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The media idyll of contemporary motherhood/mothering: is being a mother still
the fulfillment of femininity?

O idílio midiático da maternidade/maternagem contemporâneas: ser-mãe ainda
é a realização do feminino?

L'idylle médiatique de la maternité contemporaine: être mère est-il encore
l'épanouissement du féminin ?

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ABSTRACT

The media was the communicative vehicle that grew the most during these decades, becoming dominant not only in the emission of news, but in the propagation of ideologies, beliefs, customs and values. At the same time, motherhood has been produced as the woman's goal, her life goal and that the meaning of her life is directly proportional to being a mother. However, it is observed that this aspect does not match the objective of all women. Thus, the general objective of this research was to understand the conception of women about motherhood beyond the media idyll present in contemporary times from the perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and as specific objectives: a) to know the conception of motherhood in contemporary media;

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b) to understand the impacts of the media on motherhood in women who are experiencing, have experienced or have not yet experienced motherhood; c) to develop material to subsidize the follow-up of women regarding motherhood. It is a study under the qualitative bias that used the phenomenological method of research in Psychology. The research instrument was the phenomenological interview that started from a guiding question, presenting its main developments. The analysis of the interviews was through the theoretical framework of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, elaborating two thematic categories: 1) The lived world in the maternal experience: and the *Lebenswelt* manifests itself; 2) Media and motherhood: idealizations and influences. Therefore, the pluridimensionality of the female gaze under motherhood, being a mother and being a woman in the contemporary media context was understood.

Keywords: Motherhood, mothering, contemporary media, being a mother, phenomenological method

RESUMO

A mídia foi o veículo comunicativo que mais cresceu durante essas décadas, tornando-se dominador não somente na emissão de notícias, mas na propagação de ideologias, crenças, costumes e valores. Contemporaneamente, a maternidade e a maternagem têm sido produzidas como o objetivo da mulher, sua meta de vida e que o sentido de sua vida é, diretamente, proporcional a ser

mãe. Entretanto, observa-se que este aspecto não condiz com o objetivo de todas as mulheres. Desse modo, o objetivo geral desta pesquisa foi compreender a concepção de mulheres sobre maternidade e maternagem para além do idílio midiático presente na contemporaneidade sob a ótica de Maurice Merleau-Ponty e como objetivos específicos: a) conhecer a concepção da maternidade e da maternagem na mídia contemporânea; b) compreender os impactos da mídia sobre a maternagem em mulheres que estão vivenciando, já vivenciaram ou ainda não vivenciaram a maternidade; c) elaborar material para subsidiar o acompanhamento a mulheres no que tange à maternagem e a maternidade. É um estudo sob o viés qualitativo que utilizou do método fenomenológico de pesquisa em Psicologia. O instrumento de pesquisa foi a entrevista fenomenológica que partiu de questão norteadora, apresentando seus principais desdobramentos. A análise das entrevistas foi através do referencial teórico de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, elaborando-se duas categorias temáticas: 1) **O mundo-vivido na experiência materna:** e o *Lebenswelt* se manifesta; 2) **Mídia, maternidade e maternagem:** idealizações e influências. Assim, compreendeu-se a pluridimensionalidade do olhar feminino sob a maternidade, maternagem, ser-mãe e ser-mulher no contexto midiático contemporâneo e as implicações aí presentes.

Palavras-chave: Maternidade, maternagem, mídia contemporânea, ser-mãe, método fenomenológico



RÉSUMÉ

Les médias ont été le moyen de communication qui s'est le plus développé au cours de ces décennies, devenant dominants non seulement dans la diffusion d'informations, mais aussi dans la propagation des idéologies, des croyances, des coutumes et des valeurs. À l'époque contemporaine, la maternité et le maternage ont été présentés comme l'objectif des femmes, leur but de vie et le sens de leur vie est directement proportionnel au fait d'être mère. Cependant, on constate que cet aspect ne correspond pas aux objectifs de toutes les femmes. Ainsi, l'objectif général de cette recherche était de comprendre la conception féminine de la maternité et du maternage au-delà de l'idylle médiatique présente à l'époque contemporaine du point de vue de Maurice Merleau-Ponty et comme objectifs spécifiques : a) comprendre la conception de la maternité et du maternage dans l'époque contemporaine médias; b) comprendre les impacts des médias sur la maternité chez les femmes qui vivent, ont déjà vécu ou n'ont pas encore vécu la maternité ; c) préparer du matériel pour soutenir le soutien aux femmes en matière de maternité et de maternité. Il s'agit d'une étude qualitative qui a utilisé la méthode de recherche phénoménologique en psychologie. L'instrument de recherche était l'entretien phénoménologique qui partait d'une question directrice, présentant ses principaux développements. Les entretiens ont été analysés à partir du cadre théorique de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, créant deux catégories thématiques : 1) Le monde vécu dans l'expérience maternelle : et le Lebenswelt se manifeste ; 2) Médias, maternité et maternage : idéalizations et influences. Ainsi, la pluridimensionnalité du regard féminin sur la maternité, le maternage, le fait d'être mère et d'être femme dans le contexte médiatique contemporain et les implications qui y sont présentes ont été comprises.

