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## Women in the Work Place: Broadening the Discussion on Gender

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### Abstract

Discrimination in the work place based on gender has been the subject of various studies; however, these studies have not discussed the possibility of the existence of superimposed psychographic characteristics, which could weaken or strengthen this practice of discrimination. The research presented here, enlightened by the ontological premise of post-modern criticism, seeks to verify whether the discrimination of the female gender in the work place is an isolated social phenomenon or if it is intertwined with other types of discrimination. To this end, a field study took place from March, 2006 to July, 2008, in public and private companies. Thirty-three women and thirty-seven men of various ages, ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations were interviewed. The reports were transcribed and underwent discourse analysis. The field study revealed that: (a) women are, in fact, submitted to discriminatory practices in the work place, such practices which are not rarely hidden under a mask of humor and informality; (b) in spite of their macho attitudes and comments, the men who commit them don't perceive them as such; (c) Brazilian national culture prevails over organizational cultures; (d) gender cannot be treated as a fixed category since questions of esthetics, ethnic backgrounds, social class and sexual orientation accentuate the discrimination, and, finally; (e) contrary to what happens with blacks, ugly people, and homosexuals, towards whom discrimination is lighter when they occupy a more favorable social position or hierarchy, the same does not happen with women.

### Introduction

Social affiliations which are inherited and traditionally attributed to individuals as definitions of their identity, as ethnic background, gender, nationality and social class, are becoming more diluted (Bauman, 2005), and individualism increases to the degree that capitalism is crystallized as the predominant system regulating economic relations (Marcuse, 1973). Paradoxically, capitalism is responsible for making viable a space for the reflection of "I" (Silva, 2006) through the formation of collective social or union resistance movements which tried to establish a collective identity based on "us," which is dialectically opposed to "I." These collective political beings—workers, blacks, gays and women—which are the focus of this study, were formed on

the basis of alternatives, or the construction of the “other” as opposed to the “I” (Ricoeur, 1994), and are found in every social body, including work organizations. These organizations have been treated as antiseptic environments in which individuals relate in a functional and neutral way aiming for common economic goals (Irigaray, 2007). This functionalistic way of administrating neglects the fact that, in the same work place, there are individuals with distinct psychological backgrounds, genders, ages and lifestyles, who, in order to survive, many times keep quiet, hiding themselves under the cover of impersonal professionalism (Irigaray, 2007).

In the field of Organizational Studies, the diversity of the members of organizations has been analyzed through isolated prism: race or ethnic background (Alves, Galeao-Silva, 2004; Fleury, 2000), sight deficiency (Scott, 1964), facial deformities (Edwards; Watson, 1980), physical deficiency (Heinski, 2004, Carneiro; Ribeiro, 2008), sexual orientation (Irigaray, 2007); Siqueira, Ferreira; Zauli-Fellows, 2006) obesity (Homan *et al.*, 2001), mental deficiency (Foley, 1979) or gender (Carvalho; Carvalho; Santos, 2002; Tonelli, 2001; Betiol, 2000). On what pertains to women, the studies cited point out that, in fact, women are discriminated against in the work place. However, the research did not consider the possible existence of overlying psychological characteristics, which could lessen or accentuate, for example, discrimination based on gender.

As other studies in the area of Administration (Vergara; Irigaray, 2007; Tonelli, Alcadipani, 2001), this research is also enlightened by the ontological premise of post-modern criticism (Benhabib, 2002; Boje, 2001), which presumes the existence of multiple realities and parallel identities, superimposed and simultaneous (Baudrillard, 1968), which means that individuals are the result of multiple intersecting sources of identity. Empirically, there is evidence that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Irigaray, 2008), ethnic background (Santos, 2006) and ugliness (Ecco, 2007) polarizes and is weakened—or accentuated—depending on social class and job of the individuals discriminated against. As the aforementioned categories are socially constructed (Berger; Luckmann, 2004), in order to fill the social vacuum that may arise, it is important to highlight that our object of study is gender in the Brazilian society and the verification if discrimination against the female gender in the work place is an isolated social phenomenon or is it intertwined with other types of discrimination? In the attempt to answer this question an empirical research was developed, the course of which is explained here.

This study is organized in six parts, including this introduction. In this next part, the justification and limitations of the project are discussed. In the third, a review of the literature on the subject is presented to establish a theoretical background regarding this study: the nature of the relationship between masculine hegemony and the social construction of feminine identity, as well as the diversity of the genders in the work environment. In the fourth section, the methodological course is described; in the fifth, the field work is shown, and finally, in the last, conclusions obtained through the study are presented.

### **Justification for the study: understanding the Brazilian background**

At this moment in history, in which social relations are diluted and have become more unstable and changeable (Bauman, 2002), the discussion about identity should focus on this process of transformation. In this way, this research is relevant in that it approaches the question of gender, not in the traditional way, but through the point of view of the transitory, which is imposed over the permanent (Bauman, 2002).

Furthermore, in this research, upon analysis of the process of disqualification of women and of the multiple identities that are interposed with the gender, the recommendations of Correa and Carrieri (2005) are followed about the necessity of deepening the study of the correlation between relationships of power and work in the organizations. Their research indicated how work relations are degraded by gender inequality and sexist behavior.

Historically, women have been discriminated against in the Brazilian society. Their social role has mostly been limited to the domestic sphere (DaMatta, 1991), which is defined as a space of integration, where human relations are characterized by proximity, personalization and stability (Giasson, 1990). Socially, the domestic universe refers to family symbols, such as home, garden; whereas men are destined to public spaces, wars, weapons, machines, and fights (Yaguello, 2001). This social characterization of genders, which places men as the protagonists, has been reified in the labor relations.

