test when subjects become parents. The subjective operations that a person will be able to perform with their child require certain conditions, as Iaconelli (2019) points out. These conditions place the subject in impasses related to their own biography and to the cultural discourses in which they are embedded. Women, when required to reconcile the roles of mother and professional, find themselves immersed in a condition that brings them even more directly into contact with the condition of being lacking, divided, and incomplete.

At the same time, cultural demands for completeness and perfection persist. These are ideals of capitalist culture: perfection, sublime maternal love, "the woman as all love," professional success, health and bodily fitness, plenitude, and so forth. Now, if the condition required for the exercise of parental functions is the acceptance of the dimension of lack in being, as Lacan (2003b) argues, this contradiction gives rise to conflicts and suffering. These, in turn, demand spaces of reflection that provide support for the acceptance of the human condition of lack that constitutes us.

The Woman who is a Mother and Work

As previously noted, motherhood cannot be conceived as the sole outlet for female desire. Motherhood does not provide a universal mode of being applicable to all women. Women are plural and experience different forms of crossing and determination, depending on the gender position they occupy (cisgender, transgender, etc.). Naming oneself as "woman" and "mother" entails social power relations. Being a "woman" is also shaped by family transmission and each individual's social network. The excess of responsibility that contemporary cultural discourse places on mothers and fathers appears to hinder the exercise of castration, i.e., the acknowledgment that we are limited and cannot manage everything, since

something will always be lacking (Iaconelli, 2019a). This burden weighs more heavily on women, who are more frequently held responsible for childcare and household tasks than men (ILO, 2018). Moreover, women are generally the ones who most reduce their investment in the professional sphere in order to manage the multiple roles assumed after the arrival of a baby (Martins et al., 2014).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a substantial reduction in working hours among women was observed (Collins et al., 2020). Recent studies indicate that mothers with young children (1–5 years) reduced their working hours four to five times more than fathers between February and April 2020 (Staniscuaski et al., 2021). The authors note that, when incompatibilities or difficulties arise in reconciling professional and family roles, withdrawal from professional life most often occurs among women. Thus, it is evident that women are those who most assume responsibility and are subjectively more closely tied to childcare activities. When these women also invest their energy, their libido, in the professional sphere, this often results in demands and ideals that are impossible to attain. It is therefore common to hear women report feelings of overload, exhaustion, and burnout.

Based on a review of studies by different authors addressing motherhood and work, Macêdo (2020) observes that, in Brazil, responsibility for formal domestic work remains largely assigned to women. The author further notes that women's subjectivity is often immersed in a discourse that dictates that responsibility for caring for children, the household, and the family belongs to them. Globally, the report *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work* (ILO, 2018) presents significant data on care work, both paid and unpaid, showing that it is generally still considered a female responsibility. Examining 23 countries worldwide, the report concludes that women and girls perform three quarters of all unpaid care work. In addition, two thirds of paid care workers are women. The study also indicates that in no country do men and women share unpaid work and care equally. In other words, gender relations in care work remain unbalanced (ILO, 2018).

Boroi and Pereira (2011) demonstrate different patterns of labor division by comparing men and women with academic professional careers. The women studied were more likely to work longer hours, overlap professional demands with domestic responsibilities, and experience greater psychological suffering or illness.

Beyond suffering, work may also represent a source of personal fulfillment and identification for many women. Fabbro and Heloany (2010), for example, studied women academic faculty members. According to the authors, these women reported feeling fulfilled and finding meaning in their lives through their professional activity. Being a professional appears to have become part of these women's identification, providing a sense of purpose beyond motherhood. The authors also note that many women who previously expressed an inclination or desire to enter professional life, but did not act on it due to various social factors, have more recently come to assume this desire. At the same time, many still wish to become mothers.

