

From teacher development to teaching in Early Childhood Education: the male teaching taboo¹

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze, from a historical, socioeconomic, and political perspective, the current reality in which the male presence in the initial teaching undergraduate course for pedagogy teachers and their possible teaching activities in the education of young children is very low, and, so far, has been the target of several stereotyped social discourses, which support the idea of not belonging. The study is essentially qualitative and exploratory, and it focuses on provoking a new vision of gender impositions, which sustain the stereotyped idea regarding the roles of men and women in the educational field. Most importantly, it is highlighted that the male presence in both the Pedagogy course and the teaching practices for children's education is still a taboo to be overcome. It is noted that the male presence in these spaces is the target of several questions about their morals, ethics, professionalism, and even their masculinity.

KEY WORDS: Early Childhood Education. Pedagogy. Male Teaching in Early Childhood Education.

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Da formação à atuação docente na Educação Infantil: o tabu da docência masculina

RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo é analisar, sob uma perspectiva histórica, socioeconômica e política, a realidade na qual a presença masculina no curso de formação inicial de professores pedagogos e a possível atuação docente na educação de crianças pequenas é muito baixa e, por ora, alvo de diversos discursos sociais estereotipados, que sustentam a ideia de não pertencimento. De natureza qualitativa e exploratória, o mesmo, concentra-se no ato de provocar um novo olhar sobre dadas imposições de gênero, que sustentam a ideia estereotipada em relação aos espaços do homem e da mulher no âmbito educacional. Destaca, em especial, que a presença masculina no curso de Pedagogia e no exercício docente na Educação Infantil, ainda é um tabu a ser superado. Aponta que, quando a presença masculina existe nesses espaços, ela é alvo de diversos questionamentos sobre sua moral, ética, profissionalismo e até mesmo sua masculinidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação Infantil. Pedagogia. Docência masculina na Educação Infantil.

De la formación a las actividades docentes en Educación Infantil: el tabú de la enseñanza masculina

RESUMEN

El objetivo general de este estudio es analizar, desde una perspectiva histórica, socioeconómica y política, la realidad en la que la presencia masculina en el curso de formación inicial para docentes pedagogos y el posible rol docente en la educación de los niños pequeños es muy baja y, por ahora, blanco de varios discursos sociales estereotipados, que sustentan la idea de no pertenencia. De naturaleza cualitativa y exploratoria, lo mismo, se concentra en el acto de provocar una nueva mirada a determinadas imposiciones de género que sustentan la idea estereotipada en relación a los espacios de hombres y mujeres en el ámbito educativo. Destaca, en particular, que la presencia masculina en el curso de Pedagogía y en el ejercicio docente en Educación Infantil sigue siendo

un tabú a superar. Señala que, cuando la presencia masculina existe en estos espacios, es objeto de varias preguntas sobre su moral, ética, profesionalismo e incluso su masculinidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Infantil. Pedagogía. Docencia Masculina en Educación Infantil.

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Introduction

Upon entering the Pedagogy course in 2018, it was possible to notice, from the very beginning, a totally opposite reality from that previously experienced in my first Geography teacher education degree, held between 2014 and 2017. The presence of men, which once had been higher than that of women, had now become very scarce.

From the first day of class, this feminine predominance provoked some discomfort that guided a new look at all the established social relationships and, especially, at the activities that were developed throughout the course.

In particular, during the supervised internship in Early Childhood Education, in 2019, it was also possible to notice how the male shortage becomes even more exacerbated when compared to the number of men in the initial training course. The Pedagogy course aims to train pedagogues to work, mainly as teachers in the classroom, in Early Childhood Education, and in the initial years of elementary school.

Therefore, the desire to understand this female predominance in early children education, which is intrinsically associated with the low interest of men for the Pedagogy course, became stronger to the point of becoming the focus of this study. We consider, at first, that approaching this subject is something intriguing and challenging, since the social

representations bring in their core impositions to the genders⁴, by means of distinct conceptions. This topic includes the existence of stereotypes that have been historically perpetuated over the years and still remain today.

Although in the last few decades much has been (re)thought about issues related to gender, we are still faced with social discourses that sustain the fact that, from training to professional performance in Early Childhood Education, male teaching is a taboo to be overcome.

In order to better understand this issue, we must analyze the present in the light of history, which shows how the role of educator has been assigned to women, creating a teaching protagonism in relation to young children in Early Childhood Education, which is the first stage of basic education.

