

**NEGOTIATING MOTHERHOOD:
PRACTICES AND DISCOURSES¹**

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"GOOD" MOTHERHOOD: A DISCOURSIVE CONSTRUCTION

Processes of transition to motherhood have been devoted a great deal of attention, resulting in a consistent range of research and literature. Globally, and considering the different directions and motivations of these studies, the consequential body of research basically points out the complex and diverse character of this personal experience, whether focused in a more quantitative approach intended to isolate the variables influencing the psychosocial adjustment to this transition (Glade, Bean & Vira, 2005), or oriented towards a qualitative exploration of the individual experience of these women (see Nelson, 2003, for a review).

Nevertheless the knowledge that the transition to motherhood constitutes a highly challenging task that presents several emotional, affective and social nuances, the cultural view of this life event seems to continue emphasizing the element of self-fulfilment of the feminine nature that motherhood experiences also carries. Several authors have highlighted the fact that motherhood, more than a mere biological event, constitutes a social phenomenon, loaded with inherited cultural and ideological images and lay theories that influence the experiences of any new mother (Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Letherby, 1994; Sévon, 2005; Woollett, 1991).

At the realm of social discourses, seemingly a traditional idealized view of motherhood as a source of significant personal fulfilment and enjoyment of intense positive emotions prevails (Leal, 2005; Solé & Parella, 2004). This narrow vision of motherhood also carries a set of beliefs and stereotypes around what is socially and culturally accepted, in contemporaneous western societies, as an adequate practice of "mothering", which are largely sustained by the myth of motherhood as a universal need and "natural" choice of women and by the expectation of a full-time mothering (Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Fursman, 2002; Solé & Parella, 2004; Oakley, 1984). In other words, it is expected that all women long for motherhood

and that they become almost exclusively devoted to their children, being present to love, educate, stimulate and care for them (Fursman, 2002).

Thus, the word "motherhood", understood as a discursive construct with deep socio-cultural roots, also involves a set of behavioural and attitudinal prescriptions necessary to what is understood as a "good" mother and which, by opposition, exclude other behaviours and attitudes that become connected with a "bad" mother (Solé & Parella, 2004). Thus, these social and cultural discourses around the notion of an intensive motherhood, that is presented as the major priority in women's lives, is extensively based in the invention of the "good" motherhood, which has strong implications in the way women live this event and reassess their life projects, limiting the possibilities of their identities and discursive practices (Breheny & Stephens, 2007).

WORKING MOTHERS: THE CHALLENGE OF THE TRADITIONAL VISION

There is a relevant issue here if we think that these traditional ideologies of motherhood are increasingly dissonant with the current role of women in western societies. Presently, women often carry expectations of participating more actively in social life, valuing a professional career and the consequent public and social recognition and assuming a more proactive role in politics and citizenship (Alberdi, Escario & Matas, 2000; Solé & Parella, 2004). Regarding this, we shall mention the feminization phenomenon of the labour market, noted as a reality in several western countries, namely in the United States and in the European Union (Nogueira, 2006; Rebelo, 2002; Riggio, 2006). The female professional activity has increased during the last decades, namely in Portugal, and considering specifically the particular situation of women of the middle classes² and with access to high levels of education, it has seemingly an important dimension of personal fulfilment

² We should refer that this phenomenon of increasing entrance of women in the labour market includes a great heterogeneity of situations that are not limited to the one considered here, but that equally comprise women of lower economical classes, whose professional motivation is often more associated to financial issues than vocational ones.

in their professional choices (Rebelo, 2002). It is precisely this group of women that choose a professional occupation mostly because of the satisfaction they get from it and not because of an economical necessity, which is more strongly influenced by traditional discourses of motherhood (Fursman, 2002).

In face of this reality, and mostly since the 70's, this question is also reflected within the areas of psychological and sociological research, which manifest a big concern with the conciliation of this developmental transition and new identity dimension with the maintenance of a professional activity by women. In a recent work, Riggio (2006) offers an interesting review of the orientations that this research area has undergone in the last decades, highlighting its first focus on the impact of maternal employment in children development, followed by some concern around the effects of this situation on the mother, and finally the shift to a more systemic approach, focused on the answers of the family as a whole. Despite some contradiction in the results, it is true that increasingly more studies reveal a consistent pattern concerning the absence of short and long-term negative effects of maternal employment on children's development (Aughinbaugh & Gittleman, 2003; Love, Harrison, Sagi-Schwartz, van Ijzendoorn, Ross & Ungerer, 2003; Harvey, 1999). Indeed, some research suggests positive outcomes of maternal employment for offspring, including for cognitive and socioemotional development (Makri-Botsari & Makri, 2003; Vandell & Ramanan, 1992). Likewise, literature suggests that a gratifying professional occupation has meaningful positive effects on women's (and mothers') psychological health and life satisfaction (Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbush, & Brennan, 1993; Baruch & Barnett, 1986).

Despite the findings that maternal employment *per se* is not harmful for children and may in fact benefit them, also through increasing maternal psychological health (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Helms-Erikson, Tanner, Crouter, & McHale, 2000), the prevalent vision within the lay discourses seem to continue reproving these women and seeing them as selfish and unable to offer a quality motherhood (Riggio, 2006), which reveals the powerful influence of traditional visions of "good" motherhood.

NEW PRACTICES, MULTIPLE TRAJECTORIES

Motherhood might be, in fact, experienced in several and quite different personal contexts and subjectivities. Moreover, it is always inscribed within the network of social dynamics that, at each historical moment, define the constraints imposed to women in their experience and subjective construction of this identity dimension (Sevón, 2005). Consequently, we should not talk about the "motherhood", but rather of "motherhoods", assuming the diversity of trajectories and the multiplicity of discourses and practices that delineate the phenomenon. In other words, in order to fully accomplish understanding motherhood and its several expressions, we need to start from a conceptualization of this phenomenon as a social and cultural process. Furthermore, in order to understand this process of construction and integration of a maternal identity by women today, we can not neglect the fact that it is immersed in an occidental and industrialized socio-cultural context that has been subject to deep practical and social changes, which have been transforming to a large extent the status and expectations of women's role in society. Yet, the set of social discourses concerning the idea of intensive motherhood also constitute the cultural context in which the new mothers will give sense to their subjective experience and act as discursive orientations to the construction of this new maternal identity.

Hence, we share the notion that becoming a mother is among the major developmental transitions during young adulthood and emphasize, at the individual level, the process of identity transformation as one of the great challenges that motherhood entails (Bailey, 1999; Nelson, 2003; Seibold, 2004; Smith, 1991, 1999; Raeff, 1996). Motherhood can not be circumscribed to the concrete experience of giving birth and objectively becoming a mother. The adoption of this identity corresponds to a process that is drawn from several elements of the concrete experience but transcends the physical and biological domain. It is

inscribed into the subjective realm of the imaginary during the entire gestation and this is a phenomenon that draws out beyond the birth as the experience is represented through new modalities, in a constant interplay between diverse identity positions and between these and the cultural prescriptions available in the dominant social discourses. Thus, adopting a discursive and dialogical approach, we intend with this chapter to present a study about the transition to motherhood and the consequent implications of this event to the dialogical processes of identity construction. We are interested in exploring which are the meanings elaborated by these women in their effort to negotiate their new mother identity.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

At a conceptual level, we may say that the orienting bases of this study's methodological and analytic design are structured into three fundamental theoretical-methodological tools – dialogical self; meaning-making and semiotic mediation; and finally discourse analysis.

The Dialogical Self

The Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans and Kempen, 1993) constitutes one core conceptual line guiding our approach to processes of identity construction and transformation, particularly in what concerns its proposal of a self as a decentralized, relational and dialogical space where multiple versions of the “I” articulate and dialogue.

In line with this dialogical perspective that understands the self as a “dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the landscape of the mind, intertwined as this mind is with the minds of other people” (Hermans, 2002, pp. 147), the construction of meaning becomes a process fundamentally relational in nature, since it emerges from the ongoing dialogical exchanges happening between two or more voiced

positions that, at each moment in time, compose the person's repertoire (Hermans, 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

In fact, each I-position can create a "voice" that communicates with other I-positions "voices" in a dynamic relation of dialogicality and resulting in a complex and narratively structured self (Gonçalves & Salgado, 2001). Within this multiplicity of I-positions, some may become more dominant than others so that the voices of less dominant positions may be temporarily silenced (Hermans, 1996b).

In other words, these I-positions become understood as interlocutors in a process of meaning-making that is always influenced and challenged by the anticipation of another's reaction, which equally highlights a second central concept - dialogue. It is in this sense that Salgado and Gonçalves (in press) suggest that all our intentions and meanings are embedded by others' meanings, since people are in constant dialogue with others, physically present or not, and thus all dialogue (external or internal) is addressed to potential others. Hence, the dialogical self is also a deeply social self, since the internalized voices of social others are also part of these dialogues and take place in the occurring process of meaning (Hermans & Dimaggio 2004; Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992).

It is this relational and multiple feature that the dialogical approach can add to an analysis of the meaning-making as a vital process in human beings and that constituted the basis for the elaboration of our methodological task - Dialogical Articulation Task (see also Duarte, Rosa & Gonçalves, 2006) - which calls for an explicit effort of describing these ongoing dialogues among the various I-positions and their respective social interlocutors. From a dialogical standpoint, as the person assumes different positions he/she is endowing each one of them with a voice able to be part of the dialogue and making new meanings possible by transforming the positions involved or by the emergence of new I-positions that somehow solve temporarily the dialogical tension.

Meaning-Making and Semiotic Mediation

These dialogical exchanges entail the use of signs that regulate the fluidity of all structure of I-positions and of the positioning movement itself (Valsiner, 2004). Therefore, the dialogical self is also a semiotic self-regulating self and this semiotic mediation results in a process of distancing from the here-and-now context and an anticipation of the future conditions, acting as a pre-adaptation mechanism to the situational demands of the next moment in time (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998; Valsiner, 2002a; 2004). In this sense, looking at the semiotic processes within the dialogical self is one pathway to understand the transformations in self-system.