Metaphorically, Brazilian women have reproduced Penelope’s life, in the *Odyssey*, written by Homer. Penelope waits and looks after the house, making Ulysses’ travels feasible. This sexual division of labor is one of the most resistant *topoi* of Brazilian society (Santos, 1997, p. 109).

Nevertheless, when Brazil entered WW II, women had to fill the gap left by the men in the workforce. They acquired some mobility, conquered the right to vote, to wear more comfortable clothes and, above all, self confidence. They advanced in their *transgression* in the 1980’s. The severe economic crisis that hit the country, made the unemployment rate among men skyrocket and, again, the women had to provide “the bread for the family”, becoming social entrepreneurs as artisans, embroiderers and even recycling garbage (Irigaray; Rocha-Pinto, 2006).

We borrow this expression transgression from Roberto DaMatta (1991, p. 137), who affirms that “only through transgression we can conceive social change”. According to this anthropologist, transformation, reform, and revolution may only take place in the public space; seldom in the domestic sphere, since home is “a place where time does not pass and history knocks on the door” (DaMatta, 1991, p. 114).

If the discrimination against women is explicit and – up to now – tolerated and not criminalized, the same does not happen toward racial issues. Racism is considered a severe crime by the Constitution; nevertheless, it is unstated. Historically, Brazil has been the purgatory for the whites, hell for the blacks, and heaven for the *mulatos* (light-brown skinned. In Portuguese, this word derives from mule, an hybrid animal used to transport heavy loads), according to Florestan Fernandes (1987). In terms of citizenship this means that, historically, the blacks have had only duties; the whites, all the privileges as long as they could maintain the *status quo*; and the *mulatos*, for living on the margins of the society, entitled to no social sanction whatsoever.

Culturally, Brazilians avoid any kind of conflict; generally, they adopt ambiguous behavior when facing a dilemma or issue. There is little distinction between public and private, duties and rights and, not rarely, humor is used to transvestite racism, homophobia, and sexism, which is the object of this research.

Although women have entered the productive system, they are still disqualified in the workplace (Betiol, 2001). This disqualification is reified by the invisible ceiling and salary inequality (Tonelli, 2001). It is not only the matter of excluding the women from the workforce (as it has been), but how they are inserted and treated inferiorly.

Therefore, we believe that, to understand discrimination based on gender in the work place—its causes, manifestations, and consequences – will contribute to the development of proposals by political organizations, which, effectively, could impede the instances, in this specific case, of moral harassment in firms (Heloani, 2004; Hirigoyen, 2002; Freitas, 2001), with the objective of minimizing the physical and moral pain inflicted on the victims. With Pauchant (2006) and others, it is believed that the administration of an organization should strive for the principals of ethics and social responsibility and not only for the plans to maximize profits at any cost.

## **Masculine Hegemony and the Social Formation of Feminine Identity**

Post-modern criticism borrows from Gramsci’s view of Marxism the concept of hegemony, or how the dominant class establishes and maintains its power and domination over the working class. This is done by persuading most of the population, through the media, organizations and institutions, as to the concepts of “normal,” “natural,” and “common.” The notion of masculinity was historically founded and associated with values as “courage,” “autonomy,” “ability,” “adventure,” and “group solidarity” (Carrigan, Cornell, Lee, 2002, p. 75). In this way, the concept of masculine hegemony resides in the way a group of particular men—white, heterosexual, and rich—take over privileged positions of wealth and power in a society and how they are able to reproduce, legitimately, the social relations that produce and secure their domination.

Masculine hegemony is imposed by violence, many times symbolic, mild, and insensitive and invisible to the victims themselves (Bourdieu, 2007), in that it produces pleasure and is perpetuated by purely symbolic means of communication and knowledge (Foucault, 1994), or, more precisely, as Bourdieu (2007, p. 8) points out, “from the lack of recognition, or recognition, in the last analysis, of the consent of the victims themselves.” The logic of masculine domination is manifested and goes beyond all social relations once it is in the name of a symbolic principal, which is recognized by the dominator as well as the dominated (Bourdieu, 2007). This power is exercised by a) the language and its uses (the way of speaking, expressions that are used, the use of gender); b) the crystallization of a way of thinking (men should be more objective than women); c) the way of speaking (men should be more silent); d) the imposition of a specific way of life (determining clothing, masculine colors and feminine colors) and, mainly, e) by body language (men should be more contained, use fewer gestures). Usually this kind of power is also manifested in sexual practices, since it is based on the premise that there is a fundamental division between masculine (active) and feminine (passive). This principle “creates, organizes, expresses and directs desires” (Boudieu, 2007, p. 31). While there is the masculine, erotic desire to possess and dominate, there is also the feminine desire for masculine domination, submitting women to an erotic subordination. In this way, sexual relations turn into social relations in which there is an erotic significance to domination.

The principle of inferiority and exclusion of women, ratified and amplified by the mythical-ritual system of society, is the source of fundamental imbalance between men and women in the area of symbolic exchanges, of relations of production and the reproduction of symbolic capital, for which the central mechanism is the marriage market, basis of the whole social order. Women can only be seen as objects, symbols, whose meaning is found outside of them and whose function is to contribute to the perpetuation or the increase of symbolic, sexually- based capital (Bourdieu, 2007). The home becomes the opposite pole of work (Tonelli, 2001). In this masculine world, women are educated to participate in the game of power struggle by proctor, in other words, through men (through marriage, for example) and are always put in an exterior, subordinate position. Their primary

function is to take care of the players: the men... This vision was explained by Kant (1964, p. 770) as, “women cannot personally defend their rights and civil functions; just as they do not make war: they can only do this by means of a representative.” Thus, different types of socialization predispose men to love power games, and women to love the men that play them. Masculine charisma is the charm of power, the seduction that having power has over bodies, whose own pulsations and whose desires are politically socialized (Pringle, 1988).