There are several reasons for such female predominance, and it is firstly related to historical events linked to the advent of the capitalist system and, of course, to the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century. The feminization of initial training courses and child teaching extended over the subsequent centuries in a way that is still present today, as already mentioned.

Statistical data from the last School Census (BRASIL, 2021b) and higher education (BRASIL, 2020) show how scarce the male presence is in this area. Additionally, out of the few men who begin the Pedagogy course, only a few complete it. Among those who finish, an even smaller number of pedagogues have the desire to work in Early Childhood Education. On the other hand, those who want to work in education face several limitations and barriers that induce a feeling of estrangement.

Therefore, we are concerned with answering the following questions: What were the factors that led to the feminization of teaching in the education for young children? Why does the peer group of Pedagogy

⁴ Gender can be understood as a principle that transforms the biological differences between the sexes into social inequalities, in which society is structured on the asymmetry of established relations. In other words, gender means that men and women are social constructions and not simply the result of the anatomy of their bodies. This is why the term “gender” is used for all social and/or cultural references and the term “sex” for biological ones (BRUSCHINI; ARDAILLON; UNBEHAUM, 1998).

courses consist, even nowadays, mostly of women, considering that men suffer prejudice in relation to this and to the very exercise of the profession in Early Childhood Education?

To answer these questions, we proposed to carry out exploratory and qualitative research, which materialized as a bibliographical study, based on interpretative reading and the summarizing of articles, dissertations, theses, and books that have already been written on this theme.

Furthermore, the study is based on dialectical and historical materialism, as well as the categories of totality⁵ and contradiction⁶. It also includes a documental analysis, given the treaty with official documents from educational agencies, such as the Census of Basic Education (BRASIL, 2021b), and of Higher Education (BRASIL, 2020).

With this study, we hope to contribute to new discussions on the subject in the academic field, so that reality can be increasingly understood and become a stage for change. This means spreading the idea that, from training to performance, men and women can occupy several functions, especially in teaching, regardless of the educational stage.

Women and Education: a brief history of the feminization of the teaching profession

In order to understand the feminization of Pedagogy courses and particularly of teaching in Early Childhood Education, it is essential to emphasize the past, considering that the current reality is the result of a non-linear historical process, so that, according to Cury (1986, p. 11), education should not be analyzed as “[...] a universe separate from the world of social relations, or even seeing it as a mere epiphenomenon of the basic structures”.

⁵ “[...] is justified while man does not seek only a particular understanding of the real, but intends a vision that is able to dialectically connect a particular process with other processes, and finally, coordinate it with an increasingly broader explanatory synthesis.” (CURY, 1986, p. 27).

⁶ “[...] (one can call it a law, given its globalizing scope) is the basis of a dialectical methodology. [...] broader explanatory conceptual moment, since it reflects the most originary movement of the real. Contradiction is the very internal motor of development”. (CURY, 1986, p. 27).

Throughout history, teaching in Brazil, and education as a whole, have not always been addressed and taken by everyone as it is nowadays. The imposition of gender has always been a hallmark of its existence, considering that, initially, it was a predominantly male and religious occupation, as Louro (1997) asserts when he summarizes that, in Brazil, the school institution was:

[...] Primarily male and religious. That is, the Jesuits, or the "spiritual arm of colonization", went beyond their attempt to catechize the Indians, investing in the education of young white boys from the dominant sectors. Thus, the first Brazilian schools run by these brothers (and some other great religious orders) consisted in a markedly masculine space, aimed at the formation of an exemplary Catholic person (LOURO, 1997, p. 94, our emphasis).

As the author herself adds, this characterization remained for a long period in Brazil, until the end of the 18th century, in face of the capitalist system expansion on a global scale. The advent of capitalism occurred mainly as a result of the Industrial Revolution, which started in England and gradually expanded throughout the world.

The Industrial Revolution led to major transformations in all sectors of society that, especially during the nineteenth century, established capitalism as the predominant socioeconomic system, giving rise to the antagonism of two social classes. On one side, the bourgeoisie, owner of the means of production, and on the other, the proletariat, which corresponds to the great mass of the population that sells its labor force in order to survive (ANDERY *et al.*, 1988).

In this context, as the authors point out, the industrial revolution meant a significant advance in the new production mode and the productive work process, directly influencing the educational field to become a stage of

change. These events corroborated the process of redefinition of the primary teaching profession, making it an occupation suitable for women.