From a dialectic understanding, Valsiner and collaborators (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998; Josephs, Valsiner & Surgan, 1999; Valsiner, 2006) conceptualize the meaning-making process in terms of dualities and assert that meanings arise as dual fields of unified opposites – or *bipolar meaning complexes* – which could be presented as $\{A \leftrightarrow \text{Non-A}\}$, being A the focused meaning within the process of meaning-making. The authors define these meaning complexes as “signs (meanings per se) that present some aspects of the world, their implied opposites, and qualifiers that are linked with either signs or their opposites” (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998, p. 70) and present this dialectic quality as an essential condition for the existence of any process of transformation or novelty. In other words, each constructed sign, immediately co-constructs its opposite, that is, a counter-sign (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998) and it is this oppositional relation between the two meaning fields that sometimes can reach a state of tension and lead to a further elaboration of meanings that change the previous relation. Therefore, tension is the crucial element in opening the meaning complex to further transformation by participating in the dialogue with other emergent meaning complexes that are inserted in one of the meaning fields of the previous complex (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998). Through this insertion a relation between the recently emergent meaning complex and the previous one is established, leading to a *contrast* of the two meaning complexes - $[\{A \text{ and Non-A}\} \leftrightarrow \{B \text{ and Non-B}\}]$.

Tension is also a very common element within the discourse of the participants in our study, often leading to further elaborations and growth of the meaning complexes constructed by the various I-positions in dialogical exchanges. These dialogical exchanges are usually modulated by the use of several kinds of *circumvention strategies* (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998), which are no more than semiotic instruments used in the meaning-making as regulators of dialogical relations. These circumvention strategies correspond therefore to semiotic means elaborated within a process of dialogical meaning-making, which can modify the relation between meaning complexes in order to negotiate and maintain the goals that people establish in each here-and-now context while keeping their effort in making sense of the social world (see Josephs & Valsiner, 1998 for a full elaboration on this issue). In other words, participants usually recur to the elaboration of some new semiotic tool that enables them to strategically bypass the existing conflicts so that they can keep their several and sometimes ambivalent motivations and values.

Discursive practices

- Meaning-making and socio-cultural context

Dialogical self is also a social self in the sense that it operates under the guidance of the social world, as the construction of all the complex structure of meanings related to the self is embedded in the collective history and in the narrative activities of each society (Valsiner, 2004). This means that any construction of meaning occurs within the context of an historical-cultural legacy that can not be ignored and also that many of the socially shared meanings both guide and restrain the construction possibilities (and therefore the discursive possibilities as well) of each individual (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

In line with the approach of Discourse Analysis, and as stated by Potter and Wetherell (1987; 1995), this guidance occur as well in the form of the linguistic resources available to the individuals, which does not appear in a social vacuum, on the contrary, they are structured around a socio-historical space and represent a cultural heritage in what concerns the practices of meaning production.

Nevertheless, this cultural and social dimension of the meaning construction does not means a disregard of the personal agency of each individual in his/her process of meaning, given the possibility one has of choosing some resources and not others, as well as the positioning one adopts towards them, opens place to individuality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As stated by Valsiner (2003), cultural messages are always and actively transformed by all the participants in cultural transference of knowledge, since both those who convey these messages to younger generations and those who receive it, are involved in a process of analysis/synthesis that enriches it with a dimension of personal construction. In his words - "what is narrated in the society and what is constructed by the person may set up the framework for actual ways of being that transcend both the social-historical and personal-self narratives" (Valsiner, 2003).

Accordingly, we believe that any analysis of the processes of meaning construction should take into account, not only the role of socio-cultural traditions as discursive resources that influence each individual process of meaning-making, but also the way people transform these social prescriptions, creating a personal culture within the realm of their development (Valsiner, 2000). Assuming the significance of these cultural and personal elements, the method of analysis suggested by the authors of Discourse Analysis seems to be quite suitable to explore the discursive boundaries within which a negotiation of a maternal identity is sustained by women faced with this developmental reality.

- Discourse Analysis

The one factor that most deeply differentiates the approach of Discourse Analysis and that places it as an alternative to more traditional conceptions, is its understanding of the nature and function of *language* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 1995). In fact, within the traditional and conventional perspective about discourse, it is assumed as a means to access a set of intra-psychic phenomena that would be reflected through the language. From this point of view, it is assumed a causal relation between verbal behaviour and the existence of internal events as attitudes. Differently, Discourse Analysis understands language as an interesting object *per se*, since it is on its use that objects and subjectivity become constituted (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 1995). In this sense, the focus becomes the discourse itself and follows a double concern: understanding what people do and what they intend with their discourse – their *linguistic practices*; and considering how is this discourse organized and which are the *linguistic resources* used in these practices.

Globally, Discourse Analysis emphasizes three elementary dimensions in approaching language: its *constitutive power*, its *agent-like nature* (discursive practices) and its *historical-cultural location* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 1995). The authors highlight the importance of language in construing social reality, since when people construct their versions of the world, events and even of themselves through the use of language, they attribute existence and significance to those versions. These constructions do not merely describe the phenomena, but they allow certain ways of being and seeing the world while constraining others (Korobov, 2001 cit. Breheny & Stephens, 2007). Language use is not innocuous and allows “to do things” happen, construing and creating several social worlds. From this perspective, language is constitutive since it is the place where meanings are created and changed (Taylor, 2001). Simultaneously, this notion of different language uses having distinct effects and social implications in addition to serving several functions, involves an assumption of the discursive act as genuine social practices. Speaking is “doing something” that has concrete effects in one’s life (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Finally, the authors also note the fact that the patterns of language used or resources are always contextualized to particular circumstances. The accounts may be altered according to the changing contexts or the functions they assume in each of them. Moreover, the range of possible linguistic resources, available to the individual subject to his meaning construction, has deep roots in the history and culture of each society.

These resources are designated by Potter and Wetherell (1987; 1995) as “interpretative repertoires” and correspond to quite consistent and recurring patterns of images, actions or issues. The interpretative repertoires are, thus, a set of tools used by individuals, and depending on the available social and cultural resources, to accomplish their personal goals within the ongoing daily interactions, whether justifying particular versions of events, apologizing themselves or validating their behaviours, or keeping a credible position in some interaction (Edley, 2001; Potter & Wetherell, 1995).

This methodology appears very suitable to investigate processes by which people use images and notions present in a widely spread social discourse to make sense of their personal identities, in a constant negotiation between socially conveyed discourses and the personal experience and agency. The relevancy of this analysis follows from the notion that motherhood as socio-cultural construct contains several images and prescriptions that become strong constraints to women conduct and guide them towards their new powerfully symbolic role as mothers.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Sample and Procedure

Considering that our main research goal consists in exploring the meanings constructed around the transition to motherhood and increasing our understanding of the ways women negotiate their new maternal identity in the presence of strong

cultural orientations, participant selection was basically intended to include women that were experiencing this developmental task and that, in parallel, were saving professional ambitions that put them in a dissonant position in face of motherhood traditional discourses.

The presented data correspond then to individual interviews with a group of 9 women expecting their first child, all of them married, with higher education and with varied professional activities.

The following table outlines participants' demographic data, in addition to some information about their pregnancies.

Participants³	Age	Professional Activity	Pregnancy
Maria	30 years	Psychologist	Planned; Without previous fertility problems
Adriana	29 years	Bancária?	Planned; Without previous fertility problems
Ana	28 years	Teacher (part-time)	Planned; Without previous fertility problems
Madalena	34 years	Assistente de Direcção?	Planned; With previous fertility problems
Beatriz	31 years	Bancária?	Planned; With previous fertility problems
Sofia	29 years	Empresária?	Planned; Without previous fertility problems
Cláudia	29 years	Sociologist	Non planned; Without previous fertility problems
Carla	28 years	Manager	Planned; Without previous fertility problems
Carolina	28 years	Lawyer	Planned; Without previous fertility problems

Table 1. Sample's demographic and pregnancy data

Data collection was achieved in two distinct moments: the first evaluation happened during the 3rd trimester of the woman's pregnancy and the second evaluation took place after the 3rd month post-partum. At each of these moments, we applied a semi-structured interview developed in a previous study - Dialogical Articulation Task (DAT, Duarte, Rosa & Gonçalves, 2006). In this interview, we invite participants to deal with the dualities of the dialogical self, exploring the way

³ The names are fictional.

people think and construct meaning, both about possible dialogues among their different discursive I-positions (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), and about the dialogues between those and the “voices” of significant interlocutors (see Duarte, Rosa & Gonçalves, 2006, for a more detailed exposition). In order to accomplish that, we ask participants to identify their most descriptive and relevant self-dimensions, which usually correspond to social roles, personal interests and idiosyncratic characteristics (e.g. Me as a professional; Me as a mother; The emotional me). These defined self-dimensions are presented to participants as different voices or identity positions they can alternate when thinking about several daily decisions or events and they are asked to explain and describe the most usual interaction between them, while imagining that each of these I-positions is a character in a story or in a movie, which suddenly gets a voice. The interview consists mostly in exploring the dialogues between each discursive I-position and all the others, in order to clarify a set of questions concerning the nature of the dialogue.

Finally, in the last moment of data collection, we also present some questions concerning the experience of mothering for the first time, pregnancy and the decision of having a child.

All the interviews were conducted by the first author, in the case of three participants in the office at the University, and with the remaining six women in their own homes. They lasted between 45m and 1h40m and were audio taped and later fully transcribed.

The analysis

The analysis of material resulting from interviews may be organized into two levels that are closely related, though representing two different approaches to the phenomenon of construction of the new maternal position by these women. Therefore, we started by proceeding to a first wide approach to the participants discourse following the guidelines of Discourse Analysis (Edley, 2001; Potter &

Wetherell, 1995), through which we intend to identify the main linguistic resources used by these women, as well as to explore potential conflicts and ambivalences.