The formation of feminine identity has sometimes occurred under the irreconcilable confrontation of masculine vs. feminine, in which men are “the other” and, in spite of the feminist posture, inadvertently subjected women to the condition of “second sex.” (Beauvoir, 1995). On other occasions, women have not accepted that their sex, gender, is “second” and have argued that the sexes or genders are two, without a first or second (Irigaray, L., 1994). In fact to argue for women and feminine subjectivity from a political point of view means to recognize that they do not need (or even want) to be “the other” (masculine subject), for as Luce Irigaray (1994, p. 53) asserts: “the question of the other is badly interpreted in occidental tradition. The other is always the other of the same, the other of the subject itself and not another subject to itself reduced and on the same level.” This means that there still is not really an other for the philosophical subject, and more generally, for the cultural and political subject in this tradition. In conclusion, effectively, there is exploitation of women and this resides in the difference between the genders; thus, the problem should be resolved by considering the difference and not by abolishing it. This neo-feminist vision interprets and criticizes how the philosophical subject, which is historically masculine, reduced the other in a relationship with itself—a complement, projection, inversion, instrument, nature—inside his world, on his horizon (Irigaray, L., 1994). In the author’s view, as for Freud, as well as for other authors of diverse philosophical systems and who have greatly affected our tradition, “the other” is always “the same” and not a real other. These criticisms are based on sexuality, for which, generally, the identity of adolescent girls is interpreted to be in function of sexuality and of her identity of the adolescent boy, of the man. From this perspective, the birth of a boy child would be preferred to that of a girl-child. For years and even today, in some societies, a marriage is only considered successful and the woman only seen as a good wife, after she gives her husband a male child. To think of the man as the only subjective model, to which women should be equal and not recognize the differences, the fluid identities of individuals, is to limit oneself to an incorrect modern, Marxist paradigm, which advocates the existence of only one model of subjectivity, historically masculine. To get out of this all-powerful model of the one and its multiple, one should use the model of two, “a two that is not twice the same, not a large and a small, but two really different entities” (Irigaray, L., 1994). The paradigm of these two is based on the sexual difference, since that is where two subjects reside, which should not be seen in a hierarchical relationship since both sexes have the task of preserving the human race and developing a culture of respect for their differences. In this way, to place two in the place of one with sexual differences means, therefore, a philosophical change and political decisiveness, one which renounces the plurality of one being and sees two distinct beings, as fundamentally necessary to a new ontology, of a new ethic, of a new politics, in which the other is recognized as other and not as one in the same: bigger, smaller, but is which is seen as equal (Irizarry, L., 1994).

## **Women, Work Environment and Relations**

The studies about women and the work place (Carvel; Carvel; Santos, 2002; Silva, Vilas Boas; Briton, 2001; Tonally, 2001; Bettino, 2000; Machado, 1999; Bastes, Correa; Lira, 1998) have dedicated themselves to approach gender as a rigid social category. In spite of this limitation, such studies are fundamental to get an understanding of the question of gender in the study of organizations. This research reveals that, when compared to men, women show stronger double links with work, which means they demonstrate a larger compromise with the organization and with their profession (Bastos, Correa; Lira, 1998; Machado, 1999). Also detected in the study were the complaints, dissatisfactions, insecurities and anguish of women in what affects the environment and relations at work (Carvalho; Carvalho; Santos, 2002).

The studies performed show that women perceive themselves to be discriminated against in the following ways: a) the existence of barriers in relation to professional promotion and restrictions in relation to positions of responsibility in the firms (Betioli, 2000; Silva, Vilas Boas; Brito, 2001); b) a greater level of demands from superiors when they are married and have children (Oliveira; Oliveira; Dalfior, 2000); c) occupation of inferior hierarchical positions than men, even when they have better professional qualifications (Madruga *et al.*, 2001); d) macho behavior by bosses and co-workers (Vilas Boas, Paula Neta’ Barros, 2001) and, finally, e) imposition of a masculine model for speech and attitudes in order to get promoted or be successful professionally (Oliveira; Oliveira; Dalfior, 2000); Silva, Vilas Boas; Brito, 2001). Pertaining to private life, some women are disappointed because they feel belittled by their husbands and families, as well as for the difficulties imposed by the double work day (Paula Neto, Capelle; Vilas Boas, 2001), as such, at least, Brazilian women, targets of this study, continue fighting for their own professional recognition (Betioli; Tonelli, 1991; Boscarin; Grzybovski; Migott, 2001). In fact, discriminatory practices against women are characterized by moral harassment, by abusive behavior, by behavior, words, gesticulations or acts that can produce

damage to the personality, dignity, or physical and psychic integrity of a human being (Hirigoye, 2001). The abuse of power, done repeatedly and systematically, over a long period of time, makes for perverse practices in the work place (Hirigoyen, 2000; Barreto, 2002; Reitas, 2001), even when it is masked by tenderness and affection (Barreto, 2000).