Mots-clés: Maternité, maternage, médias contemporains, être mère, méthode phénoménologique

Female empowerment in its multidimensionality has brought increasingly broader perspectives on being a woman in contemporary times. In this context, the fight for her right to be who she wants to be culminates in a series of new challenges and possibilities. However, despite the entire framework of acquired rights, a very dubious parameter still hangs over them regarding what is called fulfillment. The media, the various sociocultural and historical contexts still maintain a single bias for this fulfillment: being a mother! It is in this deviant view - if we can call it that - that this study seeks to question the veracity of the fact that the fulfillment of the feminine is directly proportional to being a mother. The female gender has been observed from a perspective that has been perceived as having been transgenerationally crossed since time immemorial, specifically, in the perspective of naturalization regarding the



concepts of motherhood and maternal care. To this end, it is necessary to carry out a historical review of women's place, their restlessness and desire to expand their skills beyond the family structure to which they belong, appropriating their intellectual capacities, expanding their roles as women and professionals in any areas of their choice and, even so, performing the role of mother in social and work contexts (Glitz & Fengler, 2018).

Reflecting from this perspective, we believe that in order to understand this study, we need to present some themes that, in our view, make up this process inherent to the woman X motherhood X mothering triduum. Going even beyond the philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective, we will seek to intertwine the relationship between the media's conception of the triduum presented above and the conception of women who have already experienced motherhood, those who are experiencing it and those who have not yet experienced motherhood and mothering. Conducting research that seeks to understand the vision of contemporary Amazonian women on the multidimensionality of being a woman gives us the perspective that, at the end of this study, we will be able to produce knowledge that allows us to take a broader and more truthful look at the phenomenon of being a woman and everything that is present therein; it means that we will be able, based on this understanding, to enable a redimensioning of women's view of themselves and, consequently, of the idyllic thinking elaborated by the consumer society in which we live and by the media framework that, most of the time, fosters and corroborates this view.

Regarding training in Psychology, mainly, it could result in discussions that foster a critical bias in the work of future psychologists in a way that they can touch on theoretical hermeticisms that keep women in a place far below their importance as beings-of-possibilities beyond constructs that minimize their value, beyond Manichean theorizations and without any legitimate foundations.

Thus, the following question is posed: “How does one reflect as a contemporary woman in the face of a media instrument that still propagates that the fulfillment of femininity is motherhood and mothering?”, in order to achieve the objective of this article: “To understand women’s conception of motherhood and mothering beyond the media idyll present in contemporary times from the perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty”.



Motherhood X Maternity

For some social segments, these two terms are confused, as if they were synonyms. However, this is not the case. Therefore, we need to be very clear in our minds about what one and the other are. During pregnancy, with the child in the womb, the feeling of being a mother begins to be more intense. However, the intensity and experience of motherhood are directly related to the influences that this woman suffers from her sociocultural and historical niche.

Therefore, when we talk about motherhood, we refer to the organic context, that is, the growth and development of the fetus, its genetic baggage and that it comes into the world, most of the time, at 9 months of gestation. Thus, there is an intercourse where there is a beginning, middle and end. This is the course of motherhood, how it occurs, whether natural birth, cesarean section, humanized or not, is what corresponds to the variation of the situation.

With regard to mothering, we are talking about the relationship established between mother and baby, the affective-emotional relationship, present from conception and observed in its magnitude at the birth of the fetus. Mothering is the quality of this relationship, the establishment of this bond, the welcoming of this baby, how affection and care are offered and how this mother meets the physical and, mainly, emotional needs of this child. Authors reveal how essential good mothering is for the healthy development of the child (Gradwohl, Osis & Makuch, 2014; Glitz & Fengler, 2018; Baluta & Moreira, 2018; Stellin, Monteiro, Albuquerque & Camara Marques, 2011).