This kind of analysis cannot be easily structured into objective and independent steps, since it is a rather "open-ended" and circular approach, but according to Potter and Wetherell (1987), we still can identify some phases through which the analysis proceeds and that begin with a first and very inclusive categorization of the recurring themes and images present in the discourse of each participant. This categorization does not constitute the main analysis, but leads to a first understanding of the discursive patterns that participants are presenting when approaching some issues. In other words, this first categorization facilitates the identification of the used interpretative repertoires. These patterns must include a dimension of *consistency* – identification of the features shared in accounts – and a dimension of *variability* – differences both in the content and in the form of the accounts. In this way, it is possible to isolate the interpretative repertoires that, in this case, are being used by these women as discursive resources in their effort to give sense to the motherhood experience and construct a new maternal identity.

Finally, and since the basic theoretical guideline of discourse analysis is the assumption that people's discourse fits different functions and has varied effects, we proceed to one of the most significant phases of this analysis that consists in a reflection about the social functions and discursive effects inferred from this particular use of the linguistic resources. In other words, which goals are these women trying to achieve both through this specific combination of repertoires and the way they position themselves towards them? Which are the positions they are ascribed given the culturally available resources and how do they accept or circumvent them?

In sum, we aimed to follow the three lines of analysis considered as crucial by the authors: concern with the *constitutive nature* of language and identification of the culturally available linguistic resources; exploration of the *discursive variability*, both inter and intra participants' discourses; and finally, reflection about the way in

which this variability might be related to the diversity of *functions* assumed by each discourse in the realm of social interactions (Potter & Wheterell, 1987).

Second, we chose to complement this first analysis with a more microgenetic scrutiny of the discourse through a semiotic analysis of the meaning-making process exemplified in the accounts of each participant. Through this microgenetic analysis we isolate the main bipolar meaning complexes that establish the discursive boundaries within which these women locate their process of definition of a maternal identity, and look for the design of a semantic map representing the used and previously identified interpretative repertoires.

Considering the presented dialectic notion of meaning-making (Josephs & Valsiner, 1998), we understand that, at a wider semiotic level, the discourse of these women is structured around the bipolar meaning complex – MOTHER <> Non-MOTHER, with the consequent individual process of meaning-making following one of two possible paths: acceptance and increasing differentiation of field A – MOTHER (called *growth*); or acceptance and increasing differentiation of field Non-A – Non-MOTHER (called *constructive elaboration*). Concerning this issue, we must clarify that the two fields of the meaning complex differ in its organization. The field A consists in all versions of the sign that are similar to A (a'; a''; a'''), whose construction leads to its growth through an increasing differentiation. The field *non-A* is characterized by its indeterminacy, being an unstructured or quasi-structured field that gradually emerges together and by contrast with the field A. It includes all versions of signs that do not belong to the similarity set of the field A and those that do not belong to the (infinitely extensive) set of *not-A*. Due to its character of greater ill-definition, the field *non-A* is the place where the higher meaning transformation happens and the one that most likely conducts to further elaboration and novelty, since it allows the insertion of new competing meaning complexes – {B <> Non-B}.

The analysis closely follows, then, the process of meaning-making looking for the identification of: a) new bipolar meaning-complexes elaborated by the participant;

b) subsequent growth or constructive elaboration of any of the meaning fields; c) states of whether harmonious coexistence or rivalry between the elaborated meaning complexes; d) circumvention strategies elaborated in order to deal with the tension.

INTERPRETATIVE REPERTOIRES

We will begin by highlighting the presence of two fundamental interpretative repertoires in the discourse of these women, which, to some extent, define the discursive boundaries within which their negotiation of a new maternal identity proceeds.

Repertoire 1 – The ideal of traditional motherhood and the myth of the “good” mother

↳ *Meaning complexes MOTHER <> NON-MOTHER and GOOD MOTHER <> NON-GOOD MOTHER*

As previously referred, ideologies of traditional motherhood constitute presently powerful influence forces and seem to orient themselves precisely to white, middle class and educated women with active professional careers, as a privileged target (Fursman, 2002) – that is, the ones that integrally compose the group interviewed in this study.

In fact, and as we will see onwards, the imaginary of the “good” mother and the notion of an “intensive” motherhood clearly emerge in these women’s discourses, whether they adopt a position of resistance or conformity towards these guidelines.

In the discourse of these participants, we can explicitly see their worries about being a “good” mother or about learning “well” how to be a mother, which is reinforced by a preoccupation and a very significant anticipatory anxiety with the

search for information in order to “be prepared”. This concept of a “good” mother and of a certain ideal of motherhood that stipulates certain behaviours and excludes others, also becomes clear from the doubts and the intensive questioning about the personal abilities for the exercise of motherhood. In other words, these women seem to feel a strong need to correspond to the social and personal expectations of what is understood as an adequate motherhood and that must include a set of abilities and a certain “know how”. This importance attributed both to motherhood and to the learning of some basic skills, is in absolute agreement with what is globally expected from an adequate motherhood (Breheny & Stephens, 2007).

Furthermore, this effort of compliance with the social prescriptions of what constitutes a “good mother” also seem to be understood, at least by some women, as a task that is shared by the majority of mothers, which is translated in the use of the pronoun “we” (underlined in the transcripts, below) that seems to reveal an identification with the “generalized woman”.

Next we present some transcripts from the participant’s discourse that just reveals the presence of the several elements that compose this first interpretative repertoire. The discursive markers used to identify the interpretative repertoires are highlighted in bold in order to orient the reading towards the interpretation made.

*“Sometimes I read because **I feel that I need to be prepared!**... (laughing)... **must know how to change diapers... or must know how to feed the baby...** I think... maybe in the beginning it didn’t concern me so much, while now **it starts causing me more concern** because now it is almost like... a countdown... and **then I must be prepared...**” (Maria, pre-partum)*

*“At this moment for us **the concern is...** with the progress of motherhood and pregnancy, one factor that **has been concerning us** is the raising of our child.” (Cláudia, pre-partum)*

"But... **I'm very very afraid**... I am! I don't know... (silence)... I can't wait... **but I'm afraid that I'm not going to be a good mother**... (silence)... I'm afraid! (...)
Because we... everyone says that "well, you learn how to be a mother!"
You do. I believe you do, but will we learn well how to be mothers?"
(Adriana, pre-partum)

"In what concerns being a mother, **I never know if I'm a good mother**. I never know... I think so, **but we are never sure whether we are good mothers or not, but we do the best we can to be one**." (Madalena, post-partum)

THE EXCEPTION

Considering the 9 women interviewed, only one shows a different position towards this need for preparation and search of information. In fact, Carla describes just the opposite behaviour, since the fact of achieving more information about what could probably happen to her in the near future would work for her as a source of anxiety and not safety. It is of worth to note, however, that she justifies this position towards novelty as being something that characterizes her in a particular way and that has been common to different moments in her life.

"Then the belly growing, the body transformation, changes in body shape... then **I took it all very naturally because I haven't thought**, honestly I was in fact very concerned with my work and I didn't even had... **I had never even read anything!** Well, but that **is just my way of doing things!**" (Carla, pre-partum)

"(...) After that was a pregnancy note-book that someone offered me and then it has information about pregnancy. **Then I would already read it and then by suggestion it would seem to me that everything was happening**... on the

*other day I was already discussing my post-partum depression!... (laughing)... **And thus I would rather... the really best way**, and I have already learned that coping with myself, **the best way is not to know.**" (Carla, pre-partum)*

Semiotic analysis

We globally believe that, due to the developmental transition they are experiencing, these women are in a process of identity construction and re-definition that entails the inclusion of an emergent maternal dimension. In this sense, their whole discourse about this issue may be understood as a semiotic construction circumscribed by the wide boundaries of the bipolar meaning complex **MOTHER <> Non-MOTHER**, with recurring movements taking place between both meaning fields as a result of a dialogical tension that catalyses further elaboration.

In addition, as we have seen, meanings constructed within the maternal voice reveal an effort of all women in complying with social expectations of an adequate mothering, which seem to assume a notion of good motherhood that, from a dialectic perspective, opens place to the emergence of a more restrict bipolar complex that is inserted within the field **MOTHER** of the previous complex: **GOOD MOTHER <> Non-GOOD MOTHER.**

We would say that, in a movement of increasing definition, all participants attempt to position themselves within the semiotic realm that corresponds to the field **GOOD MOTHER**, by the construction of meanings such as **PREPARING; ADAPTING; THINKING; QUESTIONING** – that reflect a movement of searching for information and reflexion around the kind of mothers they would like to become. We should note the use in the first transcript of phrases reinforced with **macro-organizers with a prescriptive nature – "I must"** – that highlight the ideological load and the socially prescriptive character of this semiotic field of the meaning complex.

In another line of meaning-making, closely related to the previous one, there is also a very significant emphasis in the questioning process and apprehension about

the possibility of not correspond to what they would like to be as mothers. This is reflected in the construction of meanings like: **CONCERN; FEAR; DOUBT; FRIGHT; INSECURITY.**

The location within the **A** fields of the several meaning complexes and its growth are emphasized by the abundance of **qualifiers** that also highlight the great personal significance of these meanings - **"very", "more", "greater", "a lot"**.

In addition to the obvious inexperience and insecurity of these new mothers, there is usually an "assault" of suggestions, guidelines and criticisms from close relatives and friends, medical experts and sometimes even strangers, which are often regarded as intrusive and disorganizing due to its frequent contradictions. While this is a very visible situation in the first days or weeks after the birth, and nevertheless the importance that is always attributed to the help and support offered mostly by grandmothers, there seems to be a certain resistance against this intrusion through an effort in searching "their" own way of being mothers. Note that this attempt in resisting the prescriptions of social others becomes a task of the couple, whose space they try to preserve in face of the existing pressure. Here we also find the use of the pronoun "we", but now referring to the couple and constructed in opposition to the former "we" (woman's generalized role). In this sense, if in certain moments we can see a great conformity to the notion of an ideal motherhood in the way it is socially carried, in other moments this notion clearly triggers a reaction of opposition and resistance that also constitutes an important element in their identity definition.