## Methodological Approach

This study was enlightened by the ontological perspective of post-modern criticism (Boje, 1995), which analyzes society through a non-patriarchal view (Benhabib, 1992), which means it dislocates the focus of the discussion to other dimensions (equality, democracy and multiplicity), starting from the premise that there are multiple voices living multiple realities (Gergen, 1991). This research presupposes that the understanding of meaning of social action should start from the perspective of the subjects themselves, and not from the viewpoint of the researcher (Da Matta, 1979, p. 35). To this end, the study tried to borrow the viewpoints of the 33 women and 37 men interviewed between March of 2006 and July of 2007 in the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. They are members of state and private companies of various sectors and sizes. The average age of those interviewed is 34.8 years and they are from various ethnic groups and sexual orientations. The reports were transcribed and underwent discourse analysis to understand the body of social interactions of the participants; that is, different participants involved in some action in which there are active and passive roles (Charaudeau; Mainguenu, 2004). Throughout this study, the authors were conscious that this research strategy would not make them become neutral or autonomous; therefore, they tried to be impartial by being distant (strangers) from the object studied (bracketing), so they followed the orientation of Bourdieu (2007) to not confuse the subjectivity of the researcher (his or her value judgments) with the subjectivity of the objects of research (individuals, groups, socio-cultural systems). In this research, the interviewers kept in mind the considerations of Goldenberg (2000), by opting for a script compatible with a focused interview, semi-structured. The interviewed were, *a priori*, informed of the objective of the research and were guaranteed that the reports would be anonymous and confidential. The interview, *per se*, was structured in two parts: a) collection of categorical data regarding the interviewed subjects (gender, age, marital status, educational background, area of study, position in the firm) and b) a conversation about his/her life and work history, since this information was seen as a source that may bring to light new facts which could influence the theoretical aspects of the research (Cavedon; Ferraz, 2000), something that the background information or the official reports available from the written sources were not able to find, which allowed the researcher to have an idea of the process of that whom he/she was investigating (Becker, 1994). The life stories are composed of disconnected fragments (chaotic narratives), which are, many times, incoherent and ambiguous, but which irrefutably contribute to the total understanding (Vickers, 2005; Debert, 1986). Bourdieu (1999) also corroborates with the idea that through a life history the researchers can access the social structures and how they function, while the narratives of more personal difficulties, of tensions and contradictions, apparently more subjective, reveal more profound structures of the social world and its contradictions. This concept of practical analysis of resources (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 236) was extremely useful in the analysis of data gathered, as one of the interviewed subjects affirmed: “we live in a zone of conflict and social contradictions.” Practical analyzing resources are individuals who occupy unstable positions (the roles of mother, wife, and boss, for example) in which social structures are in action, and, for this reason, motivated by their contradictions, and are obliged, in order to live or survive, to practice a kind of self-analysis that, many times, gives access to objective contradictions of which they are victims and to the structures that restrict them.

Meetings were arranged in public places although all the conversations were private. They lasted an average of 75 minutes. The conversations, as well as field notes made before, during and after each meeting, were transcribed, which produced a document of 876 pages, 8” by 10” page size, typed in Times New Roman, size 12, single spaced. This data was submitted to discourse analysis, a method which not only captures the message, but also explores its meaning, the feeling behind it, what is said and how it is said, what is explicit and what is implicit, the language used in the speech and the importance given to it (Putnam; Fairhurst, 2001). Specifically, in this research, analysis of discourse was used to study the real use of the language, by real speakers, in real situations, and the language is considered to be anchored in a context and, therefore, capable of producing trans-phrasal units (VanDijk, 1993). By definition, trans-phrasal units are the result of a process of organizing texts on the basis of combining phrases (Stati, 1990), the analysis of which makes it possible to see their use for social, expressive and referential objectives (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 39). Given the volume of the text resulting from transcriptions and field notes, the suggestions of Santos (2002) were taken, in that Atlas/TI software was used to analyze the data collected.

## Results of field work: the male-centered logic

The speech of all the men interviewed was categorized based on language features, which showed that the question of diversity of gender had not gone unperceived in the work place. These individuals do not notice the incidents of discriminatory organizational practices and policies, or even the existence of chauvinistic speeches, even when they are pointed out.

(01) *Man, I am not chauvinistic. I really like sexy, perfumed women, but let's admit It's one thing to get a plane and take off with a sexy flight attendant and another to find out that the pilot is a woman (...) they [the women] don't even know how to drive, much less to pilot" [making the sign of the cross on the last word] (...) Women pilots must be like those unattractive women who make a big effort in college"*  
*[Fernando studies Engineering*

In this speech fragment (01), Fernando, a Financial Analyst from Sao Paulo, made a point of reaffirming his heterosexuality (“*I really like women*”) and made it clear that a woman is fundamentally recognized for her esthetic side (“*sexy*”). On the other hand, upon negating physical and manual skills (“*they don't know how to drive, much less pilot*”), masculine prerogatives (Carrigan, Cornell; Lee, 2002), the speaker, who says he is “not chauvinistic,” reproduces misogynist arguments which put down the intellectual capacity of women and limit the feminine access to social capital (Bourdieu, 2007). In this case, access to the College of Engineering is given to men based on their intelligence, but to women based on their effort. On the other hand, since women managed to be on the same level as men, they have lost their feminine attribute of beauty (“a bunch of unattractive women who make an effort”). Work as an airline pilot is reserved for men and women do lower jobs for which the basic qualification is the body (“*sexy flight attendants*”). Affirmations like those of Fernando (01) are repeated in other male speeches, which show that, independent of whether a woman is beautiful or ugly, she is, fundamentally, an object of discrimination because of her gender. We coded these fragments as physical features.

The internal logic of male discourse is built on the notion of alternatives (Ricoeur, 1994), the woman seen under the male-centered world view (Irigaray, L., 1994). The socio-affective interactions between the genders are impregnated by distance, equality, hierarchy, conniving and conflict between individuals, which became clear in the discourse of Edson ((02), Manager of Human Resources of an English multinational energy firm:

(02) *Here in the firm there is no discrimination, especially because it is a direct order from the head office (...) Men work here, but there are also women, blacks, handicapped, but no gays, that I know of (...) I don't see any problem in getting along or any discrimination, no (...) but differences are always there, right? You are a man, you know how women are, talking all the time, confused and fragile, not even able to go to the bathroom by themselves (...) So I said to her, PMS is nothing (...) PMS is cured by PD (Personnel Department), but I can't say that to my Director since she might send me to PD, especially if she is having one of those days."*