In a recent focus-group study with five faculty members at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Pereira et al. (2019) found that motherhood was perceived as a milestone in these women's lives, while work was also experienced as a source of personal fulfillment. Current studies thus indicate that women hold simultaneous identifications as professionals and mothers, directing their desires toward different social roles and positions. However, although they considered it natural to reconcile the roles of mother and worker, they also reported experiencing overload in managing professional tasks alongside motherhood (Pereira et al., 2019). Fabbro and Heloany (2010) corroborate the notion of female overload, pointing to the existence of a conflict marked by the introjection of an ideal demand, derived from social discourse, according to which all care is a female activity. This conflict often manifests as guilt, stemming from the inability to meet this ideal and to manage all caregiving responsibilities. These studies demonstrate that the image of woman as caregiver still holds considerable force in contemporary culture.

Notably, the "novelty" of women's insertion into the labor market in Brazil primarily concerns middle- and upper-class women, generally white women. As Carneiro (2003, pp. 50-51) states:

The working woman is by no means a novelty in history, as is sometimes hastily claimed. The major change of recent decades concerns the way this activity has come to be viewed. Women (most of them) have always worked, but this was not a source of pride; rather, it was evidence of an inferior social condition, they were neither noble, nor wealthy, nor well married.

Thus, from a political standpoint, it is essential to emphasize that work has always been part of the lives of most Black and poor women. Gradually achieved feminist gains have brought changes in conditions and customs, especially for middle-class white women. This shift has made work more desirable and increasingly regarded as a source of pride linked to women's emancipation. Beyond ensuring a certain degree of financial independence from men, and responding to economic necessity, work can also be understood as part of the identificatory processes of many women. These women also invest libidinally in work as a source of personal fulfillment, identification, and meaning in life (Pereira et al., 2019; Fabbro & Heloany, 2010; Almeida, 2007).

The theme of identifications is extensive within psychoanalytic theory. It has been addressed by Freud and Lacan, among many other authors, and has undergone continuous development over time. Accordingly, we focus here on certain points that may guide reflections on identifications in relation to women, particularly with regard to motherhood and work.

According to Souza and Danziato (2014), identification belongs to the order of the subject's unconscious romance and appears as a mode of creation, mediated by sexual desire, in which a drama is staged through situations and characters that affect the ego. There is a primary identification that provides the condition for subsequent identifications, and what propels them is desire. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud (1913/1990) emphasizes that the first identification is the inscription of the symbolic law, namely the prohibition of incest. This first identification enables the establishment of the subject's bonds and the redirection of libido toward other sources and external objects (Souza & Danziato, 2014, p. 55). Thus, processes of identification originate in the very beginnings of the subject's subjective constitution. They concern the mode of operation of desire in the weaving of an unconscious reality that produces effects on the ego. Through identifications, the subject adds elements to their unconscious romance, elements coming from the Other (Souza & Danziato, 2014, p. 55). These elements are not characteristics per se, but rather signifiers (representatives of unconscious representation) that set the neurotic romance in motion. Signifiers and their chained variations, promoted by the subject, generate new meanings. In this sense, the subject's identifications speak to desire as it is staged, producing meaning.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud (1921/1983) posits three sources of identification: the primary or original identification (as previously mentioned); the hysterical identification, whose feature is the appropriation of certain traits from the other, whether loved or hated; and identification by contagion, described by Freud as a form of identification that occurs at the level of desire (Souza & Danziato, 2014). In this third form, "by contagion," a given situation causes several individuals to cluster around a common point at the unconscious level. Through this form of identification, Freud may be understood as referring to cultural discourse and its effects on the identification processes of subjects. Freud observed that, within groups, something produced there acts to bring together individuals who share points of identification and who influence each subject's identificatory processes.