*"And at some point I thought "No, from now on **I will do what my husband and I think is good for him (the baby) and what is correct... what makes us feel good also!"** Because **I think that it is also important that we are doing the***

things which we can identify ourselves with and not only "I'm doing this because that person told me to..." (Maria, post-partum)

*"... there is no one in particular, but **several persons that try to give me some tips** – "You should do like this!" – **and I don't like it at all!**... (laughing) ... **I hate it!** (But is it about the [baby] or in general?) No, it is **about my role as a mother**, right? **I can't stand that!**" (Carla, post-partum)*

*"... in the beginning I felt a bit fed up with it because **I wanted to be alone and I didn't had moments... moments alone**. I didn't! And I really missed it, because it was... I felt that I have had that experience, that I have had... **and my child wasn't mine, was everyone's! And I didn't have a moment alone with him!**" (Cláudia, post-partum)*

*"Because **I thought that I must care for her, I must do things** and I couldn't. Therefore it troubled me in the beginning. (...)It might look a bit confusing, but it was **that fear that she [baby], suddenly, wouldn't recognize me as her mother!**" (Carolina, post-partum)*

Semiotic analysis

In face of this invasion of others related to the prescription of behaviours and attitudes towards the baby, there is a clear effort of definition of new boundaries for the field **MOTHER**, which belongs to the woman herself, by opposition to **Non-MOTHER** that is identified with others' prescriptions and felt as devaluating of her individual role. We can say that, at this point, women are locating themselves again within the semiotic space defined by the meaning complex **MOTHER <> Non-MOTHER**, with this resistance effort being translated in the construction of meanings that result in the growth of the field **MOTHER: IDENTIFY; FEEL WELL; BE ALONE WITH**. This search for a personal space and a private definition of the

field **MOTHER** is also very clear in the recurring use of **ownership qualifiers** that stress a personal dimension - "**my way**"; "**my own believes**"; "**my role as a mother**"; "**our baby**". Therefore, the need of definition of a personal space as mothers is paralleled by a statement that this is "their" baby, "their" child. In two cases, participants actually refer quite directly to be afraid that the baby would fail identifying them as mothers if this space is not well circumscribed.

In some cases this space is shared with the husband, in a definition of the couple's space as the new parents of the newborn.

The positioning within the field **Non-MOTHER**, when taken into account the opinions and interventions of others, produces negative affective appraisals, which are translated into semantic constructions as **NOT TO LIKE; TO HATE; NOT TO STAND**.

Since this notion of an adequate and ideal motherhood is so openly present in these women's discourse, we should thus appreciate to what extent the several elements traditionally associated to a "good" motherhood are equally shared and accepted by participants. This leads us, then, to the central question - what does define a "good" mother?

1.1 – Motherhood as a "natural" and tacitly expected step

↳ Meaning complex NATURAL <> NON-NATURAL

One of the dimensions that describe the traditional vision of motherhood is the belief that all women aspire to be mothers, excluding the choice of non-motherhood as an acceptable one (Meyers, 2001; Oakley, 1984). In the following transcripts we can effectively notice how the notion of motherhood as a natural desire for women is present, in a more or less explicit way, in the discourse of these participants. Motherhood is presented by several women as an old time expectation and a

natural choice that, to some extent, is implicitly expected. Note, once again, the use of “we” as an expression of a clear identification with all women, as if the sharing of this desire by the whole womanhood was an obvious question.

*“I mean, maybe it existed for a while now, because **I’ve always had the will to become mother at some point of my life...**” (Maria, pre-partum)*

*“It’s like this, the moment... I think that **for us, women, being a mother is something that some day... some day we just feel like it!** I think that’s the way it is.” (Adriana, post-partum)*

*“For instance, **I always wanted to be a mother! Always.** And it might look a little strange, but **I believe in the predisposition to be a mother.** I guess that if someone told me I wouldn’t believe. But I felt it! I believe **there is a predisposition;** I believe that **the woman’s body awakes for it.** (...) But **when the time comes, we know!**” (Carolina, pre-partum)*

On the other hand, even the women that state never had taken that project as a priority or even something inescapable in their lives, reinforce this idea that the longing for motherhood is something very intrinsic to womanhood and that, in a certain way, it will “naturally” be a part of any woman’s definition by associating the moment of that decision with the awakening of an “instinct” that has been postponed or asleep until then. There is in all the discourses a clear attribution of a biological and predetermined dimension to this disposition for being a mother.

In fact, the statement of these women about the choice, even if temporary, of non-motherhood, is still drawn against a social reality identified with this spread expectation that women invariably wish to become mothers. That is, whether adopting a position of compliance or resistance, all these women define themselves in relation to this myth of motherhood as an unavoidable destination of women.

Therefore, their non compliance is sometimes “excused” through a statement of a “sleeping” maternal instinct, which is never questioned as concrete reality.

“I had never honestly thought of being a mother! I never even... what!?!... when I hear people saying like... kids! – “My dream is get married and have children” - ... I never had the dream of getting married and having children. I don’t know... or if I had, it was sound asleep, I don’t know. I’ve never thought about it. (...) ... I guess it was more the responsibility issue! I believe we didn’t have the responsibility.” (Madalena, pos-partum)

“And then... until that moment I had never thought of being pregnant in my life. And I had terror! (...) But the idea of having a baby is something internal; I don’t really know how to explain it. In a moment I would look at other children and I felt the wish of having one, I would look at a pregnant woman and felt like a thing... it was intuitive. (...) But it is how I’m telling you, suddenly... it is an intuition... something that comes from the inside, I don’t know, it is intuitive! I don’t really know how to explain it. It is a click! And a wish... it’s like that...” (Beatriz, post-partum)

THE EXCEPTION

Concerning the motherhood desire, only one woman declares never had felt that “calling”, openly referring to the social dimension of the phenomenon and to the existing pressure so that women become mothers. In this case, the decision of becoming pregnant comes up more as a project shared by the couple, than as personal and intrinsic aspiration. Although motherhood also becomes felt as very rewarding, this seems to be the only case in which there is no use of the traditional ideal to explain it.

"No!! **On the contrary**. Well, of course we always think – "Ah, I'll have a child!" – but **it was almost like because of a social imposition**, see? Because if I really really thought ... not now! It doesn't mean that it applies now. **Now I'm loving the experience and I like it! But perhaps, if I thought really well, what I would see myself doing was mostly dedicating myself to my professional activity. But I can not say that I always thought of having children!"** (Carla, post-partum)

Semiotic analysis

Concerning the choice of motherhood, we may organize these women' discourse into the meaning complexes **MOTHER <> Non-MOTHER** and **NATURAL <> Non-NATURAL** since, in almost all the cases, the location in and growth of the field **A** (**MOTHER**) of the first meaning complex is largely sustained by the insertion of the second identified meaning complex and by acceptance of the same field **A** (**NATURAL**). Thus, the majority of the participants privileges fields **A**, presenting motherhood as a fundamental dimension in their identity definition since ever and assuming this location within the semiotic field **MOTHER** as something intrinsic to the feminine nature through meanings like: **WILL; WISH; TO IMAGINE; TO THINK ABOUT; TO FEEL LIKE; INTUITION; TO WANT; INSTINCT; PREDISPOSITION; CALLING; MATERNAL FEELING**. This notion of something that is "natural" and, because of that, shared by the entire feminine gender, is very frequently reinforced by the abundance of the **qualifier "always"** associated to this question.

There are only three cases, Madalena, Beatriz and Carla, that indicate a location within the field **Non-MOTHER** in some point of their lives, triggering different lines of semiotic construction due to some existing tension between the two meaning fields. Madalena rapidly justifies this positioning within the field **Non-A** by using the same complex, elaborating the field **NATURAL** and qualifying it as being "asleep", which sustains her temporary acceptance of **NON-MOTHER**. This justification is

also reinforced by the use of a powerful meaning with a relevant prescriptive character – **RESPONSABILITY**. Thus, the choice of non-motherhood was justified by the absence of a fundamental condition of motherhood.

Beatriz follows a very similar construction line, using the same complex **NATURAL <> Non-NATURAL** to justify the transition from the field **Non-MOTHER** to the field **MOTHER**. Also in this case, there is an elaboration and growth of the field **NATURAL** through a construction of this transition as an awakening of a “will” that is “something internal”.

Interestingly, Carla explains her acceptance of the field **Non-MOTHER** through a symmetrical movement to the one made by most participants, that is, the growth and maintenance of this meaning field is achieved by the insertion of the same complex **NATURAL <> Non-NATURAL**, but with acceptance and constructive elaboration of the field **Non-NATURAL** when she presents motherhood as a “social imposition”.

Another feature that has been pointed as fundamentally distinctive of an adequate motherhood and that equally shows in these accounts is the enormous valuation of pregnancy and a certain pride in the expression of that state, in addition to the association of motherhood with very positive emotions (Breheny & Stephens, 2007). The prescription of this absolute acceptance of motherhood as a deeply happy event is so powerful that, as we can see from the last example, when it does not happen, it triggers feelings of guilt and disappointment.