In this fragment of discourse (02), Edson reproduces the official discourse of the firm, which negates any type of discrimination inside the organization; on the other hand, he reveals his lack of agreement when he makes it clear that this situation is only because of a “*direct order from the headquarters*,” which makes this concession (“*even*”) to minorities. In his speech ((02), the Manager of Human Resources sees work as a dignified activity and exclusively reserved for white, heterosexual men, since the minorities are helpers in the productive process (“*but there are also women, blacks, handicapped, but no gays*”). It is important to point out that, of the eight managers and directors of this firm here in Brazil, there is no woman, black or handicapped person. Edson used a superior reference (“*you are a man, you know how women are*”) trying to put down the identity and autonomy of women. By classifying women as “talkers,” “confused” and “fragile,” he disqualifies, reinforces a hierarchy of values, which presume that attributes of “courage,” “autonomy,” “skill,” “adventure,” and “group solidarity” are prerogatives of men (Carrigan, Cornell; Lee, 2002). Ironically, one of these “masculine qualities,” that of group solidarity, is seen as a weakness when it is shown in the feminine world (“*they can't even go to the bathroom alone*”). As HR Manager, Edson explains that, in his view, women take advantage of PMS as an excuse to get out of work, which justifies firing them and, preferably, substituting them for men, since men don't have this problem. Because of a question of hierarchy, Edson would not confront his superior, but in his speech he makes it clear that, in spite of differing hierarchies, more important than being a director is the fact that she is a woman, which disqualifies her (“*especially if she is having one of those days*”). In essence, this speech fragment (03) reveals that even when one belongs to a superior social class or has a higher position in the organization, discrimination because of gender remains, is not lessened, as in the case of homosexuals (Irigaray, 2008) and blacks (Santos, 2006). This was also the object of the discourse of (03) Flavio, Senior Manager of Client Relations of a bank with headquarters in Sao Paulo.

(03) *(...) a bunch of hysterical (sic) women that are always in PMS [referring to the attendants at the call center]. This is a work place and not a place for affectations (...) These cleaning girls are also*

*always talking, one is always sick here, another one there; poor people are always sick. I can't afford to do this; I have to put the bread on the table."*

In the case of fragments of Flavio's speech (03), the features of gender are ignored and put down and words like "hysterical" and "affected" are used to refer to feminine emotional states during the tense, pre-menstrual period. Flavio makes clear in his speech (03) that the priority in the corporate environment is for men since they support families, which reflects a male-centered world. This vision is even more reinforced by the use of the word "girls" to refer to the workers in the cleaning sector since this chosen term denotes infantile qualities for these women. His speech (03) reveals that, as with discrimination based on ethnic differences (Santos, 2006) and sexual orientation (Irigaray, 2008), that based on gender is also accentuated by social questions ("*the cleaning girls are always talking*" and "*the poor are always sick*"). In the daily life of an organization, discrimination based on gender, as that based on ethnic background, sexual and religious orientation, is also masked by humor, as seen in discourse by Tadeu (04), a systems analyst of an American multinational in the Information sector of a Sao Paulo office.

*(04) The firm is very clear that here no prejudices can exist (,) but, of course, there are always jokes about fairies (gay men) going on, right? After all, these guys are really funny (...) of blacks, women, Jews and Portuguese too (...) it isn't prejudice; it's just humor. At the headquarters [in the U.S.] there is the politically correct talk; but this is Brazil, you know? We are upbeat and everything ends in a party. Do you think I am going to stop calling that lesbian in security, Dona Deise [character from a popular humor show on TV]? She knows it's a joke and doesn't even care. Anyway, she isn't even one of our workers; she is outsourced.*

This discourse fragment (04) shows that the firm does not accept prejudice but alludes to humor as not being a type of discrimination – against masculine homosexuals (invoked by the use of the word, "fairies"), negroes (choice of "black"), women (use of "woman"), Jews (use of "Jew"), and people with mental limitations (use of "Portuguese," an allusion to implicit low intelligence, as used)—by the use of the fragment, "it's just humor." This would contradict studies that treat humor as a form of showing discrimination (Irigaray, 2008), and it shows that the national culture superimposes that of organizations, ignoring some controls that might exist to halt discriminatory practices. Tadeu's speech reveals that discrimination based on gender is worsened by homosexual orientation, hierarchical position and organizational identity. The security agent was referred to by the pejorative word choice "butch," which was hidden under humor (calling her Dona Deise, a character from a popular TV program). At the least, women are disqualified by making them seem infantile and sexual. Throughout the interviews, systematically, women work colleagues were referred to using the diminutive form in Portuguese (Carlinha, Renatinha, Flavinha), while the men were called either by their surnames or by their own names, often augmented by using the "ao" in Portuguese (Serjao, Marcao). Those men who were referred to in the diminutive were very young, small in stature or had homosexual characteristics. It became clear that the use of the diminutive was reserved for individuals that did not have social capital or physical attributes that reflected masculine strength.

Masculine discourse showed how women in the work place, in spite of a neutral organizational discourse (Irigaray, 2007), are still perceived as sexual objects. On many occasions they were referred to by physical attributes ("*the sexy one on the eighth floor*," "*the big-breasted one in computers*") or by the way they dressed ("*they wear such small dresses with cleavages that we can't even concentrate*").

An attitude of belittling of women was also revealed in the narrative by Macedo (05) when he refers to the people for whom he is the boss. This person interviewed is Project Manager of an American multinational branch in Rio which works in the area of development of information management systems:

*(05) Everyone here is very good, and, in spite of all the pressure, manage their work well. Even Joana, a great manager, works like a man (...), works all night if she has to, in spite of her age. I've never seen her crying around that she has to go home (...) here there's no way things can't work. Felipe is a super-Director. He's the man."*

In this speech fragment (05), there are positive references to Joana's professional performance, since she doesn't behave as would be expected from the feminine sex, once more infantilized, which was clear by the choice of the verb, "crying around." This fragment shows that the view of the interviewed person, women do not have enough value to be considered competent professionals, especially in such a technical area. When women are recognized it is in a depreciative comparison to a man and as a special concession, as shown by the use of "even." The discourse of Macedo (05) makes it clear that, although Joana is his direct boss, he does not recognize her as being responsible for the success of the department. Felipe, the Director ("He's the

man.”), gets the merit. Also, discrimination because of sex is superimposed and worsened by discrimination because of age (“in spite of her age”).