The mothering perspective comes from Winnicott (1956/2000), who emphasized that maternal care for the child was not restricted only to meeting the baby's basic needs, but to a psychic availability, which the author calls mothering. Along the way, the image of women underwent a change, since motherhood became extremely valued and the care related to this activity became the exclusive responsibility of the mother, who was responsible for caring for and breastfeeding. This is how the much-vaunted maternal instinct emerged, emphasizing that motherhood was an innate female tendency, as was motherhood, because if only women could conceive, they were the most appropriate people to raise babies (Gradwohl, Osis & Makuch, 2014).



At the beginning of the 19th century, motherhood and motherhood were socially exalted. Women were given greater social value, resulting in their taking on responsibility for the home and the formation of new citizens. From that moment on, some women began to desire adjectives such as “mother-woman” and “queen of the home,” terms that brought respect to so-called modern women. Thus, the more responsibilities they took on within the home as mother and educator, the greater the status they acquired within a society that valued devotion and sacrifice for the benefit of the family and children.

The media and its conception of motherhood and mothering

With the advancement of technology in the 21st century, the media has been the communication vehicle that has grown the most during these decades, becoming dominant not only in the broadcasting of news, but in the propagation of ideologies, beliefs, customs and values. Thus, the connection between the media, motherhood and mothering is increasingly intrinsic, in which the indecent “offer of information products aimed at raising children signals communication processes as a privileged space for prescribing the procedures necessary for the adequate exercise of mothering” (Tomaz, 2015, p. 155).

According to Renata Tomaz (2015), radio and TV programs, blogs, specialized content portals, magazines, newspaper columns and manuals are some examples of communication media that help in the overwhelming female reality, in which women are bombarded, daily, with content interested in the “correct” social construction of motherhood and mothering. In particular, social media, since it is currently the most accessed media outlet in the world, becoming a powerful access channel for everyone to “like, comment and share”.

Motherhood has undergone a process of romanticization as a production of meaning, and this movement persists in the imagination - and consequently in the discourse - of the most diverse areas and media outlets, given that motherhood is a social condition. It is interesting to observe the representations of femininity in the Brazilian media, since women are naturalized in the condition of mother (Baluta; Moreira, 2018).



There is no doubt that there are countless women who are fulfilled with motherhood and have managed to overcome crises, personal and relational conflicts, showing us that maternal love exists. However, we cannot insist on the understanding that all women, when in the condition of mothers, love their children unconditionally and equally. We cannot simply believe in the discernment and false acceptance of women's ability to decide on motherhood, repeating the blessedness of the social role of being a mother and the primary responsibility for their children. This latter movement continues to be encouraged, induced and conditioned in new generations, explicitly or subliminally, through religious, cultural and consumer means, with the media fitting broadly into this latter meaning.

In this way, a sociocultural parameter is established that we need to discuss: if the media influences our way of being-in-the-world to such an extent, to what extent does what this mechanism produces influence women's view of motherhood and mothering, to such an extent that, often, most people are unable to dissociate or even understand the different dimensions present in the experience of this dyad.

Phenomenology of the Act: the body that experiences the world and interprets it

The term Phenomenology immediately brings to mind the search for a method that would bring such rigor that, *pari passu*, science could resize the production that came from it to the human being, that is, to “the things themselves”, as assumed by its synthesizer, Edmund Husserl.

For the Austrian mathematician, there would always be much more than imagined between zero and the number one. Thus, he sought to develop a method whose fundamental parameter was to return to the human being the scientific gaze from which it had distanced itself. For Husserl, in the face of the crises of European science, the most important thing is not the result itself, but the origin of scientific thought, focusing on human experience itself, the lived world or *Lebenswelt*.