*“At this moment I say that **I’m well with my life!** ... (laughing) ... I think that.. **people used to tell me that pregnancy transforms women**. I didn’t believe that. Honestly I didn’t believe that. (...) And when people told me that **women really get into a state of grace and that they are well with their lives, I honestly apply that to me!** Because I see that in myself, I think **I’m in a very***

good mood!" (Sofia, pre-partum)

"... when we are pregnant we don't feel anything. **We feel a pride, like something special (...)** **I felt happier. I felt much happier, much happier! I felt more beautiful!** And... what did I feel more? ... (laughing) ... I don't know... I think it's just that. Happiness is everything! **I believe I have never been so happy in my life as I was then, so...**" (Beatriz, post-partum)

"Yes! Yes, **always. I had a very present maternal feeling.** That's also a reason why **my initial rejection was such a great disappointment to me!** (...) Exactly, **I really wanted it very much one day. And also I always idealized, always wanted to be a mother** and in fact **I believe I have the maternal instinct** and now I'm 100% devoted to my child. **But my initial reaction to the baby's welcome was a surprise to me** too. I had feelings I never thought I would!" (Cláudia, post-partum)

1.2 – Notion of maternal love and instinct

Complex INSTINCT <> NON-INSTINCT

A second element that seems to compose this traditional ideology of motherhood is the assumption of maternal love as an instantaneous reality, parallel to a statement of the maternal instinct that "naturally" speeds the adaptation to the baby and to the care giving tasks (Matlin, 1987; Oakley, 1984). Love and affection for the child are, otherwise, noted as the most basic aspect of motherhood and are constructed as a fundamental pre-requisite of the "good" mother, which really suggests a notion of motherhood as a basic natural instinct (Breheny & Stephens, 2007).

Once again, we can find movements from an “I statement” to a “we statement” that reinforce this notion of the generalized and unavoidable nature of such an innate impulse.

*“And it was complicated! And also when he [husband] returned to work. **But it is natural, instinct comes naturally.**” (Madalena, post-partum)*

*“But what can I say? **Honestly I got easily used to this facet, right? I’m adapting to these new tasks I have with some easiness, to this new part of me.**” (Carla, pós-parto)*

*“I believe that you can’t even explain it, **it is something you feel!** No matter how you try to say how it is... I think the person can’t even explain by words, **because it is something that is mostly feeling.** (...) Because **it is such an unconditional love** that it is difficult to qualify... it is difficult!” (Carolina, post-partum)*

*“I believe **that there are a lot of things we are not prepared for.** No way! **But we can accept them and it is natural**” (Ana, post-partum)*

*“In fact **maternal instinct... it is also a cultural issue, but maternal instinct does exist!**” (Cláudia, post-partum)*

This last transcript is particularly interesting in corroborating how strong and deeply rooted is this ideology of traditional motherhood, since it includes a highest ambiguity between compliance and resistance. Yet starting by adopting an obvious position of refusal of the traditional notions of a maternal instinct that is innate and present in every woman, and presenting it as a “cultural issue”, Cláudia is not really able of avoiding these prescriptions and ends up conciliating the two versions,

asserting the existence of that instinct within the same sentence.

Semiotic analysis

At a semiotic level, these women discursive constructions seem to be located again within the realm of the meaning complex **NATURAL <> Non-NATURAL**, since not only motherhood is presented as an expected destination of women, but the adaptation to this role is equally understood as guided by a certain **NATURAL** instinct. Acceptance and growth of this meaning field is more consensual than in the previous case and they are manifested in the construction of meanings such **INSTINCT; NATURALNESS; EASINESS; SIMPLE**. In the case of Cláudia, there is, nevertheless, a clear ambiguity that reveals some tension between these two meaning fields. To a first acceptance of the field **Non-NATURAL**, constructing maternal instinct as a “cultural issue”, follows an immediate move into the field **NATURAL**, justified by a **strategy focused on the harmonious coexistence** of meaning complexes – “*but maternal instinct does exist!*”– which results in a conciliation of two totally opposite fields.

This same ambiguity is equally present in Ana’s statement, yet less explicit. Thus, however naming the lack of preparation for motherhood, which suggests a constructive elaboration of the field **Non-NATURAL** (since learning is requested), she quickly shifts to the field **NATURAL**, justifying precisely that it is something “natural”.

1.3 – Mother as the prime caregiver

Complex MOTHER <> NON-MOTHER

The ideal of traditional motherhood also portrays expectations of a full-time dedication of the mothers to their children, to the extent that every child needs his/her mother and her presence in order to grow up healthy (Johnston & Swanson,

2006; Oakley, 1984; Solé & Parella, 2004). This idea that it is the mother who constitutes the privileged caregiver of her child and that a “good” mother is the one that reveals parental skills and closely attend to her child development, putting the child’s needs in front of hers (Breheny & Stephens, 2007), has, thus, a correspondence in the fact that the familiar realm had been traditionally presented to women as a central context of personal achievement.

In the following examples, this notion of the mother’s presence as an important requisite is somehow reflected in the difficulty in leaving the baby and in delegating the care giving function, even with the father or other family members, as the case of the grandmother. The fear, sometimes assumed, that the baby would not recognize them as the mothers highlights a will of intense maternal affirmation and a need of evidencing themselves as “the mothers” of their babies.

In these cases, though it appears in one of the examples a reference to the importance of the presence of both parents, there is a strong emphasis in the irreplaceable presence of the mother, which is translated in the profusion of phrases that use variations of the **first pronoun (?)** – “me”; “mine”; “I”.

*“... it is a separation, **even with him staying with my husband or with my mother. I completely trust them, but it is no longer with me**, right, so if you are used to being with him all day that’s a bit...” (Maria, post-partum)*

*“**It is not staying only with my mother. She [baby] needs us**! And she is very attached to both of us.” (Madalena, post-partum)*

*“I believe **the most important for the baby is to be close to his mother**, right? **The more hours we are with them... the better, isn’t it?** (...) Because **the baby also needs to be with other people, doesn’t he? He needs to socialize with other people**, but at this stage... **at this stage to me is very important that he be with me. I don’t feel like sharing him!” (Sofia, post-partum)***

"It is very hard for me to separate from my child. It undoubtedly does! But I also know that I must separate from him to be well with him. Do you understand? But I thought it would be much more difficult!" (Cláudia, post-partum)

Differently from the previous women, Ana reflects about the importance of preserving some space for herself as a woman, outside the monopolizing realm of motherhood, but still highlighting that she considers delegating the care of her child only for brief periods of time and exclusively to her own mother, someone absolutely trustworthy. Similarly to the previous examples, Ana also uses the pronoun "we" in a way that somehow reinforces her statements in the sense that present them as shared and accepted by a group of other women. However, in this particular case, the "we" refers to a different kind of women, the emancipated modern mothers that, yet still loving their babies, value some time for taking care of themselves. Nevertheless, this situation seems to cause some ambivalence or at least some fear of being judged, since Ana feels compelled to justify her behaviour, highlighting the fact that she only allows herself these breaks because she spends plenty of time with her child.

"And these hours that we leave them with someone we trust and go, this is also good for us! It's our little hour to calm down and relax a bit... it would be very difficult... without the help of the family. (...) But I spend a lot of time with her and I think that... well, I only go to the gym because I know she is with my mother, because if it was with someone else I wouldn't... right, I go relaxed, I don't worry." (Ana, post-partum)

Semiotic analysis

The stage most of these women are in, close to the end of maternity leave, triggers an anticipation of the return to their professional activities, which imposes them

coping with a reality that is synthesized by the meaning complex **SEPARATION <> Non-SEPARATION**. It is interesting to note that it is in this anticipation of a positioning within the field **SEPARATION** and in the growth of this same meaning field that the centrality attributed to the mother as the primer caregiver is elaborated by almost every woman. The boundaries limited by this meaning complex forward again to the wider field of **GOOD MOTHER <> Non-GOOD MOTHER** and thus, each woman makes an effort for justifying the location within the field **SEPARATION** without drawing from that a positioning within the field **Non-GOOD MOTHER**.

Elaboration of this field causes discomfort and guilt in every case, which is translated in the use of meanings such **COMPLICATED; TO BE VERY HARD**. In some cases, however, some strategies are used to circumvent the implication **SEPARATION → Non-GOOD MOTHER**. Cláudia, for instance, makes use of a strategy focused on a competing macro-organizer – *“I also know that I must separate from him to be well with him”* – that reverses the implication into **SEPARATION → GOOD MOTHER**, since in order to be well with the baby and be a **GOOD MOTHER**, she must leave him and go to work.

1.4 – Family centrality and priority

Complex PRIORITY <> NON-PRIORITY

Accordingly with this feeling that their presence and care are absolutely needed, the familiar realm is regarded as the main context of affective and time investment, achieving a much more manifest centrality in this gestation period, although to all of them family was a value priority even before. This familiar centrality, as expected, is stressed in the post-partum period, when motherhood is understood as reinforcement of the family concept, which is reflected on the image that a “new family” has in fact been formed and in the use of the pronoun “we” to describe the

experience, as if the couple and the new child were now an unique whole. This fact also leads to a greater feeling of achievement and completeness concerning other identity positions within the family sphere.

"At this moment... **I as a mother involves everything around me, you know... the whole me!**" (Adriana, pre-partum)

"... **feelings even more of a family... now it is really our family!** I think there was **reinforcement here, that the two of us and our daughter are a new family, apart from the other two!!**" (...) Yes, that's it! I think **it makes you more of a wife, because that's the role, isn't it? Mother, wife!!**" (Ana, post-partum)

Globally, we can say that these women reveal an extremely positive image concerning motherhood, which emerge at this moment as top priority in their lives. Apparently, for them, motherhood has coloured all the other experiences and contexts, leading to a devaluation of some more negative aspects implicated in the whole pregnancy process and in the adaptation to their new mother circumstance, which are seldom spontaneously stated in their discourses. Accordingly, the great part of their accounts reveals a manifest conformity to a kind of motherhood socially and culturally prescribed as the most appropriated and that entails planning and rehearsal of mothering, an unquestionable wish of becoming a mother and pride in being pregnant, giving priority to the baby's needs and close attendance to its development (at least during the first year of life), resulting in the attribution of a great centrality to the family realm (Breheny & Stephens, 2007).