The woman, who used to be only a wife, mother, and caretaker of the house, began to be inserted into the labor market, executing and accumulating functions that were previously unfeasible. This event was due to the fact that the Industrial Revolution, in short, was characterized by the accelerated emergence of factories/industries, whose productive process demanded a lot of labor.

As a way to meet the existing productive demands that increased day after day, the views regarding the role of women in society had to be reviewed, contributing to the incorporation of socially and economically disadvantaged women into the manufacturing process.

In contrast, the consequences for women from better-off families were different, as a larger number of them started to seek an education, entering the normal schools⁷, as Vianna (2002) points out. In summary:

[...] ever since the 19th century, men have been gradually leaving the classroom in primary schools, and **normal schools have been training more and more women.** This situation remains throughout the 20th century, promoted mainly by the intense economic, demographic, social, cultural, and political transformations that the country is undergoing, which are responsible for determining a great female participation in the labor market in general (VIANNA, 2002, p. 85, our emphasis).

Vianna's (2002) consideration draws attention to the fact that, in the context of the Industrial Revolution, teaching became a profession for women, especially when it came to working with young children. It is worth pointing out

⁷ "The Normal School was the institution responsible for training teachers during the second half of the nineteenth century and all along the twentieth century. It was considered to be the locus of circulation of knowledge and construction of school culture, bringing about changes related to educational, social, and political matters." (SILVA; RODRIGUES, 2018, s/p).

that it was not a job for all women at that time, but rather a professional position for middle-class women, who would educate the children of the working classes.

In this regard, Vianna (2013) asserts that:

[...] teaching is one of the first working fields for **white women of the so-called middle classes**, scholars and bearers of an idealized femininity for this class, but also protagonists of the struggle for the expansion of female participation in the economic sphere (VIANNA, 2013, p. 164, our emphasis).

There are several reasons why the teaching profession became dedicated to white middle-class women, as Vianna (2013) points out. At first, we highlight that the most conceived idea in relevant studies is that this work was an extension of the women's duties in caring for and educating their children, as they were considered to hold natural predicates that, for the moment, were the essential elements for teaching, such as love, affection, and patience with children.

In other words, this job was directly linked to the ideas of domesticity and motherhood, as Almeida (1998, p. 64) points out as she writes that "[...] the ideological discourse has built a series of arguments that attributed to women a better professional performance in education, derived from the fact that teaching was linked to the ideas of domesticity and motherhood [...]". In this sense, the woman was understood as a natural born educator.

Almeida (1998) adds that this conception had the power to reinforce stereotypes, as well as social segregation, of which women have historically been targets since they understood that caring for children and educating them were female tasks. Therefore, teaching was believed to be what they were meant to do, that is, this was the occupation that would best justify their presence at work, due to the fact that they were women.

Nevertheless, we highlight that this feminization of the teaching profession for young children did not happen solely as a result of the aforementioned conception. Some scholars affirm that men were distancing themselves as the logic of capital made the teaching profession more precarious, giving more status to other professions, such as administration.

Demartini and Antunes (1993) point out that men distanced themselves from the profession, for they had the duty to support their families financially. Once the teacher's salary was not sufficient for a family provider, it would hardly be viable for them to fulfill this obligation working as a teacher.

Conversely, the financial factor was not a problem for women, given that, because of social judgment, they were not responsible for the household expenses. Thus, their salary was only an addition. In this context, it is clear that the conception of women's inferiority guided the ideological constitution of teaching as women's work.

We must consider that, according to Almeida (1998), the process of feminization of the teaching profession in Brazil took place when the educational field, especially public primary education⁸, was expanded in quantity. That significantly motivated more women to enter education, both as students in normal schools and as teachers in primary schools.

When talking about the expansion of public primary education, which currently refers to the initial years of elementary school, it is important to emphasize the fact that there was not yet a formalized education for children at that time, and the predominance of women was further justified since this function was associated with motherhood. Early Childhood Education was only formalized in Brazil as the first educational stage after many years later, with the implementation of the Law of Directives and Bases of Education - LDBEN, no. 9.394 of 1996 (BRASIL, 2021a)⁹.

⁸ "[...] From the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the primary course referred to elementary schooling (lasting 4 years), followed by high school, which consisted of two cycles: the gymnasium (lasting 4 years) and the college, classical or scientific, (lasting 3 years). [...]" (VIANNA, 2013, p. 164).

⁹ Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação - LDBEN, nº 9.394 de 1996 (BRASIL, 2021a).