A follower of the ideas of the master Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty elaborates phenomenological thought based on the constitution of the human being as an incarnate being, a being in the flesh. Thus, being embodied means understanding that as human beings, we are immersed in the world through the body that appropriates



and attributes meaning to this world. Melo (2020) corroborates this meaning by considering that it is man who makes the world world, as he signifies it through the act. Thus, any investigation we do on human existence must seek to reveal the nuances of the encounter between man and world. Therefore, man in a situation in the world is the phenomenon to be researched in his contact between organism and the environment, in the field, the act. And the body is the first place of this contact. Now, the body is whole, a person. And, in this way, there is only a person in the body that reveals itself before the other self through the act. The author also tells us that the act is perspective, an announcement, that is, motivated by and for the future that announces a project to be carried out (Melo, 2020). This leads us to reflect on the fact that Husserl makes the body the “original cradle” of all meaning, given that it is through it that consciousness can be conscious of something. After all, it would be a null result to think of spiritual reality, subject, and subjectivity without the body. The body is the stage for the meanings of human experience.

The body is an act. It is the experience of contact with the world. It is what gives meaning to experiences themselves. Merleau-Ponty (2011) brings us the perspective of perception beyond mere perception, designating perception as an element of the body. Thus, what do I perceive? How do I perceive? What is being perceived? Let us note that these are questions that launch us beyond the theoretical construct alone and exclusively.

It is in the experience of the body that motherhood and mothering coexist. Hence, we need to re-dimension our view of the maternal body, the mother's body, which is not just what culture has led us to believe. However, in order to understand the phenomena of motherhood and mothering, we need to delve into the theoretical structure of the French philosopher. Is the body an act or is it the act that designates the embodied?

Methodology

Study design

The methodology used in this study will be the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research concerns very specific aspects, focusing on a level of reality that cannot be quantified. In other words, it works with a “universe of meanings, motives,



aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes” (Minayo, 2015), associating itself with the deep space of relationships, processes and phenomena that cannot be reproduced by an interaction of variables. The qualitative approach immerses itself in the world of meanings and human relationships, with the central objective of understanding human reality, which contains beliefs, values, attitudes and habits. Meaning would be the central concept of this type of study, working with experiences and everyday life (Meira & Castro, 2023; Minayo, 2015; Giorgi & Sousa, 2010).

Method

The phenomenological method of research in Psychology, by Giorgi & Souza (2010), was used in this research, following the epistemological concept of intentional consciousness, which introduced some changes in relation to the philosophical method, so that it can be transported to the context of scientific research (Giorgi & Souza, 2010; Pereira & Castro, 2019; Castro, 2021).

Study location

The audio interview recorded by the Google Meet platform was carried out in the place where the participants felt most comfortable.

Research instrument

The phenomenological interview was used, where the fundamental criterion is, as far as possible, to obtain as detailed and concrete descriptions of the participants' experiences. The researchers verified the adequacy of the descriptions, ensuring that, from them, it was possible to generate different structures of psychological meanings, about the study topic. To this end, it became important to provide as specific and concrete a description as possible, related not so much or only to the rationalizations presented by the research participants, but to the embodied subjectivity, as it is experienced in everyday life (Giorgi & Souza, 2010; Pereira & Castro, 2019).

Acharán (2014) in his study reveals that the objective of a qualitative interview is to obtain descriptions of the experiential world, the interviewee's life world and their explanations of meanings about the phenomena described. Thus, the objective of a research and/or investigation interview, in the field of phenomenological investigation,



is to describe as completely as possible the participants' lived experience of a given phenomenon under study. The proposal in this study was to conduct audio-recorded interviews through the Google Meet digital platform, using a digital recorder with the participants and, subsequently, to transcribe them, so that the data could be analyzed.

The guiding question was: how do you understand motherhood and mothering? Main developments: how do you perceive the media's view of motherhood and mothering? To what extent has it influenced, influences or will it influence you about motherhood and mothering?

Procedures

The following aspects were considered: a) Presentation of the research objectives to some previously contacted women; b) request for indication of other possible participants; c) request for the acquiescence of the possible participants for their voluntary participation in the study; d) signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF) through Google Forms; e) beginning of the interviews after the research participants signed the FICF. The CEP's opinion received CAAE: 80215424.8.0000.5020 and was approved at the meeting on July 11, 2024.

Data analysis

The phenomenological-psychological method devised by Giorgi was chosen and has the aspects designated below. Amedeo Giorgi, following the same proposal of the phenomenological method of investigation in psychology, systematized a method consisting of a descriptive component, configured by four steps, explained below: 1st step) establish the meaning of the whole; 2nd step) Determination of the Parts: Division of the Units of Meaning; 3rd step) Transformation of the Units of Meaning into Expressions of Psychological Character; 4th step) Determination of the General Structure of Psychological Meanings.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

From this point on, as assumed in the perspective of data analysis, we present the Thematic Categories and their subcategories.



