

“This conversation is professional, [...] I am a painter!”: resistance at a construction site

“Aqui a conversa é profissional, [...] Eu sou a pintora!”: resistência no canteiro de obra
“Aquí la charla es profesional, [...] Soy el pintor”: la resistencia en el sitio de construcción

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to be familiar with the work relationships between females and their male colleagues at a construction site in the municipality of Santa Maria, RS.

Method: Exploratory research, qualitative approach with a female worker of a construction site in August 2012. Oral history as a device for data production. Analysis of French tradition speech as an analytical device.

Results: Work relationship with stances of resistance, with major fights against power of male order, pointing to shifts and continuities in the test for new gender behaviors.

Conclusions: The conquest of spaces in paid work is not enough to achieve balance in gender relations; public policies on gender sensitizing contribute to changes in the cultural field by understanding that equal rights and opportunities between men and women are a basic condition for achieving justice, citizenship and development.

Keywords: Nursing. Female work. Gender identity. Power (psychology). Millennium Development Goals.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Conhecer as relações de trabalho de mulheres com seus colegas homens em um canteiro de obras da construção civil no município de Santa Maria, RS.

Método: Pesquisa exploratória, abordagem qualitativa com uma trabalhadora da construção civil, em agosto de 2012. História oral temática como dispositivo para produção de dados. Análise do Discurso de tradição francesa como dispositivo de análise.

Resultados: Relação laboral impregnada de posturas de resistência, com enfrentamentos importantes com o poder de ordem masculina, apontando para deslocamentos e permanências no ensaio para novas posturas de gênero.

Conclusões: A conquista de espaços no trabalho remunerado não basta para o alcance do equilíbrio nas relações de gênero; políticas públicas de gênero contribuem, sensibilizando para transformações no campo cultural mediante a compreensão de que a igualdade de direitos e de oportunidades entre homens e mulheres constitui uma condição básica para o alcance da justiça, da cidadania e do desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Enfermagem. Trabalho feminino. Identidade de gênero. Poder (psicologia). Objetivos de Desenvolvimento do Milênio.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: conocer las relaciones de trabajo de las mujeres con sus colegas masculinos en el sitio de construcción de la obra en construcción en el municipio de Santa María, RS.

Método: investigación exploratoria, enfoque cualitativo con un trabajador de la construcción, en agosto de 2012. Historia oral como un dispositivo para la producción de datos temáticos. Análisis del discurso de tradición francesa como dispositivo de análisis.

Resultados: Relación laboral impregnada con resistencia posturas, con grandes enfrentamientos de orden masculino, apuntando a desplazamientos y permanece en la prueba para nuevas posiciones.

Conclusiones: La conquista de espacios en el trabajo remunerado no es suficiente para lograr el equilibrio en las relaciones de género; políticas de género contribuyen a la sensibilización de transformaciones en el ámbito cultural por entender que la igualdad de derechos y oportunidades entre hombres y mujeres es una condición básica para el logro de la justicia.

Palabras clave: Enfermería. Trabajo de mujeres. Identidad de género. Poder (psicología). Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio.

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■ INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed by 147 Heads of State and Government in 2000, reflects the concern and willingness to carry out actions to overcome problems affecting the world's population and interfere with their development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aligned to the principles and values of the Declaration of Human Rights (DDH), intended to promote the development of societies, with a range of expectations of peace and security, eradicating poverty and disarmament, as well as by printing protection strategies for vulnerable ⁽¹⁾. This document lists eight priorities to be focused on until the year 2015, among them, the third objective aims to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as a tool to achieve development ⁽²⁾. This third goal permeates the study hereby presented, giving visibility and bringing to the debate the centrality of gender equality as a potential factor for the development of societies in that gender relations can be understood as social relations between men and women, which have a historical and cultural character that marks and delimits the body of each subject and their field ⁽³⁾.