In this study, there was evidence that the male-centered view that women are not autonomous, physically and numerically able and rational (Carrigan, Cornell; Lee, 2002; Bourdieu, 2007), is entrenched in Brazilian management. As in the speech of Macedo (05), this discriminatory posture is also present in speech by Tavares (06), Director of a Brazilian air transport firm in Sao Paulo.

*(06) “Here we respect all differences in spite of difficulties (...) It’s expensive having women as employees; they get married, have kids, are absent from work for four months (...) They like to stay home taking care of the family (...) but they and the gays, especially the young ones, are great in the call center and on board service; they were born for it.”*

The use of the phrase, “we respect all the differences, in spite of the difficulties,” clearly denotes how much the problems are related to the firm’s policy of no discrimination, which would be expected considering the delicate theme. The next parts of the same speech, however, show discrimination: “It’s expensive to have women as employees; they get married, have kids, are absent from work for four months,” is an explicit allusion to maternity leave and to the fact that women have double work, a central role in the local family structure (Betiol; Tonelli, 1991; Boscarin; Grzybovski, Migott, 2001). This part of the speech (06) denotes a view that women give priority to family life over a career, and that they are not compatible since the home is the “natural feminine environment” and that it is seen as an opposite pole to work (Tonelli, 2001). This speech (06) also reinforces the arguments of Bourdieu (2007), who sees the similarity of masculine homosexuals and women as male-centered hegemonic manifestations. This is extremely discriminatory in nature since it reserves for women and gays joint roles in the production of riches, that is, hierarchically inferior, and that denotes social discrimination. Besides, it shows the perseverance of macho discourse when credit is given for polish, communicative ability and rational incapability which are seen as feminine characteristics (“but they and the gays are great in the call centers and on board service; they were born for it) notably younger. The choice of the word, “younger,” suggests that Tavares is driven by instrumental logic, to use cheaper workers who have less experience. This speech fragment (06) also reveals that discrimination based on gender, as well as sexual orientation (Irigaray, 2008) is worsened by social conditions, which points to the use of young people as cheaper workers.

If the speeches of the men interviewed tend to mask masculine hegemony under a politically correct discourse and humor, how is this hegemony perceived and expressed by women? This is the object of discussion in the next section.

## **Field Search Report: identities and gender in the work place**

As in the masculine discourse, those of the women were also structured based on language features. However, those interviewed did not hesitate to explain their perception of being submitted to discriminatory practices in the society in general, including in the work environment. In these reports it was clear that what is seen by men as humor and informal, to the women it was masked moral harassment (Barreto, 2000), as shown by the discourse of Lucia (07).

*“(…) I am not some poor, unattractive woman (…) I am a pretty woman, graduated from the Federal University, with graduate study, have lived abroad and, even so, I have to be twice as good as any man who works with me (…) My salary is the same as a nobody from the suburbs raised at the end of any street (…) I get tired of being called “princess, doll, cookie (…) One of the guys keeps joking, is always saying that I don’t talk, but that I mew like a gentle cat” (07)*

The speech fragment from Lucia (07), a Market and Sales Analyst of an industry of hygiene products shows that she is the victim of moral harassment, given that she is exposed repeatedly and systematically (“always saying”) human and moral demeaning, in this case, masked under the guise of tenderness and informality (Barreto, 2000), who harms her psychic integrity (Hirigoyen, 2001), as seen by the use of the metaphor (“gentle cat, princess, doll, cookie”). This figurative language uses transfers to analogies, revealing the use of language and expressions as an instrument of reiteration and manipulation of masculine hegemony (Foucault, 1994), utilized by men to emphasize exclusively the physical attributes of women, which only exist and are seen to the degree that they satisfy masculine sexual desire and desire for possession and domination. This practice is also shown by the use of synecdoche (“don’t speak, I mew”). However, in her speech, (07) Lucia makes it clear that gender alone does not create a category of identification and solidarity, as she makes it clear that she is above other women, that she doesn’t correspond to the esthetic pattern as seen in inferior social classes (“I am not some poor, unattractive women”). In addition to this, as the more affluent homosexuals (Irigaray, 2008), in spite of feeling the pain of discrimination for gender (“I have to be twice as good as any man who works with me”), Lucia does not hesitate to reproduce the same behavior based on social parameters, since she believes it is inadmissible to have a colleague, who she puts down (explained by the word choice of

“suburban guy”), who has the same salary as her but who lives in the suburb and does not have graduate school from a first-rate university.

The organizations, in spite of their neutral and politically correct discourse, are accomplices in the daily practice of submitting women to an eroticized subordination in the work place. They set the stage for the alignment of the relations between genders, which are permanently redefined from conversational events, remodeled by external data, manipulated by shared signals and, in particular, by the game of certain pertinent units (the language characteristics themselves). In this way, a family-like relationship comes about (external data) which favors the production of confidence (outside data), which results in the installation of a (lack of) intimacy until then unknown by the speakers. This discrepancy between the organizational relations comes out in the speech of Renata (08), Financial analyst of a Spanish bank in Sao Paulo, in her report on interactions between her, her manager and her subordinates.