1. The lived world in the maternal experience: and the Lebenswelt manifests itself!

Entering motherhood and mothering, this woman launches into experiences that were previously unimaginable. In this way, her speeches brought her perspectives on motherhood X mothering, the difficulties inherent in the process of being a mother.

1.1 Motherhood versus Mothering: possibilities of understanding

Considering the perspective of the questioning carried out with the participants, it is still very present how much they are unable to establish the difference between the terms. Motherhood is the pregnancy period, per se; mothering corresponds to the view that this woman casts on herself, on life, on the world from the moment she becomes a mother. We could say that the first is totally organic, while the second is emotional, psychic.

Motherhood and mothering enrich each other

So, I think that motherhood, the motherhood I speak of in the broad sense, both physical and emotional, is a matter of giving. Wonder Woman (**Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024**)

Motherhood itself is all that bond we have with our child, and so on, and motherhood, is it better characterized as an attachment? Tiana (**Single, interview conducted on May 7, 2024**)

Look, these are things that could even be synonyms, right, but? They're not, right? Motherhood is the act of being a mother. Right? In my understanding, many times the act of being a mother does not lead the person to actually be a mother, right? The biological mother, motherhood. I understand it as the biological mother and motherhood I understand as care, love, affection, right? Everything, everything, all issues that go beyond a... uh, something physiological. Fiona (**Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024**)

Mothering goes far beyond the gestational process. It is the act of generating with the soul and the heart! It is such a profound experience between being-with-the-other that only those who experience it can attempt to describe such dedication and bond. The narratives told in the interviews with women who are mothers were told beyond words (Merleau-Ponty, 2014; Heidegger, 2015; Castro, 2021). When returning to the moment when their children were born, a movement that Heidegger (2015) will



define as temporality, it was observed that they felt, once again, the emotions that permeated their historicity. They were present, feeling in body, soul and spirit (Dupond, 2010; Frankl, 1984; 2021; Manganaro, 2016).

Castro (2021, p. 53) demonstrates how Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception (2011) conceives perceptive consciousness “as consciousness open to the world, because it is in the body”. That said, the magnitude of experiencing motherhood and mothering is in this body that perceives, feels, lives the experience (Castro, 2021; Merleau-Ponty, 2011; 2014; Dupond, 2010).

Donation

Initially, when we are going to have a child, we only give ourselves, we don't have that one... because, like, everything we do in our lives, we expect a return, right? So we work to get paid, we do something to get a return and motherhood, at least in this first moment, right? (laughter) It's just a donation that you do without expecting anything, you give your best without expecting anything in return, because the baby, the infant, the child, they still don't have any idea, right, of how much you sacrifice, that you, that you give of yourself. Donation like that is the word that comes to mind the most, is that clear? Wonder Woman **(Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)**

Reward

But like that (pause) there's no direct reward, right? But there's the issue of, even if the child doesn't know it, they're bringing you joy, they're giving you a smile that makes you happy and cheers you up and you see the child, and developing, growing well and whether you like it or not, if your child is doing well, you're doing well, and that's a reward (pause) there you have it, do you have a more specific question? Wonder Woman **(Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)**

Bond with her daughter

And I always say that xxxxxx she, she... I can use that word like that, it will sound a bit strong, but she saved my life because ever since she was born, it seems like I have the feeling that ever since she left my womb, it seems like a new woman also came out, you know? I have become a much more responsible person, much more human. Much more patient. That thing like that, you know?



She is my fuel for me to win, to wake up every day and go after my goals. Whenever I think about giving up on something, some project, I look at her and I see how much of an incredible child she is. And that gives me strength, you know? Rhaenyra (**Divorced, interview conducted on May 23, 2024**)

Life is permeated by meaning, and when experiencing something new, different from what was expected or believed, one realizes that new senses and meanings also end up emerging in the journey of contemporary women. Viktor Frankl (2022, p. 46-47) corroborates this perspective when he states that “life always offers a possibility of realizing meaning. Optionally, it always has a meaning. It would even be possible to say that human existence allows itself to be shaped with meaning ‘until the last breath’”. Therefore, from the range of senses and meanings collected, two subcategories were formed to explain the depth and scope that the theme possessed.