Semiotic analysis

The familiar realm, or even more specifically the maternal realm, are presented as the top priority, which is qualified with several semantic developments of the opposition **PRIORITY <> Non-PRIORITY** that accomplish the acceptance and

growth of the field **PRIORITY** - **IMPORTANT; RELEVANT; VALUE; TIME;**
CENTRAL - always emphasized with the **qualifier "more"**, which in fact
 configures a **strategy focused on a personal preference.**

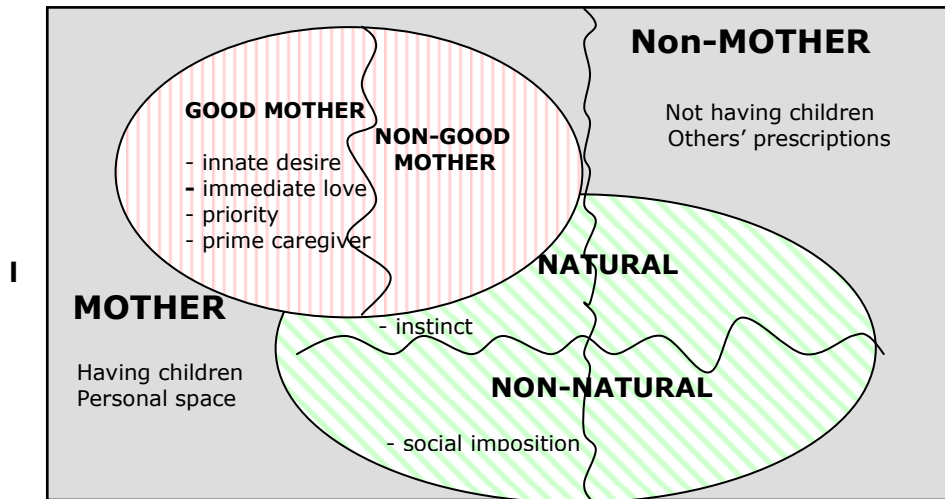


Figure 1 – Discourse organization of the first repertoire

The first repertoire (see figure 1) seems to be organized in these women’s
 discourse around three central dualities:

- **MOTHER <> Non-MOTHER**
- **GOOD MOTHER <> Non-GOOD MOTHER**
- **NATURAL <> Non-NATURAL**

Social prescriptions that define the outlines of this repertoire of traditional
 motherhood are globally located within the meaning fields **A** defining this
 developmental event as something expected in every woman and therefore
 presenting the field **MOTHER** and denying the possibility of conciliation of the field
Non-MOTHER with a female identity; limiting within this field of motherhood the
 boundaries of what is “good” motherhood by inserting the semiotic field **GOOD**
MOTHER; and finally presenting several elements of “good” motherhood,
 inclusively the decision itself of having a child, as inserted within the semiotic field
NATURAL.

Repertoire 2 – Career and professional success

Similarly to the presented vision that legitimize a certain identification of the feminine with motherhood and family, we see nowadays, at least in the occidental countries, other images of womanhood which demand the right to assume other roles in society. The great changes verified in terms of the possibility of planning childbirth, the access of women to higher levels of formal education and their massive entrance in the labour market, as well as the value transformation that is associated to it, legitimated an emancipation of the feminine and the maintenance of new expectations and aspirations concerning the social role of women (Alberdi et al, 2000; Solé & Parella, 2004). Because they occupy gradually more places in the labour market, sometimes in traditionally masculine areas, women also contact with another ideology concerning the work realm and whose discourse tends to be masculinised and to value several aspects conventionally endorsed to the stereotype of masculine gender, such as the use of power and leadership and values of individuality and autonomy, in addition to highlighting the need of investing long hours of work and of managing a high level of pressure and responsibility (Fursman, 2002).

Once our sample consists in a group of women with high education and with varied professional careers, several of them associated exactly with business, financial and juridical areas, we intended to understand if these conceptions of valuation of the professional career and need of progression and success would also function as linguistic resources to the construction of their accounts.

2.1 – Profession and career as personal achievement

Complex FULFILMENT <> NON-FULFILMENT

As previously referred, today many women see labour as a crucial element of self-fulfilment, leading them to strongly invest in their academic education and in the search of a professional career that becomes a source of satisfaction and a central vector in their personal trajectories (Alberdi et al, 2000). In fact, it becomes obvious from the following examples the great importance attributed to the professional/vocational dimension, especially because of the self-fulfilment character that it holds. For these women, their professional path often presents itself as the accomplishment of a life project, drawn and looked for since their early youth and that is seen as demanding time and dedication.

*"Concerning the professional part, **I always wanted and have somehow fulfilled my dream.** I always wanted to be a teacher and have graduated in teaching... (...)... so, **it is something that I really love and still... I can't give it up!**" (Ana, pre-partum)*

*"... essentially in the last 8 years, always in the same job, I've been able to construct a career, piece by piece, **every year I rise a bit and that really... I've fulfilled my dream!** (...) Despite having said now that I have work to do and sometimes I get tired and sick of it, **I couldn't live without it!** And **I like very much what I do** because... I've never worked in any other place, but **now I'm not seeing myself doing another thing! Thus, it was really a story of success!**" (Beatriz, pre-partum)*

*"**I like my job very much and I like working very much!** And honestly **I believe that's where I am most perfect.** (...) I know that at that level I have much more... **as a wife I have much more fails than as a worker** (...) But at least... **I hate that people think bad of me or that they see that I'm doing something wrong!** And to me **people seeing that I'm a good professional is***

already... to me it is enough! Or admitting that I'm a good professional, that I do things right." (Carla, pre-partum)

"... committed... I feel I give much of me. I don't know if I give the best! I give much, I don't know if it is the best or not, but I give much of me. I like what I do very much! Maybe it is so important to me because I feel fulfilled, it is a cause of fulfilment too. Personal." (Cláudia, pre-partum)

Semiotic analysis

At the microgenetic level, a common element in these participants discourse concerning professional dimension is the use of a wide meaning complex that we would name as **FULFILMENT <> Non-FULFILMENT**, with all their constructions being located within the field **FULFILMENT**. We can see the growth of this field in every case and with redundancy of the constructed meanings at a first meaning level concerned with the valuation of this field – **TO LIKE; DREAM; TO LOVE** – and at a second meaning level, more related to a kind of professional pride – **TO DO WELL; TO BE A GOOD PROFESSIONAL**. We should note that the meanings elaborated within this field **FULFILMENT** are very often reinforced by **semantic qualifiers** – “much”, “a lot”, “really”.

2.2 – The need of improvement and recognition

Complex PROGRESSION <> NON-PROGRESSION

Another frequent element in these women's discourse is the perspective of career improvement and the will to continue evolving professionally, even if that doesn't necessarily mean ascending in the hierarchy.

"Of course I never... that's what I was saying, **I as a person wanted to continue progressing and that way finishing my graduation was a priority!**" (Sofia, pre-partum)

"... **I like to be good at what I do... and above all, I like what I do.** I consider myself a good manager. I don't know if someday I'll be a good director, right? **I won't be thinking about administration...** (laughing)... unfortunately that is more... **well, that is reserved for men, isn't it?**... (laughing)... No, but I think that... **I won't say that it wouldn't be an interesting challenge, obviously!**" (Adriana, pre-partum)

"... **professionally I'm never concerned with the place I'm getting to, it is the work I will develop, things I would like...**" (Carla, post-partum)

In fact, the idea of progression seems to be more associated to questions of learning and improvement of competencies and performance than to the attainment of higher positions. This is sometimes articulated with a certain awareness that some places high in the hierarchy are still little accessible to women in general.

Therefore, we conclude from this that this limit to the ambition of professional ascension might not necessarily reflect a personal choice, but rather result from an awareness of the costs it would implicate. It is here that the first ambivalences appear between a professional enhancement goal and the realization that the decision of having a child might become an increased difficulty in the eye of the employers. This feature of their discourse is particularly important because it reveals exactly the understanding, and in some cases the sharing, of a work ideology that emphasizes the need of great investment of time and dedication from professionals to their careers if they are to achieve the expected levels of success (Fursman, 2002).

At this point several elements come into dialogue – the wish of progressing and being rewarded; the expectation of increased difficulties due to the demands of their new family life; and the priority of having some pleasure with what they do in detriment of the hierarchical position.

"I think it depends on the person's ambitions, if someone said to me – "Look, I want to invest in my career" – I wouldn't say – "Oh, no, have children! Have children!". (...) **It will disturb!** No matter how much you try, **it will disturb, at least in terms of time.** At least in terms of time **and because no one can be relaxed doing her work and thinking that at some point she has to go for [the baby] and has to feed [the baby] and then has to cook dinner and then... you can't be as available as before, can you?"** (Carla, post-partum)

"Now, in terms of the company, I don't know how... **I suppose they don't think that way!** Even though **I believe that today a woman with children, mainly young, won't probably ascend so quickly. I have that idea!** But let's see what's going to happen. I don't know. But nothing has changed! (...) **Indeed I'm waiting for proposals to progress more. Nothing holds it back! Now I don't know,** honestly. Because I'm not seeing... we have there kinds of careers... **me rising more, at this moment with a child... they wouldn't even propose nothing like that!** I think. **And would I want it either?** I don't know..." (Beatriz, post-partum)

"Now, **to me it doesn't make sense to be like housewife, having the family around me, having the husband and the children and not doing anything else!** Because **then I wouldn't be happy too!** But if you asked me to ponderar na balança??, **maybe I would prefer not getting so far professionally and getting further personally and in the family realm, than reaching a higher**

professional level and having, suddenly, a mediocre familiar life.” (Carolina, pre-partum)

This is also very obvious in the fact that all of them consider the issue of professional stability when taking into account the decision of getting pregnant, implicitly assuming that pregnancy would be much better accepted if it happened in a moment when they would have some professional security. Catarina A.@ - é melhor fazer um find dos nomes reais, só para ter a certeza de que não há enganos actually mentions this questions as a reason for an initial rejection of her pregnancy.

“There were some rejection causes here. (...) Second, professional instability. Because it might even not have been planned... I might be in pain, but if it had been planned it would be welcome. The fact that I wasn’t professionally stable... it might even not had been planned, but if I was stabilized, I would accept it better!” (Cláudia, post-partum)

Semiotic analysis

Another dimension of this professional repertoire is the inclusion of the meaning complex **PROGRESSION <> Non-PROGRESSION**, which reflects an important field of dialogical tension in some of these accounts. Most of these women accept and carry on to the growth of the field **PROGRESSION**, trough the construction of meanings such **SUCCESS; TO EVOLVE; TO GO FURTHER; TO IMPROVE; NOT TO ACCOMMODATE**.