The World Report on Gender and Development ⁽⁴⁾ points out some important advances in gender parity, especially in education. As a result, women have gained greater insertion into the labor market, allowing greater contribution to the family income and increasing their future social expectations ⁽⁵⁾. Despite this incorporation in the labor market being a phenomenon that is more prominent among women of the middle and upper classes, since poor women have always worked, an increase in professionalized paid work has also been observed in this last social layer. This dynamic can result from public policy initiatives in the field aimed at poor and less educated women. Such initiatives aim to facilitate the achievement of economic autonomy and equality in the workplace for women who are not prepared for areas which demand higher levels of education ⁽⁶⁾.

On this track, women's qualification to work in construction appears as one of the insertion strategies which are identified by the National Plan of Policies for Women – PNPM ⁽⁶⁾ in its axis I – Economic Autonomy and Equality in the Workplace with Social Inclusion and Citizenship, for poor women that still maintains low level of education. It is believed that the ability of women to promote and manage their livelihoods implies positively on their future projects, contributing to the

achievement of citizenship, as well as for the country's development.

Opportunities like this, however, do not seem to one handedly overcome the disadvantages of women in contexts in which they live, work and relate. With a structure similar to that of equal access to education, it may not be enough to balance relationships between genders ⁽⁴⁾. Cultural discriminatory mechanisms persist based on the concept that certain attributes regarded as feminine make women unable to perform certain tasks, disqualifying women and denying other spaces where they can exercise their abilities, such as their integration in roles that are culturally and statistically accepted as male.

This study brings to the health care debates, especially nursing, issues related to social determinants that affect the lives and health of women and society as a way to contribute to reflections that allow possible shifts, even if in the long run, towards the third objective of the millennium. It is also believed to contribute to reflections in line with the recommendations of the National Policy for Integral Attention to Women's Health (PNAISM), which recognizes that women's health is partly determined by imbalance in gender relations.

Reflections of this nature should be part of the nursing work, guided by the commitment to reduce social inequalities that impact health in an unfair and avoidable way. It is essential that work performed with women nursing professionals is able to transcend the offer of guided biomedical procedures, also assuming political and ethical responsibility to contribute to overcoming gender inequalities, thus contributing to their engagement and commitment to the MDGs.

The article presents the issue of women's resistance to various forms of reproduction of inequalities that emerge in their relations with work colleagues on a day to day basis. Its ballast is supported in doctoral research ⁽⁷⁾ defended at the Paulista School of Nursing at the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp), in 2014. Guiding question: how to establish the relationships between men and women in a construction site in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul? Objective: to be familiar with the work relationships between females and their male colleagues at a construction site in the municipality of Santa Maria, RS.

■ METHOD

Exploratory qualitative study in where thematic oral history was used as a device for the production of data ⁽⁸⁾.

This approach considers that the natural histories of the subjects reflect historical and cultural processes that are contemporary to them, as well as the remnants of previous processes. The study setting was a location where there were women working in construction, in a city in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. This article chose to use the story of just one of the participants, among the eight interviewed, in that the in-depth analysis of her history allows us to observe the entanglements between ruptures and continuities in women's relationships with themselves and with the world based on the implementation of gender equality policies. The interview, which lasted nearly two hours and was later recorded and transcribed, left the following guiding questions: “how is it for you, to work in construction? How is your work process and the relationship with other colleagues?”

Contact with the informant was established by indication of a participant of an extension project developed by a federal university of the southern region of the country, in order to qualify women to work in construction. The interview was scheduled by phone.

The participant was identified by the name of Mary, plus the name of a tool used in construction. The production of data was performed in August 2012.

The Discourse Analysis (AD) of French tradition served as theoretical and methodological framework for the study. This construction addresses the historical determination of the meaning processes, allowing the understanding of aspects such as social dynamics through the interpretation of beliefs, ideologies and social consensus underlying the discursive production⁽⁹⁾. AD understands the subject as one that is crossed by ideology and history through language. The word becomes the living vehicle full of meanings and symbolisms able to cause stays or stagnation, as well as displacements or movements, and ruptures with the set. In this focus, the speech becomes a socio-historical object that uses language for granted; this, in turn, when crystallizing speech in discursive processes, acts so to cause feelings that affect parties within the social fabric, serving as an element for critical reflection on the meaning of what is verbalized or even what is not verbalized⁽⁹⁾. This makes it possible to analyze beyond sentences, opening the way for the inclusion of the human being and language to its exteriority in the time and space lived. With this understanding, it does not matter so much what the subject says, but the meaning that the text acquires in the interaction between subjects⁽⁹⁾.