Araújo (1991) notes that, although the feminization of primary teaching was related to both the devaluation of the profession and the idea of women's inferiority, it also brought the possibility for women to expand socially. In her perception:

[...] the entry of women into public elementary schools, the intention is not to forget what education represented for the women who devoted themselves to it, not only as a form of economic survival, but also as the achievement of their aspirations for independence, for personal expression, and for an opportunity to impact the community in which they lived and worked. (ARAÚJO, 1991, p. 140).

The author's statement assumes that, once entering the labor market through teaching, women were faced with a great possibility of using the little prestige the profession still had socially to increasingly occupy social spaces, that is, they became more active in regard to the functions of society.

In this sense, Almeida (1998) and Apple (1998) point out in their studies that teaching was very significant for women, since it was through this profession that they became protagonists of other struggles for their social rights, which have consistently progressed and are now guaranteed. However, it is worth remembering that women are still fighting for participation rights and equality with men in many other social spaces.

The feminization of the teaching profession does not mean that men have completely quit occupying spaces in education. Over the course of history, the male presence was, in fact, distancing itself from the education of young children. Men, although in a smaller number than women, began to concentrate in those educational levels considered of greater prestige, which did not demand much of the characteristics considered to be feminine in the

teaching practice. In Brazil, the largest male occupation and concentration in the Brazilian teaching profession is currently in the final years of elementary school and in high school.

Not by chance, this issue is closely related to the fact that Pedagogy is currently the least sought-after undergraduate course by men. The few who enter the Pedagogy course imply that they will act outside the classroom in the future, that is, in positions that are considered to be superior in the school sphere, such as the principal and school manager. This topic will be discussed further in the next sections.

In view of these aspects, which were presented as being initially of historical nature and linked to both the objective and subjective realm, the feminization of teaching still exists today, especially in Early Childhood Education. Even though society has evolved in their discussions, as well as in gender issues, and despite women having occupied several other professions that were previously masculine in the job market, men still suffer prejudice when they try to educate small children, which is a result of the feminine predominance in Pedagogy courses.

The low presence of men in Pedagogy courses and Early Childhood Education: an existing correlation

As explained in the previous section, the feminization of the teaching profession is the result of a continuous historical process. This leads to a high current predominance of women in the Pedagogy course and, later, in the professional performance in Early Childhood Education, when compared to the low presence of men in both contexts.

On this matter, we share, at first, the same idea defended by Louro (1997) when she states that,

[...] the different social institutions and practices are constituted by genders (and also constitute them), this means that these [...] not only "manufacture" the subjects but also

are themselves produced (or engendered) by gender representations, as well as ethnic, sexual, class, among other representations. [...] (LOURO, 1997, p. 88).

In spite of the above, the author draws attention to several points, especially those that are closely linked to the influences from the objective to the subjective sphere. After all, history shows that teaching has been increasingly dedicated to women, as economic, political, and social changes related to the work field took place, which caused a resignification of the social representations.

When we enter any Pedagogy course classroom, we soon realize how the female presence is predominant, because we see many women and very few men. This inequality is directly related to Early Childhood Education, in which we find an even bigger scarcity of men.

Based on Monteiro and Altamain (2014), it is worth pointing out that there are still men today who seek and enter the teaching career dedicated to working with young children in Early Childhood Education. However, the number is still very low, as proven by statistical data.

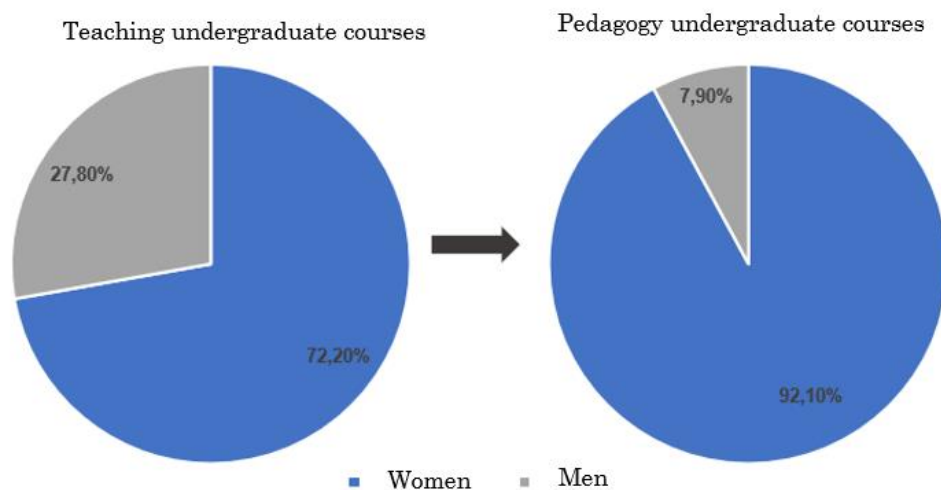
The 2020 Census of Basic Education indicates that, in Brazil, there are over 590,000 teachers working in Early Childhood Education. 96.4% of this number are women and only 3.6% are men. Nevertheless, in relation to the initial years of Elementary School, the male shortage is slightly smaller, corresponding to 11.9% out of 1,378,819 education professionals (BRASIL, 2021b).