Lacan (2003a/1981) deepens the discussion of identifications by introducing the concept of the unary trait, indicating that by which each person may be 'one,' the support of the mark of singularity (Souza & Danziato, 2014, p. 55). Lacan considers the symbolic and imaginary aspects of identifications derived from the unary trait. Imaginary identification, allegedly totalizing as in the mirror, seeks an identity of completeness and closure of meaning. Symbolic identification, by contrast, introduces a hole, a lack, functioning as a supplement to the deceptive totality of the imaginary (Souza & Danziato, 2014). D'Agord et al. (2006, p. 120), regarding these two forms of identification, state:

Imaginary identification is that which makes sense for the subject; symbolic identification is that which operates within the subject. Both come from the outside and are therefore offered. However, while the former appears total, like the image returned by the mirror, the latter is always lack, hiatus, an opening to signification, insofar as a trait is repeatedly replaced, and what causes this substitutability is vacancy, lack. For the subject is not their name, just as they are not any of their images. The subject will always be more than their name and more than their images.

Thus, identifications contain an imaginary dimension that provides an appearance of totality, as well as a symbolic dimension that marks absences, gaps, lack, and the production of new meanings. This allows us to state that the subject's identifications are not fixed, but operate through these absences. Culturally, the image of woman was for a long time strongly attached to the image of the mother. In practice, however, many women wish to invest in professional life, and many do not desire motherhood at all. By postulating that identifications are not fixed, psychoanalytic theory allows us to assert that identification as a worker offers many women an opportunity for relief from a certain identificatory fixation that long bound women to recognition by the social and cultural Other, confining desire and identification to a single outlet. Work enables women to attain satisfaction through another pathway and to loosen the fixed identity that culture long sustained equating woman with mother.

Professional life may also be conceived as a third element that introduces a cut in the mother-infant relationship and, therefore, as a salutary symbolic operation in both the infant's subjective constitution and the mother's subjective life. From the maternal perspective, binding libido to other forms of identification may allow desire to circulate within the fabric of subjectivities. On the one hand, the accumulation of tasks, investing energy in both professional work and motherhood, has become more exhausting, as the experience of most women reveals a genuine accumulation of functions. On the other hand, entry into the workforce is often described as a source of identification and satisfaction. It is currently socially permitted and recognized that women may hold multiple identifications, not only as mothers. Nevertheless, guilt remains a recurrent theme in women's discourse, pointing to the persistent weight of cultural demands.

From the interplay between the instituted discourse, that motherhood should prevail among the roles women occupy, and a new discourse under construction, that women may/should (?) also occupy a place in the sphere of work, feelings of ambivalence and conflict emerge in women's narratives. All of this unfolds against the background of capitalist discourse, which demands success, productivity, and happiness across all domains, not allowing for pleasure but rather requiring it.

In different narratives, some women adopt a more questioning position, managing to introduce discursive ruptures, recognize their limits, and confront the demand to "manage everything." Others demonstrate an engulfment by demands

imposed by a discourse that admits neither error, impossibility, nor imperfection. In Lacanian theory, within the four discourses initially proposed, discourses allow the subject a certain flexibility, a change of position through a quarter-turn (Lacan, 1992; 2003c).

In our reading of these four discursive positions, possible exits in the face of capitalist discourse become particularly salient. Subjects who identify as women, mothers, and workers may find, both in the hysteric's discourse and in the analyst's discourse, possibilities for occupying positions in which desire can circulate, even in the face of the impossibility and lack inherent in the exercise of parenthood.

The hysteric's discourse questions what is instituted, while the analyst's discourse sustains not answers but reflections necessary for the constitution of the fictions that structure us as speaking beings. Lacan (1992) referred to the hysteric's discourse as the discursive structure capable of enabling the subject who occupies this position to pierce the instituted order and reveal the master as lacking. He stated that this discursive position unveils the master's omnipotence and reveals them as incomplete, barred. If the modern master is the capitalist, this discursive position is particularly powerful in questioning injunctions that demand women to manage everything.

Capitalist culture sustains an ideal that proclaims, "Yes, we can!" or "We can do everything!", alongside a superego that commands, "Enjoy!" Women are commonly described as warriors, strong, capable of enduring hardship, perhaps as the reverse side of the notion that woman is the "weaker sex," dependent on male protection. However, such discourses that ostensibly confer strength also impose a demand to be whole, to be superhuman.