AD devices were used in the study from relations between paraphrastic processes and polysemic processes. The paraphrastic processes are those where there is always

something maintains itself, that is in memory, that repeats itself over time and space. Polysemy, in contrast, is side by side with change, with the movement, enabling transformation of the senses, the minds of people and the social and cultural context⁽⁹⁾. It can be inferred that dominant discourses are powered by paraphrastic processes that, in a way, strengthen them through the institutionalization of norms, laws, policies. On the other hand, the counter-hegemonic discourses, alternative, guaranteed by polysemic processes, trying to break out of this set, in search of transformations. The polysemic discursive processes are thus engaged with the new, with the shifts, with movement, with the ruptures.

The linguistic materiality of the interview was expressed through the use of spelling features such as /: reflective pause; //: emphasis on the statement such as enthusiasm, joy, pride, twinkle in the eye; ///: Anger, helplessness, anger; ////: Demonstration of grief; ...: Some thought; “quotes” – phrases or titles that do not originate from the person who is speaking or phrases that were spoken by the person at another moment and that are being reproduced by her in the interview; (...): name of a person or institution to be kept anonymous; [...]: suppressed fragment; {}: supplementation with an expression that was not mentioned but is implied.

The data systematization consisted in the preparation of a summary table containing statements of the participant, the analytical category, and the empirical analysis axis determined by paraphrastic discursive processes and polysemic discursive processes. This was a way of organizing information and is central to its best viewing, forwarding, in an objective way, to the final step of the analysis. Below is a picture of the cutout prepared for the systematization of data.

The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of São Paulo – UNIFESP / EPM, university where the doctoral research that gave rise to this Article was conducted, under protocol number 03321812.6.0000.5505 dated June 2012. The Free and Informed Consent Form – TCLE, as well as the Confidentiality Agreement, have been prepared in accordance with Resolution 196/96⁽¹⁰⁾, from the National Health Council. The TCLE was presented in two ways, one copy being for the researcher and one for the interviewee.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It initially presents the profile of the research participant. Then, the analysis axis originated from the data pro-

Table 1 – Cut out of the summary table prepared with statements and discursive processes related to the analytical study category and originated empirical analysis axis

Participant	Statements	Analytical categories	Process discursive	Axes or empirical categories of analysis
Maria do Prumo	<i>[...] At first they {the male colleagues} hated us, wanted to quarrel with us all the time, boycotted our work, blocked the passage for us to when walking by with pain, they really gave it to us. And one day I said, 'Look guy: it will not do you any good to stand in our way, we'll just go another way, but we will do our work.'</i>	Gender (with elements related to the work and public policy categories)	Polysemic discursive process with paraphrastic discursive process crossing)	Resistance in the construction site: between shifts and continuities in the test for new positions gender

Source: Survey data, 2012.

duced is presented, namely: Resistance in the construction site: between shifts and continuities in the test for new positions gender

Who is Mary do Prumo?

Born in a municipality of the countryside Rio Grande do Sul in 1967, white, studied until 5th grade of elementary school. She is from a family of 5 children. Deceased father; he was a construction worker; when younger, her mother helped her husband in the cleaning service in the buildings in addition to performing household chores. Maria do Prumo liked to accompany her father in the rough construction work, carrying bricks and mixing cement, however, household chores were imposed by her mother as a way to prepare her daughter to be a good housewife. The games that attracted her the most were playing football, riding a ball bearing cart, among others deemed culturally masculine. The father always encouraged her to face life and defend herself. She has an adult and married son. Divorced, worked as a cleaner until starting to work in construction as a building painter for four years. Works as a freelance painter and considers that the current job gives her satisfactory economic autonomy. In one of the companies where she provided her services she had major confrontations with a male colleague.