These data are directly related to the scarcity of men in the Pedagogy course, which trains professionals for teaching, preferably in the aforementioned educational stages. The 2019 Census of Higher Education shows that the Pedagogy course is the most sought after among the undergraduate courses, as it corresponds to 48.3% of the enrollments made throughout the national territory (BRASIL, 2020).

In relation to the undergraduate courses, the 2019 Census of Higher Education also shows that, in 10 years, the course of Pedagogy rose from the third to the second position in the ranking of preference of Brazilian students, in quantitative terms (BRASIL, 2020).

The majority of Pedagogy graduates are women. This predominance also extends to the other undergraduate courses in general, as we can see in Chart 1, developed based on data from the 2019 Census of Higher Education.

CHART 1: Number of enrollments in undergraduate courses



Source: developed by the authors of this research based on the 2019 Census of Higher Education.

Given the data presented, the most important question is: what are the possible causes of this great difference between the number of men and women in the Pedagogy course, which as a result is related to the scarcity of male teachers in Early Childhood Education?

Although much has been discussed in the last decade about the representations of the role of men and women in society, especially in professional occupations, we must consider the perpetuation of various social discourses that directly and/or indirectly contribute to the fact that teaching children is still seen as a female activity.

These same discourses also spread the idea that the Pedagogy course is a more appropriate environment for women. When questioned (boys and girls), the justifications always end up implying that this is a reproduction of the historically established association between teaching and motherhood, as it was discussed in the previous section.

When discussing the subject, André (2002) does not hesitate to point out that:

[...] among the students (girls and boys) and even among the female teachers who consider the boys to be more intelligent, but not good at dealing with children, 'Whereas [...] the girls have to be gentle, kind, and attentive'. Thus, a possible justification for having such a restricted percentage of men in the Pedagogy course [...] (ANDRÉ, 2002, p. 194).

It is noted that the author is very objective in pointing out the perception that men are devoid of the adequate skills to educate and care for children. This certainly contributes to the low percentage of men in the Pedagogy course and, of course, even lower in education, when teaching children.

Such male scarcity, whether initially in the Pedagogy course or in the even more aggravated in Early Childhood Education, expresses, as Louro (1997) notes, that the action of "being a teacher" integrates representations originated from multiple social discourses, which can both transform and even oppose each other. In the words of Santos and Castro (2015), from training to professional performance, men carry a feeling of not belonging, as if they were out of place.

Besides that feeling, whenever a man enters the Pedagogy course or works in Early Childhood Education, he is faced with questions about his intimacy and masculinity, that is, regarding his sexual orientation (MONTEIRO; ALTAMANN, 2014). In this context, the discourse that

echoes in society given the idea of teaching as a female profession, is that when a man seeks such a profession, it must be due to his sexuality, he is believed to be a homosexual.

Another point to be considered regarding the male scarcity in the Pedagogy course, which is focused on the training of teachers to work in Early Childhood Education and in the early years of Primary Education, is the protection and care of young children. We refer to the concern about the physical contact of the male teacher with the children's bodies (GONÇALVES et al., 2015. p. 144).

Above all, in order to be admitted and accepted by the whole school community, "male teachers go through the sieve and the surveillance of adults, especially when the function within the children's institution requires the execution of tasks related to the children's care [...]" (RAMOS, 2011, p. 61).

It must be considered that when it comes to physical contact and body care, the woman-child relationship is more acceptable, since:

The prejudices and stigmas originating from ideas that see the profession as eminently feminine for dealing directly with the body care of boys and girls are evident. Given that, both historically and as a continuation of motherhood, the body care has been an attribute of women, **a man dealing with the body of young boys and/or girls causes conflicts, doubts and questioning, stigmas, and prejudices** (SAYÃO, 2005, p. 16, our emphasis).