In this sense, and in a general way, **PROGRESSION** is constructed more as evolution and learning than as hierarchical rising. Nonetheless, a number of women seem to have some ambivalence between the two fields of the meaning complex, since hierarchical rising appears as an interesting possibility but also as demanding high personal costs. Here we can see sometimes an ambiguity between locating

themselves within the field **PROGRESSION** or the field **Non-PROGRESSION**, with the use of **circumvention strategies focused on semantic qualifiers** (“I don’t know if those will be so rewarding”) or **focused on personal preferences** (“maybe I would prefer not getting so far professionally”). Both of those strategies restrain the meaning field **PROGRESSION** and rise doubts concerning its positive affective impact.

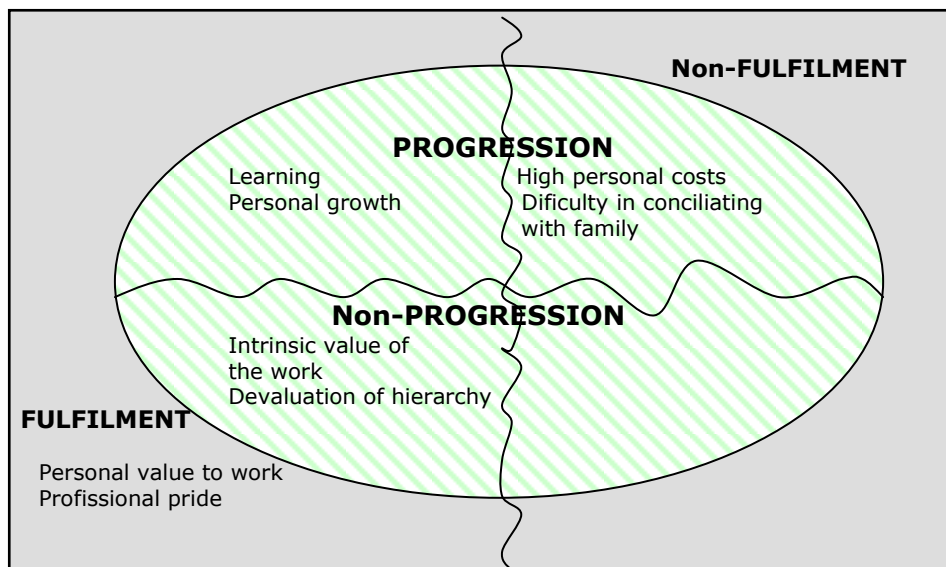


Figure 2 – Discourse organization of the second repertoire

The second repertoire (see figure 2) is essentially structured around two central dualities:

- **FULFILMENT <> Non-FULFILMENT**
- **PROGRESSION <> Non-PROGRESSION**

As in the previous one, also in the case of this work repertoire, its defining social prescriptions are globally located within the meaning fields **A**, presenting career and professional success as a fundamental dimension of self-fulfilment and constructing the need for evolution and progression within this meaning field. In this sense, the prescribed relation between these two meaning complexes would be **FULFILMENT**

→ **PROGRESSION**. Nonetheless, the ambivalences identified in these women accounts reveal that for them **FULFILMENT** may not be necessarily related to the field **PROGRESSION**, since there is a devaluation of the hierarchical position in favour of the intrinsic value and satisfaction of the kind of work that they develop. Thus, there is a growth of the field **FULFILMENT** by acceptance and constructive elaboration of the semiotic field **Non-PROGRESSION**, with change of the previous implication to **FULFILMENT → Non-PROGRESSION**.

Ideological Dilemma - Ambivalence and contradictions within the working mother perspective

Between these two repertoires lays an important focus of tension within the discourse of these women and this tension has clearly increased after the birth of the baby.

Initially, in the pre-partum, there is a general maintenance of the value of professional career, but paralleled with the acceptance that it is temporarily on second plan. This acceptance happens without conflict or distress, especially because it is understood as a temporary situation and, to some extent, an "excusable" fact due to the greater physical difficulties caused by pregnancy.

In the second moment, post-partum, the anticipation of returning to work causes a much higher anxiety and worry and becomes approached in a radically different way. It is in this stage of preparing the returning to the labour market, after a period of exclusive devotion to their new position as mothers, that becomes imperative a confrontation with the dilemma of attending to an ideal of "intensive" motherhood or keeping the image of professionally successful and competent women, that demands an availability often seen as incompatible with traditional motherhood. Almost invariably, all of them anticipate the professional return with great anxiety and reveal some level of conflict in considering that idea.

"Yes, yes! And time passes on increasingly fast... it will collide. It is only two months away! Perhaps I'll react well! But I think I'll take it badly. And then it will be a shock they (employers) wanting me to stay longer and me not wanting to stay." (Madalena, post-partum)

"I'm already like predicting, anticipating. Thus, it would be hard! It would be hard because just thinking, well... in the beginning it will be hard! Because I'm used to spending the whole day with her. Seldom have I gone here or there... but well these are moments! Little time. (...) And when I'll go to work things won't be like that!" (Carolina, post-partum)

THE EXCEPTION

The only exception to that fact is Ana who, being a teacher, believes that her job will not "interfere" too much with an appropriate mothering performance since it permits some schedule flexibility. This fact has in fact been noted as relevant to the way women adapt themselves to this reality of being working mothers (Fursman, 2002; Riggio, 2006).

"At this moment, even the hour that I am... I am totally available... and even... now it also depends on each year, I have different schedules. But my job... there is always a free morning or afternoon anyway! And thus it becomes easy to manage and to be... then we have Christmas vacations, Easter vacations... thus we have time to use." (Ana, post-partum)

However valuing their professional career and progression at different levels, all these women have in common the fact of attributing a vocational and self-fulfilling dimension to their activities, in addition to keeping a professional occupation during pregnancy and after this transition to motherhood. This situation of working

mothers puts them in a position that challenges socially shared constructions about motherhood and infant development and that imposes a fulltime devotion to their children. Consequently, the two repertoires used to construct their professional identities and their experience of motherhood with its resulting maternal identity offer, thus, two potentially opposing positions, since the behaviours required to someone that looks for a successful professional career are in absolute dissonance with the ones usually prescribed to a "good" mother. In other words, the inclusion of a mother identity in their personal repertoire results in a status of working mothers that, in itself, holds a serious incompatibility, by the light of the ideologies in operation and also shared by them. This incompatibility opens place to a profound dilemma of value, to the extent that the maintenance of both these repertoires entails a position of "bad" mother. In this sense, we are interested in understanding how do women circumvent some social guides about what is a good mother, in order to avoid a positioning as "bad" mothers that is automatically attributed to them, since their life style is not totally in agreement with those prescriptions.

Some women seem to undergo a deep adjustment of their priorities, starting to noticeably devaluing the professional realm and showing themselves very unenthusiastic concerning the recovering of their previous career projects. This does not mean that their professional identity has disappeared; rather it has simply lost saliency and importance. This is the case of Madalena.

*"Maybe, but **at this time I don't even know if I had projects...** (laughing) ... I swear! I don't... **I don't even think about it! I don't think about anything. I don't...**" (Madalena, post-partum)*

*"... **at this moment the professional facet is what frights me the most. Really! Because my will at this moment doesn't... my will to go to work is nil.**" (Madalena, post-partum)*

In the majority of cases, however, there is a grand ambivalence between a strong desire of continuing home taking care of the baby and some feelings around the importance of not giving up the professional investment. These women reveal a great effort to reconcile values and demands, alternating between statements that professional career constitutes a dimension they do not want definitely giving up and assertions that the return to work is more imposed by circumstances than by their will. In these cases, there is often a search of alternatives that could help ease this transition period, such as working from home for some time, reorganizing work routines given the benefit of schedule reduction or delaying the return to work at least until the end of the first year of the baby. Regarding this, it seems relevant to us the fact that the second moment of interview takes place only during the fourth month post-partum, therefore in a period soon after the birth and when all women were still using their maternity leave. This was a moment, thus, when participants are still adapting themselves to the new routines and only planning their return to the working life they provisionally left and this is the reason why they often say that their difficulties in leaving the babies and their little motivation to return to work would be eventually different in a later moment.

*"Me as a professional knows that I must go back to work and that **this must happen** and... to get more experience, to enrich her curriculum and so on... (...) **Maybe Me as a professional also wants to return** and... **have again other roles in life** without being only..." (Maria, post-partum)*

*"It happens! Of course it happens, **but I know what I have to do**, right, **I know I must go to work**... I wish I could be with him all the time! That's why **I'm in favour that women stay at home and take care of their children, I think that's right!**" (...)... I think **that at least during a year the mother should stay at home! Or at least while the baby needed breastfeeding**. But I know that's*

not possible and because of that **I must go to work!** There's no other way, is there?!" (Adriana, post-partum)

"I do! I do, I do have that will because **I like what I do** and don't... and **I end up missing** talking with everyone and missing that routine, right... there's no doubt I do! Now, **it will be hard because the [baby] is more important than the rest!** (...) ... **I'll do my best as always, but I will... I won't give up my rights as a mother, those hours you are entitled to and... the schedule reduction... I'll perform that strictly because I know that he needs it!** It is a right that I have and..." (Adriana, post-partum)

"It will be complicated. Well, **knowing me as I know, right... and I have all that devotion...** and then **the kind of work I have requires meetings, very complete schedules, full...** but we have two hours a day! In the morning I will try to arrive an hour later and the other hour I still don't know very well because... but I believe... **I believe that in returning to work that routine I had will continue.** I'm not seeing... **because work requires that!** No, I'm thinking a day for meetings, a day or two for leaving later and two days for leaving sooner. Trying to conciliate... **I know it will be impossible to leave at 5h30 everyday! I have that notion, right... but trying to reconcile both things!** I don't know yet. Let's see. I don't know what expects me yet." (Beatriz, post-partum)

"**At this moment it has overlapped...** (laughing)... **but I know that when I'll start it won't be like that!** But at the same time I'm also... I'm not very motivated with the project that I have now or with some indecisions that I have professionally and... it is another reason **why I don't feel like going to work.**" (Carla, post-partum)

"**At this moment and while he is younger, I honestly would leave work if I**

could! (...) No, not definitively. But you know, I would consider that because at the same time I would like... I think that after that I could develop other projects that would interest me more." (Carla, post-partum)

We can see in these excerpts an effort to escape to the positioning as "bad" mothers that could naturally come upon from a preservation of the professional interest and the will of returnig to work, not staying at home with the baby in a fulltime basis as the ideal of traditional motherhood stipulates. Once again, these women seem to be constructing a new identity as "good" mothers by resisting to the prescriptions of an intensive motherhood. For them, the possibility of avoiding a position as bad mothers while keeping a professional activity depends on the construction of alternative modalities of a good motherhood, for example by refusing to work more than the regular schedule as they used to and by making the best use of the time they spend with their children.