Resistance in the construction site: between shifts and continuities in the test for new positions gender

In the narrative fragment Maria do Plumo highlighted in this article, it is possible to see a resistant behavior in the relationship established with colleagues, as an instrument

that subsidizes transit for speeches related to future possibilities in which egalitarian gender attitudes materialize.

[...] At first they {the male colleagues} hated us, wanted to quarrel with us all the time, boycotted our work, blocked the passage for us to when walking by with pain, they really gave it to us. And one day I said, 'Look guy: it will not do you any good to stand in our way, we'll just go another way, but we will do our work.' [...] Or you walk along with us or you stay behind, then he will humiliate you {the property owner}, say you're worse than a woman. " They began to lower their guard, and we began to come to terms: "We're not here to fight, or to be better than you, we are here to work with you. If you boycott us, you will not receive your money, and we won't receive ours." //: Then things started to work. The foreman also boycotted us, delayed our work. One day he opened a hole and smeared the wall for us to clean again to paint, then I asked: /// "This is man's work, made by a foreman? You look in the eyes, our conversation here is professional, you are the foreman and I am the painter. You had to have done your work for me to do mine. I'm going to clean it, I will fix what you did this time, and if you mess with my work again, I will take it to the boss. " [...] Since that day he respected us, as painters, he let us know when our material arrived [...] " (Maria do Prumo)

Maria do Prumo demonstrates a posture that sometimes goes beyond endurance; it is subversion to the speech that places women in a submissive position, especially in spaced considered to be male dominated, shifting the speech to the new, to the different, towards polysemy and necessary changes. On the other hand, fighting with

this different situation, a discourse that places it at odds with the first is presented. Recalling her colleague that he can be humiliated by the boss if she tells that boss that the colleague's work is worse than a “woman's”, it returns to the commonplace previously stated of continuity that understands a woman's work as being worthless. And she has the exact dimension of how this comment may offend and humiliate her colleague, since she compares his work to that performed by a woman, meaning that it is considered as having a smaller value on a paraphrastic discourse level.

Gender images are perceived in the narrative, defining the place of one and the other in everyday life, both in the private and public space. At the same time a disadvantage is seen, she incorporates a woman who creates a space to speak and defend her work, for she needs to be strong to be respected. Similar meanings were revealed in a survey of workers in the mining area, which is also culturally occupied by men. In this research, women understand that to be a respected professional, it would be necessary to have a serious attitude, strong, manly and formal, following male models⁽¹¹⁾.

This speech is shown when Maria do Prumo states: “You look me in the eyes, our conversation here is professional, you are the foreman and I am the painter.” A discourse that screams and imposes itself is evident in this speech: ‘you respect me! Because I am also a professional’. It finds an attempt to dislodge in its resistance that, more than hierarchy, represents the plastered places of men and women constructed by hegemonic discourses.

The production and reproduction of gender as a social and identity standard for women and men, is given by the circulation of symbols, patterns and social practices that shape the places and the possibilities of being, thinking and doing different for each subject. The instruments used for this are part of everyday life and are present in the social space, defining how they should be as men and women, as well as the places reserved for each in society.

This cultural construction is given by internalized attitudes that are reproduced through various insignias, such as clothing, behavior standards, patterns of feelings and expressions and the creation of life projects. Thus, expectations of women regarding their life trajectory are strongly marked by domesticity, while men are encouraged to compete, win and win. This distinction in assignments sustains the pillars of the sexual division of labor, whereby men are assigned activities related to the productive sphere and women of the reproductive sphere.