Therefore, when a man enters the Pedagogy course and/or works in Early Childhood Education, he brings with him a confrontation with the social and cultural discourses, making his education and professionalism an act of resistance to the countless stereotypes that clearly or obscurely say that the environment is not the most appropriate for his nature.

As Monteiro and Altmann (2014) point out:

The occupation of the teaching position in Early Childhood Education was also the target of questioning due to the fact that the male teachers entered a career considered to be feminine by the school community, **a choice that was preceded by the completion of training courses in the area**, not only as a job opportunity, but also as an option that preceded the position's offer. This fact triggered the look of suspicion and attempts to segregate these individuals who deliberately set out to care for young children and educate them, breaking with social expectations of masculinity (MONTEIRO; ALTMANN, 2014, p. 735, our emphasis).

Considering that material issues influence people's subjectivity, we must not forget to mention that the social devaluation of teachers, especially of Early Childhood Education professionals, also contributes to men not entering the Pedagogy course and, especially, not seeking to work in this educational stage.

In this sense, the justification for the field of Early Childhood Education being a female profession is rooted in the logic of capital and the historical sexist view of men as superior to women. In other words, this implies in conceiving the devaluation of the profession as if it were the same as feminization.

To clarify, Alves and Pinto (2011) present some data concerning professional remuneration. Predominantly composed of women teachers, in sequence, Early Childhood Education and the initial years of Primary School, which are the focus of training in the Pedagogy courses, are the educational stages that present the lowest salaries in national education.

However, these environments are not completely exempt from the male presence; it exists even if in a discrete way. Nowadays, there is a percentage of men either studying Pedagogy or already working with

young children, although this performance is still very low. What stands out is the presumption of men to occupy positions considered as more prestigious professions.

Not by chance, when a man enters the Pedagogy course, he is expected to dedicate himself to the management area, that is, work as a school manager rather than a teacher.

In general terms, the scarce male presence, first in the Pedagogy course and then in Early Childhood Education, which extends to the initial years of Elementary School, must be considered as a result of the processes of subjects constitution in the social dynamics and, therefore, marked by the objective materialization.

These are forms of representations crossed by gender relations, which start from attributing symbols, meanings, and differences between men and women, and there is a long way to go to overcome this condition.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, we sought to contribute to the understanding of the existing correlation between the scarce number of men who attend the Pedagogy course and, consequently, seek or act as teachers in Early Childhood Education. Despite what has already been studied, we intend to contribute to the expansion of further discussions on this topic, in order for some historically established and stereotypical social representations regarding institutions, individuals, and their practices to be overcome.

As was presented, the male scarcity in those closely related contexts is the result of a historical process triggered by the Industrial Revolution, which reinforced the capitalist system as the dominant production process, establishing alongside the existence of two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Based on the effects of the Industrial Revolution, we understand that the male scarcity, both in the Pedagogy course and in the teaching of early childhood education, is directly linked to the historicity of the women's social representation as "natural born educators".

The ideas of domesticity and motherhood that drove such representation did not remain only in the past. Even though many discussions have been held regarding the impositions on the masculine and feminine genders in recent decades, unfortunately, some views that consider women as the most adequate and naturally qualified to take the Pedagogy course and to work in Early Childhood Education are still perpetuated.

Therefore, these ideas and social representations are still rooted in the popular imagination and lead to fewer men entering the Pedagogy course and, later, seeking and/or managing to work in the education and care of small children.

Directly linked to the production process of material life, many customary social discourses stereotype the presence and the male performance in Early Childhood Education, to the point of even questioning their morality, professional ethics, or sexuality. Furthermore, they cause a feeling of not belonging, inducing the male presence, when it exists in these places, to the confrontation of the individuals against the prejudices and barriers that exist in social and educational spaces.

Even when some men enter the Pedagogy course, the same social discourses sustain the view that they are not in search of training for teaching in the classroom, especially in children's education, but rather for professional practice in management and/or for working in non-schooling spaces.

If, on the one hand, such discourse imposes challenges and limitations onto men who study Pedagogy, on the other hand, it also contributes to sustaining the vision of superiority of men in relation to women. Therefore, we believe that it is not wrong for us to point out that Early Childhood Education is predominantly the stage where women work and, coincidentally,

the educational stage in which education professionals receive, on a national level, the lowest salaries.

As an overview, all the aspects discussed throughout this study elucidated how much the masculine presence in the Pedagogy course, as well as the teaching performance in the childhood sphere, is a taboo that still needs to be overcome. It is worth reinforcing that this will only be possible through our concerns, which may enable new discussions and studies on the issue.

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