The subject positioned within the hysteric's discourse, as theorized by Lacan, questions these injunctions, puts the instituted order to the test, and challenges the closure characteristic of capitalist discourse. Analytic practice is likewise powerful in confronting this discourse of closure. Within the structure of the analyst's discourse, there is space to question the subject's demands and to revisit questions of desire. What sustains the encounter (in the analyst's discourse) is precisely the non-satisfaction of demands, the non-response to questions, and the timely denouncement of the illusion of idealization (Braunstein, 2010, p. 162).

Braunstein, in reflecting on post-capitalist discourse and market discourse, observes that both fail to favor the presence of lack, the rupture of idealizations, and thus the emergence of the desiring subject. For him, in the discourse of markets, the product would be collective, mass-produced S1s (master signifiers) that seal over lack and are easily discarded by the subject. In contrast, the analyst's discourse produces S1s tied to the subject's singularity and desire. In this sense, the feminist positioning adopted by many women, who actively voice challenges to what is instituted, as well as the position of analysts, who question subjects without responding to their demands, becomes particularly relevant. Both sustain the possibility for singularities to be expressed and for desire to circulate.

These constitute possible exits in the face of the engulfing and suffering-inducing demands of capitalist discourse, which massifies, forecloses the dimension of lack and incompleteness, and erases the originality and singularity of each subject in the constitution of themselves as woman, mother, and professional.

Final Considerations

At present, women are subject to capitalist discourse, which does not favor the exercise of motherhood and professional life in the presence of lack. Demands to "manage everything" are common, an ideal that psychoanalysis demonstrates to be unattainable, based on the premise that we are founded and constituted as subjects by this very mark of lack. Some women appear engulfed by this discourse, suggesting subjective suffering arising from the failure to meet idealized demands of plenitude, total love, and professional success. At other times, we observe women who question this discourse and its claims to totality or normative standards, occupying positions that favor singularity and each woman's mode of being. We thus conjecture the possibility of positioning oneself in relation to the closed capitalist discourse in ways that allow for the circulation of desire and singularity, situating the hysteric's or the analyst's discursive structures.

Furthermore, we propose that, beyond suffering or financial necessity, work may represent another source of fulfillment and feminine identification distinct from motherhood. To assume one's desire implies responsibility and choice; it also entails leaving something for the Other.

In times saturated by capitalist discourse, sustaining the desire to be both mother and professional, while acknowledging non-totally and accepting the premise that something will always be lacking or excessive, is no easy task. In a context dominated by the imperatives to "manage everything" and to "be fully happy," being both mother and professional, while respecting singularities and the dimension of desire, inevitably requires assuming the condition of incompleteness as a subject, as a human being. It is therefore necessary that spaces exist that enable reflection through attentive listening to singularities. As proposed by psychoanalytic practice, it is essential to consider personal history and, above all, to recognize the limitations, possibilities, and singularities of each woman, as well as the importance of positions, such as feminist ones, that question what is socially instituted. In this sense, we agree with Iaconelli (2015, p. 98):

We believe that only by reflecting on the bases upon which possible choices are being made can women and their partners benefit from a situation in which parenthood is grounded in desire within the possibilities and limitations of each case, rather than according to forces of nature; only then could we speak of humanization.

Thus, we observe that the more favorable the conditions are for a subject to occupy and sustain a questioning position, the greater the potential to pierce a closed and totalizing discourse. Cultural practices that affirm women in their diversity and respect their singularities, as well as spaces for critical and reflective thought, contribute to creating such ruptures in the discourse of subjection imposed by capitalist discourse. This, in turn, favors the circulation of desire and makes it more possible to be a woman, a mother, and a worker in accordance with each individual's singularities and possibilities.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of noting that the scope and reflections of this study primarily concern cisgender women in heterosexual conjugal relationships. While being a woman, a mother, and a professional shares common features for many women, these experiences also involve specificities and distinct crossings for transgender women, lesbians, and women with other orientations and life experiences. This underscores the openness and relevance of future research that addresses these other experiences.

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