In these two cases we could say that there is an attempt of keeping a growth of the semiotic field **FULFILMENT** in paralell with a positioning within the field **GOOD MOTHER**, which, according to the presented repertoires, suggests an obvious contradiction since professional fulfilment will entail **SEPARATION**. This contradiction is understood by these women that, once again, try to circumvent it trough some strategies that allow an avoidance of the implication **SEPARATION** → **Non-GOOD MOTHER** and emphasize the maintenance of important elements of the field **GOOD MOTHER** – acknowledgment of the importance of their presence next to the baby, maintenance of the priority of the familiar realm and the baby.

We should note that these women often use **prescriptive macro-organizers** when they say they "must" return to work, which, aside the existence of some personal wish in doing so, emphasizes the character of institutional imposition of this return that, in some way, excuse them.

The three last women that compose this group have in common with the previous ones the fact of feeling some difficulties in the early separation from their children and also saying that the possibility of delaying the return to work would be nice for them. Yet, they ascribe a much more noticeable emphasis to the will of recovering their work and to the idea that it constitutes an essential part of their personal identities. These women state explicitly that, although family and mothering are their top priorities in terms of personal values, their professional careers are no less important and they even feel that somehow the fact of being working mothers might enhance their mothering performance to the extent that it enriches and fulfills them as a person.

*"... for instance, if someone told me – "From now on you won't be working anymore, you'll just take care of your child" – **I guess I wouldn't want it, honestly!** Because I believe that then you reach a time when you spend the whole day... **and he [baby] doesn't develop as well... and we also start getting stressed... because if we like working, I mean we'll start getting stressed because of not doing what we like! Isn't it? **What complete us! And we'll be blaming someone that hasn't the fault at all, right?** I also have the sensation that when I'll start working **I'll get home and those moments that I'll be with him, I'll enjoy them the most, right?"** (Sofia, post-partum)***

*"No because when I'll consider that it [work] will damage, there are limits, lines that I establish! **Therefore it is part of my life because I can't see myself... I see myself being a working mother! I like to have professional goals, I feel it is part of my way of being, but when I'll think that things are crossing the limits and that they may damage my life as a mother, as a woman... therefore I establish the line very well.**" (Carolina, post-partum)*

"Me and an occupation, isn't it? I can't think of myself without it, because... I can't! (...) It is an important part to me and I miss it! Let's see, I miss... producing! I miss, the most strange it might look, I miss producing, studying... because it part of my daily routine. I miss that part!" (Carolina, post-partum)

"At this moment the professional dimension still is very important because I invest in the professional thinking about the [baby]! Always thinking... that it is good for him. Both at a practical and economical level, in addition to my emotional stability... that I directly transmit to him." (Cláudia, post-partum)

"It helps me being a better mother because I'm fulfilled and because I do these things to feel well as a person, but even better as a mother. And at some moments of the day I think about my child and that gives me an enormous strength! And there it is, I'm a better professional and a better mother, definitively!" (Cláudia, post-partum)

As we could see, in these examples the ideal of traditional motherhood is used in a more obvious way as a discourse that helps women in their identity definition through opposition and resistance. These mothers refuse the position of "bad" mothers that is ascribed to them by traditional ideology even more resolutely than the previous ones, and construct a new alternative to that version of "good" mother, stressing the importance of their own happiness and fulfilment to their children's well being.

As the previous group, these women maintain a valuation and growth of the semiotic field **FULFILMENT**, inclusively trough the insertion and growth of the field **A** of the second meaning complex **PROGRESSION**. In the same way, this maintenance of these semiotic fields is paralleled by a shift of the implication **SEPARATION** → **Non-GOOD MOTHER** to **SEPARATION** → **GOOD MOTHER** by

the growth of the field **GOOD MOTHER** through new meanings that substitute those carried by the traditional ideology. Thus, interestingly these women circumvent the potential contradiction derived from the maintenance of the main bipolar complexes informing each of the previously described repertoires, through the insertion of the second in the first one. That is, they not only keep their position in the field **GOOD MOTHER**, but also proceed to its semantic growth by inserting in it the complex **FULFILMENT <> Non-FULFILMENT**. There is then an acceptance and growth of the field **FULFILMENT**, leading to the new implication **FULFILMENT → GOOD MOTHER**, since they understand that the fact of feeling happier and more fulfilled does help them to be better mothers. Therefore, in the case of this last group of women, there is the construction of a new semiotic reasoning that imposes itself by resistance to the cultural prescriptions of “good” motherhood, resulting in a complete inversion of traditional ideology.

DISCUSSION

Starting with the presented analysis we can observe the effort of these women in negotiating between two distinct identity positions, which may be identified with very different and equally valued meanings. The difficulty in harmonizing the values and interests hold by each position is even greater since both the maternal and professional positions are strongly connected with two interpretative repertoires inevitably rooted in their discourses and that become particularly problematic at this specific moment in their lives. In other words, these women are at a pivotal moment of their personal trajectories, when a set of more or less shared social meanings come into play and work as a cultural guide to their subjective processing of the experience. This is not a linear and unambiguous process and women often move between resistance and compliance with the mainstream social discourses, entering different coalitions in an effort of strengthening their statements. At

different points of their discourse, these women seem to identify themselves with and adopt discursive resources made available by distinct groups or images of womanhood, as reflected in the use the pronoun "we" with several correspondents: we women and good mothers as expected by the (general) others; we, me and my husband or our new family; we emancipated working mothers that still love our babies. These movements or positioning between distinct Me's and We's seems to be well in line with a feeling of having a "widened I", a sense of multiplicity that is in fact at the core of the notion of a dialogical self. Apparently, due to the novelty and transformation that transition to motherhood implies, paralleled with the high social attention and prescription that it triggers, this moment in women lives becomes a particular demanding task of self-definition and identity transformation, highlighting the nature of a multiple and diverse "I" that is negotiated in the interplay between ambivalent personal values and motivations, as well as between these and the social discourses that frame their experience.

Moving between the boundaries established by these cultural guidelines and their own individual subjective experience, each of these women are somehow using the meanings and semiotic tools available in social discourses to guide their own behaviour and thought, trying to act as "good mothers" since the moment they knew about the pregnancy. Later, the decision of whether to return to the workplace, the definition of the leave duration and the anticipation of some satisfactory future articulation of the maternal and professional worlds, all figure as choices that suppose a negotiation of values and meanings that are of difficult conciliation. However, given the very early stage of this new motherhood these women are in, it is natural that their opinions concerning some devaluation of the professional dimension might be altered in the near future.

The inclusion in their personal I-positions repertoire of a new maternal identity results in the adoption of a status as working mothers that entails a hardly manageable incompatibility, since what is culturally taken by a "good" mother does not fit in the reality of women with demanding professional careers. In some

moments sharing the elements of the traditional repertoire of an intensive motherhood and also some ideas that compose a work repertoire that emphasizes career and professional success, these women realize the dilemma this causes to them. Then, the majority of them strategically attempt to circumvent the contradiction trying to keep a position of good mothers and rejecting the idea that in order to accomplish that, they must give up their personal realization as professionals.

The simultaneous use of these two repertoires inevitably results in positioning the working mothers as "bad" mothers, which becomes obvious to the participants. In this sense, we can see, in the majority of the cases, a noticeable effort of refusing a single kind of adequate motherhood, what constitutes a move of resistance to the prescriptions carried by the repertoire of traditional motherhood. One first group of women of our sample tries to circumvent this socially imposed positioning through strategies that attenuate the implication – PROFESSIONAL FULFILMENT → "BAD" MOTHER – and that, in a certain way, stretch the semiotic field GOOD MOTHER. One of the more frequent and elucidative strategies is the use of prescriptive macro-organizers that present the return to work not only as a personal aspiration, but also as an institutional imposition that they would in good will postpone. In these cases a very noticeable ambivalence between the two repertoires remains, given that this kind of semiotic construction make possible a circumvention of the emerging conflict but do not change the central meanings in focus or, in other words, they do not entail the obvious rejection of any of the repertoires.

The second group of women follows a positioning and meaning-making process considerably distinct, while they look for a position as "good" mothers through a manifest resistance to the implications derived from the repertoire of intensive motherhood and through a totally new semiotic construction of the field GOOD MOTHER. For these women, their professional fulfilment and success not only does not position them as "bad" mothers, but beside that makes her better mothers. Here we can see not only a stretching of the semiotic field GOOD MOTHER, but also

a entirely different attribution of meaning that results in the full inversion of traditional ideology.

This actually reveals, and in accordance with Potter and Wetherel (1987), a strategic and functional use of discourse in order to preserve personal goals in each interpersonal situation. However following distinct trajectories, all our interviewees make use of several strategies to maintain their personal values and goals, but at the same time without escaping the boundaries defined by social guidelines that they share to a more or less extent and that constitute the constraining limits of their process of meaning.

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