In the productive sphere belong activities that generate goods, which have exchange value and are therefore paid. The reproductive work, in turn, comprises a set of activities focused on the care of persons and the maintenance of life. Being it worthless as merchandise, it does not produce income and is invisible, it is a work that is not considered as work in itself, being understood and exercised as a natural aptitude of women⁽¹²⁾. Although social reproduction depends on that kind of work, sexual division of labor makes men take ownership of the functions that have higher added social value⁽¹³⁾, with no added social value to the reproductive work performed by women. In the speech of Maria do Prumo, the mark of this inequality is clearly seen, subsidizing her outrage, rebellion and resistance to this type of conformation.

The context of devaluation of women's work permeates Maria do Prumo's position. She prints a speech in which the power of the foreman is shown to be enhancing the sexual division of labor and is reproduced in the private and public space.

This context in which the world of paid work is governed by the same social rules of domestic work becomes challenging for women. To the extent that the paraphrastic speeches show its hegemony in favor of maintaining the culturally accepted, the opposition with a polysemic discourse fighting for transformations is required. And often, the new mixes with the already mentioned, as you can see in Maria do Prumo's narrative. At the same time a shift in the field of gender inequalities is rehearsed when standing up to the foreman, Maria do Prumo supports herself on a speech according to which, it is expected that all work done by men be well done: “*This is a man's work, made by a foreman?*”. It therefore returns to reproducing the culturally prepared and socially accepted speech.

This cutout opens up possibilities of debates bringing together equal value to the work and roles of women and men in the private and public sphere. Debates to reflect, above all, on the need for a new culture of relations and the sharing of household activities between both sexes is needed, allowing a minimum of equality in employment opportunities. A survey that focused on the career of male and female judges in the state of São Paulo, showed that career advancement favors men, as “family, marriage, cares and responsibilities with their children preferably restrict the professional activities and careers of women” for the difficulty of shifting and spatial mobility in the state^(14: 293). These data depict a reality accepted as natural, but that needs to be overcome in order to approximate the assumptions of the MDGs.

In the field of discourse analysis, the statement of Maria do Prumo shows the dynamics of speech as the “word in movement”^(9:16). It shows that language often betrays what one thinks and does, mixing what is already said with the new, or what is to be incorporated as new discourse. It meets the understanding that paraphrastic processes and polysemic processes⁽⁹⁾ can not be addressed independently or alone, since there are no precise or closed limits between them. It is in the movement caused by tension and strength between one and the other that the functioning of language is established. So between paraphrase and polysemy there will exist the conflict between what was already said, conceived as inviolable, and which may be different. It is in this game that each and any speech takes place⁽⁹⁾, and is therefore an expression of the relationship of humans with the world.

In this sense, a new discourse to be considered is the fight against any kind of discrimination against women and in stimulating their potential for participation and leadership in the world. It can be considered that paid work contributes to the achievement of this protagonist role and overcoming situations of dependency. This is the case of research on the impact of the Bolsa Família Program in the lives of benefited women, where the results showed that income or financial resources to support themselves has the power to liberate women from relationships that oppress them, encouraging their autonomy and leadership⁽¹⁵⁾.

Similarly, results of a survey conducted in several countries, including Egypt, Ghana, Bangladesh and Brazil, show that paid work as a tool to transform the lives of girls and women, has the potential to balance gender inequalities. The investigation also relates the empowering process with the capabilities of women being heard in order to influence the spaces that allow necessary changes⁽¹⁶⁾. The authors emphasize, however, that economic empowerment can not be regarded as a mere commodity to be transferred; it is necessary to focus on structural relationships that can be changed by collective action and the awareness that can be developed in feminist activism. Thus, putting women at the market in order to promote the encounter between power and money, has no potential to promote transformations⁽¹⁷⁾, being the development of a critical consciousness of society about the cultural determinants that place women at levels below fundamental.