*(08) “I feel discriminated against even in the way the manager treats me (...) He speaks in a tone of voice that, I don’t know, in a more direct way with my male colleagues. Not with me; it seems like he treats me as if I were stupid, as if I didn’t speak the same language (...) the other day he was surprised because I understand financial mathematics profoundly. He said: not bad...without saying...for a woman or for a black (...) as I am the only woman in the group, they call me a mascot [pause] and notice that Chico came here after me and I am the only one for whom they use the diminutive: Renatinha here, Renatinha there (...) and I am the only black person on the whole floor, I feel that they look at me strangely, but they aren’t going to do anything, you know? It’s an unimaginable crime to ask me to happy hour, always with the comment: will your boyfriend let you go? They don’t seem to take me seriously. How can I make a career like this? I don’t think they would ever let me be a manager.”*

The speech fragment by Renata (08) shows that this person perceives a difference in treatment on behalf of the manager in his different posture and tone of voice, which reflect a lack of intimacy between the speakers (“as if I didn’t speak the same language”). Renata resents being treated like a child by the boss (“He speaks in a more direct way to my colleagues and by her work colleagues (to have the nickname of mascot, although she is not the newest one in the group and to be called always in the diminutive). This resentment is justified, as she is seen and treated as a child and faces a masculine model for getting promoted and having professional success, (Oliveira; Oliveira; Dalfior, 2000; Silva; Vilas Boas; Brito, 2001), which compromises her career and, consequently, is characterized as taking away social capital (Bourdieu, 2007). In this speech (08), it becomes implicit that discriminations are superposed for gender and ethnic background, perceived by the person interviewed, which characterize discrimination of the second degree, a social phenomenon that results in psychic overcharge (Irigaray, 2008). Even though there are laws and regulations that prohibit any type of discrimination, Renata perceives herself to be the target of negative, differentiated treatment (“the only woman in the group,” “the only black person on the floor”), which results in psychic overcharge (Pauchant, 2006).

In general, all of the women interviewed expressed hurt, anguish and disappointment for feeling devalued, not only in the work environment as Renata, but also by the family, especially husbands and children, who do not recognize the difficulties that they face because of the double work day. These results reinforce conclusions from former research (Paula Netto, Capelle; Vilas Boas, 2001, Betiol; Tonelli, 1991; Boscarin; Grzybovski; Migott, 2001). However, women, blacks, fat, ugly and poor people show much more anguish since they feel persecuted by men as well, by other women, even members of a subgroup minority; in other words, women who are fat discriminated against the poor; the poor discriminated against the ugly. This fragmentation of feminine identity led us to realize that gender cannot be treated as a “closed package,” for there are subcategories that, circumstantially, superimpose this category.

In this study, it was found that women who go up professionally fall back on the strategy to simulate masculine behavior (Bourdieu, 2007): they try to speak less and more directly, they a-sexualize themselves, dressing in suits and dark tones, and gesticulate less. However, some of those interviewed were suspicious of the efficiency of this strategy, as is evident in the discourse of Olivia (09) and Catarina (10).

*(09) “It’s funny how my colleagues at work treat me as if I were a man (...)It’s part of the game (...) Brazilian men are machos, no matter in what firm they work: Swedish, American, they say, in front of me that women are fragile, I don’t think it’s good (...) it doesn’t matter what I do, I feel that I will never be one of the boys, but I don’t care; they have to swallow that I am an engineer like them, project manager like them and, like it or not, many have to answer to me.”*

(10) *“(...) that’s why I have to dress like this...very formally. I always use grey or black...this suit gives a professional tone, makes them respect me (...) They look at me as a colleague and not like a woman (...) my clothes are sophisticated,, bought in New York, Paris, I never wear any Vila Romana.”*

The fragment of Olivia’s discourse (09) shows that, in fact, the national culture is predominant over the organizational culture and how the male-centered attitude causes suffering to this worker. She has her feminine identity negated (Irigaray, L., 1994) by being treated as a man. What could mean equality and equal standing with her colleagues is, in reality, the manifestation of a fundamental imbalance put between men and women in the area of symbolic exchanges. (Bourdieu, 2007), since even though she is “*treated as a man*,” she will never be one of them (“...*never be one of the boys*”). She will never have access to the social capital reserved for men. Olivia’s awareness is shown by the use of antonyms, or a syllogism, for which “*women are fragile, you are fragile*” is omitted. The shortened syllogism goes along with the politically correct rhetoric since it is less pedantic than the complete syllogism; however, its use supposes that the premise is easily recuperated, which is an offence to Olivia. In fact, this person interviewed expressed her dissatisfaction with the macho commentaries she is subjected to by using a prototypical pun (“*I don’t think this is good*”). The word she uses in Portuguese is “*legal*,” which can mean good or legal. The use of this expression reveals a paradox, since the real meaning of it should be recognized by those to whom it is directed (the work colleagues) and the literal value, which is not completely obliterated, implies possible procedures could be taken. Olivia’s speech (09) also brings us back to the discussion on how a higher social class can affect the discrimination based on ethnic background (Santos, 2006) and sexual orientation (Irigaray, 2008), but does not have the same effect for women since even though she is “an engineer” (used in the masculine form once again) and “project manager” as the men, she still perceives herself to be discriminated against. However, Catarina’s fragment (10) reveals that, given the impossibility of being seen in another way, she resigns herself to social practices that do not consider the differences. When she is treated and lets herself be treated as a man, she manages to survive in the daily chauvinism of the firm. Coherent with this, she adopts, in her own way, a formalism that she doesn’t like, which is shown by lexical selections “*I have to dress like this (...) this suit gives a professional tone, gets me respect (...) they see me as a colleague and not as a woman.*” In this way, in this case, the price of working in the firm and surviving the prejudices is to negate her own identity, which becomes built on a masculine basis (Beauvoir, 1995), and holds to the mainstream and its discriminatory practices. This behavior reveals an ego-distancing discrimination (Irigaray, 2008), which means that although she belongs to the feminine gender, she incorporates male-centered values and disqualifies herself and other women.