This goes against feminists, when warning that the empowerment of women implies the radical change of

structures and processes that reproduce their subordinate position in society⁽¹⁸⁾. This perspective to understand empowerment is aligned with the idea of community empowerment⁽¹⁹⁾. This kind of empowerment involves “factors located in different spheres of social life”^(20: 1090), including the individual and societal level, which allows us to understand the importance of the roles in the process, making it imperative to mobilize forces to lead the cultural deconstruction of concepts, spaces and perspectives that reduce women to their biological nature, subjecting them to unjust social rules. The protagonism of woman and the entire society is, therefore, necessary. Maria do Prumo is therefore being strengthened by the power obtained with her paid work and that puts her in control of her life. It’s her way of aggregating movements that want other freedoms for women like feminist movements, whose speeches are somehow reflected in the daily lives of workers in construction, to the extent that they somehow participate in a process of deconstruction of model of sexual division of labor.

One has to consider some facilities that Maria do Prumo carries, which frees her from the weight of many prejudices. She is white, has a good appearance and had “a father who taught her that she had to face the world.” Besides that, she also had permission and was encouraged to play with boys. Factors that may have influenced the preparation of Maria do Prumo to face the established power. The story of Maria do Prumo, since childhood, is permeated by questioning attitudes toward her condition as a girl. Her courage comes from this past, stimulated by her father, when he said: “*Daughter, do not let people trample on you!*” When strongly and courageously facing the men at work, using strong and objective words, unusual behavior in the speech that normalizes this issue in the life of women, she brings her story to the construction site.

From this, one can deduce how the network that supports it is complex, strengthening and reproducing patterns of gender inequalities and how much it can be difficult and how long the walk in search of that horizon is. The crossing of multiple dimensions and markers of difference such as color, age, social class among others, arises as the real challenge to societies seeking development, understanding development as less poverty, more opportunity for all human beings, economic participation and political subjects, access to education, health, work and, above all, less gender inequality⁽⁴⁻¹³⁾.

Maria de Prumo’s narrative shows that access to work alone does not ensure the achievement of gender equality, it is also necessary to deconstruct old images that give

less value to the work done by women. In this sense, public policies that target genders contribute to sensitize towards transformations in the cultural field in face of the understanding that equal rights and opportunities between men and woman constitute a basic condition to achieve justice, citizenship and development. The necessary change of that reality is slow and long, requiring, among other things, the development of a critical awareness between women and people in general about the importance of gender equality for the development of societies.

■ CONCLUSIONS

The analysis under paraphrastic and polysemic processes gave way to knowing the shifts and continuancies that accompany the participant's participation in gender relations that appear in the work space. Regarding the shifts, the story presented shows an employment relationship impregnated with resistance, with major battles against the power of male order, which allows us to think in future ruptures in gender inequalities, even if in the long run. Regarding the continuities, the study points to the marks of discrimination, prejudice and inequality, signaling contexts that need to be permanently questioned as a way of overcoming.

It is evident that the conquest of spaces in paid work is not enough to achieve balance in gender relations. Similarly, public policies on gender contribute to raising awareness of necessary changes in the cultural field, an area that must undergo shifts to the extent that women and society at large understand the equal rights and opportunities for men and women as a basic condition for the scope of justice, citizenship and development. In this sense, it is necessary to believe and invest in initiatives that bring together the collective empowerment in the development of policies for women and for society in general. We must also bring this community empowerment to the individual or psychological empowerment in order to affect sedimented structures, whose speeches establish and maintain women restricted to some spaces, with a view to overcoming possible imbalances in the field of gender inequalities, going against the current recommendations of public policies in the country and meeting the MDGs.

The nexus of this study with nursing occur as the idea of a need for involvement that goes beyond the biological that is affirmed and reproduced in the rigid, Cartesian model of academic thinking and doing is reinforced. One must look at the world of nursing so as to form and gather

knowledge from other areas that allow for the understanding of care as a dynamic construct, since one must consider the daily lives of each subject, which is constantly developing in the face of diversities and adversities that interact, often interfering in the achievement of human dignity.

To the extent that a possible limitation of the study is indicated as the focus set on the story of a single woman, it is emphasized that this option allowed us to analyze the relations established between workers and workers on the construction site in more detail. Similarly, it is believed that the methodological theoretical framework supported in discourse analysis allows and suits this type of study.

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