It would be a mistake to treat the identity formed from gender as a solid category. In fact, there is evidence that discrimination against women in the work place is accentuated by other psychographic data, as social class, esthetic appearance, religion and sexual orientation, which characterizes discrimination of second and third degrees. This new dimension of parallel, superposed and simultaneous identities (Baudrillard, 1968; Benhabib, 1992) was found in the speech fragments of Lucia (07), Renata (08), Olivia (09) and Catarina (10). This same idea was perceived by Simone, secretary to the General Planning Manager of a Swedish engineering firm in Sao Paulo; however, in her speech (11), she reveals another dimension to the feminine universe: marital status.

(11) *“For a woman to be seen as a good professional she has to be twice as good as men, even better, in my case, since I am blond (...), even worse, separated. Do you think there is no prejudice still? A separated woman is seen as easy prey for men and a secretary too? Men think we are almost call girls and women too. I have heard insinuations that I sleep with the boss.”*

The discourse fragment (11) points out the existence of a fourth degree of discrimination, by the fact that a woman is obliged to be “twice as good as a man”; is blond, which in Brazilian interpretation, is synonymous with a lack of intelligence; is separated, which means she is “easy prey for men,” all of this reinforces the evidence that, even in the “neutral” corporate world, women are viewed as essentially objects of masculine pleasure (Bourdieu, 2007; Pringle, 1998) or that they will always be looking for a man to validate their social role (Beauvoir, 1995; Irigaray, L.,1994). Simone’s speech (11) professional discrimination is also mentioned—on the part of women as well as men—by the fact that she is a secretary, a job seen as feminine because of its subservient nature (Bourdieu, 2007). In this research, and language discourse analysis—notably in the speeches of Eliane (12) and Patricia (13)—was a valuable instrument to “open the package” of gender categories as it validated the coexistence of feminine identity with others, simultaneously.

(12)...*“If I am discriminated against? I don’t really know; everything is relative. No one says anything in the open, but I look around and see that in the middle of a bunch of lawyers, there are only four girls (...) I come from a poor family, studied where I did because of a scholarship ( ) They looked at me strangely when they found out that I live in the suburbs; it seems to discredit me; other people feel sorry*

*for me (...) the girls don't call me to travel with them on the weekends (...) They comment that I should dress better, wear the brand names they use, but I have a family to support.*

*(13) "I do my job of manager (...) In a time of crisis, I fire people if I have to, even though the person is a woman and competent (...) These orders come from above."*

The fragment of Eliane's discourse (12) shows that she perceives the existence of discrimination based on gender in the Law Department where she works because of inequality between men and women who work there. Furthermore, Eliane also believes she is discriminated against socially and is belittled, even by the women because of her humble origin and place of residence. Eliane's narrative (12) as that of other women, uncovers that inside the group of women, there are differences based on social class, esthetic sense and sexual orientation. In the case of this speaker, she does not see herself as a member of the group ("They don't invite me to travel with them on the weekends") because she is not of the same social class ("I don't wear the same brands as they do"). As Eliane, Patricia is also a woman although her speech (13) uncovers that her organizational identity superimposes that of gender, leading us to infer that, in the work environment, there is not a sense of corporate loyalty among the women, which is shown by lexical selection of the concessive connector ("even so"). At the least, this research points out that gender—as ethnic background, social class and sexual orientation—does not make up a hermetic category that is in and of itself, or is only socially inherited and traditionally attributed to individuals as a definition of their identity (Bauman, 2005).

The diverse categories of identity interpose, superimpose and are diluted, which results in a dilemma for individuals since these identities come in the middle of a paradoxical relationship of inclusion/exclusion in a conflicting social space where there is a difficult negotiation between the place and the non-place, a parasitic place that lives with the very impossibility of stabilizing. This paradoxical state results in specific discourses that can only be authorized by itself (Charaudeau; Mainguenuau, 2004); if the speaker has a high position, he /she cannot speak in the name of some transcendence, but if he/she does not belong in some way to the social space, he/she cannot give an acceptable message.

### **In conclusion: discussing gender and discrimination in the work place**

Analysis of the data shows that the differences in gender do not go unnoticed in the organizational environment and that, in fact, as earlier studies point out (Betiol; Tonelli, 1991; Machado, 1999; Olliveira, Dalfior, 2000; (Carvalho; Carvalho; Santos, 2002), women are the target of discrimination in this social dimension. In spite of misogynistic attitudes and comments, men, most of the time, do not perceive them as such. This behavior, in general, is dressed up in speeches that, apparently, are politically correct, suavely declared, or hidden under the mask of humor, which shows that national Brazilian culture prevails over the organizational culture, even in European and North American firms. In fact, a contribution which is more relevant to this research in order to advance the discussion about discrimination based on gender in the work place, is the fact that it discussed gender, not as a solid category, since, as gender is intertwined with discriminatory processes based on esthetics, ethnic background, social class and sexual orientation, it is accentuated when the individual belongs to privileged social classes. The "package" is open. Effectively, these other psychographic traits serve as a basis of discrimination even among women. When compared with other types of discrimination, that based on gender seemed peculiar. As was suggested by research by Santos (2006) and Irigaray (2008), respectively, discrimination by gender is not lessened in any circumstance. Thus, women, even when rich, beautiful or in higher job positions, continue to be discriminated against by men, which is the central axis of the speech fragments (07), (09) and (10).

The implications of the present study are applicable to academic institutions, organizations and society in general. In relation to academic institutions, researchers should recognize the multiple identities that exist inside the apparently hermetic categories and, thus, to give voice to those who are silenced by social and organizational discourse. For firms, it is the role of the administrators to implement practices that, effectively, stop discriminatory acts and moral harassment at work. For society, it is hoped that there is recognition that there are still individuals whose citizenship is being taken away by social micro-practices.

Focusing on these implications seems to be an adequate suggestion for future research.

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