1.2 The multidimensionality of talking about Motherhood and Mothering: difficulties that generate a mix of emotions

One of the mothers mentioned the difficulties inherent to pregnancy initially, given that she was unable to achieve the much-desired status of being a mother due to problems at the organic level, having three pregnancies, two of which were interrupted. Wonder Woman's emotion when telling her story is clearly present in the exacerbated emotion when talking about being able to maintain a pregnancy.

I'm going to say it while crying anyway (tearful voice) (pause) I get emotional because, for me to have my son, I had a lot of difficulty getting pregnant. So before I got pregnant with Israel, which is my son's name, I had two miscarriages (pause) one ectopic pregnancy, I didn't know I was pregnant, I got sick and then I ended up in the hospital and they had to remove one of my tubes (pause) and another miscarriage, even though I already knew I was pregnant. Wonder Woman (**Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024**)

For young Tiana, just thinking and reflecting about becoming a mother one day triggered a series of anxieties due to the difficulties that motherhood and mothering entail in her reality.



So, I see motherhood as a very heavy place. A place that I may not see myself in for a long time, I don't see myself in without going through, without having a very well-established life and a very well-established psychological state, because all the situations that may arise due to motherhood, not just pregnancy and having a child, it's all that background, you know? I think it's very heavy, so I can't see myself in motherhood so well yet, I don't know if this thinking would change as the years go by, but that's how it is. Tiana (**Single, interview conducted on May 7, 2024**)

And what are these difficulties? Rhaenyra and Fiona share in their own unique way some fragments of an entire experience that is both unique and multidimensional for each woman who perceives herself and transforms herself as a mother.

When my mother had me, she had a lot of problems with stretch marks on her belly. And I took great care, I asked for, I remember that at the time I ordered oils, I even brought them from the United States. But it was no use, my belly was all marked. Now, yes, it is fading a little, I made a treatment plan too, but it still remains and there comes a time when you don't recognize yourself, when it seems like you are only a thing like that with a baby, that you know you have to protect [...] I think that motherhood, it is something like that, painful, let's say, it is painful, well, in the sense that you give up many things in your life. You go through a lot of pain that only you know, that pressure, you know? I know that too, that not every woman will have this pressure, but I have a lot. I worry a lot about her, about her future. I don't think it's good for people to idealize motherhood because it's a very painful thing. That first year, the first 3 months of the baby, you don't live it, you just exist, and it's painful. My breasts hurt, I had a lot of fever because my breasts were cracking and I couldn't and I didn't know how to breastfeed, so I was always very alone with xxxxxx. And I confess that sometimes I wanted to disappear, at the same time that I wanted to put her in the suitcase and run away with me, you know? It's a mix of very strong feelings that if you don't have good mental health, you end up going crazy. Because of everything, because of pressure, because of this competition that I'm talking about between people who are really close to you. Rhaenyra (**Divorced, interview conducted on May 23, 2024**)



In motherhood... being a mother is very difficult, regardless of whether or not you take on this role, because, the reality today... Today... We, as women, need to contribute to the family income, we need to leave home to work, we face a huge challenge, because when we were given the opportunity to work outside the home, to make our dreams come true and contribute, to be a breadwinner for the family or, often, to be that breadwinner, certain obligations were not taken away from us, but rather added to them. So, even if you are not the person raising the person, who is with this child, the process of giving birth to him or her is complicated. The pain and anguish, the fears, the frustrations. So, all of this impacts the woman in some way. And I'm not talking about a problematic pregnancy. I'm talking about a normal pregnancy, right? Just a normal pregnancy cycle. Fiona (**Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024**)

Given so many facets, it is easy to understand the vast array of realities that affect motherhood in a painful way. The arduous difficulties presented in each mother's story, whether socio-historical, political, economic, or cultural adversities (Bernardino, 2021), or changes in the body, deprivation, relationship crises, helplessness, abandonment, loneliness, impasses, external and internal pressures (Castro, 2021), demonstrate the challenges that motherhood faces and that little is embraced, welcomed, listened to, or cared for.

Women are seen as caregivers of everything and everyone, and in contemporary times, it is noted that more tasks are being assigned to them. So, how can they cope? How could younger women aspire to and share the same desires and yearnings as the generations before them? How could women maintain the feminine ideal? Rooted not only by ancient patriarchal Western civilizations (Bernardino, 2021), but also by the new era of technology (Silva; Japur & Penaforte, 2020).

1.3 Being a mother: a journey full of uncertainties

Questioning a woman who is already a mother and pregnant, again, and a single woman, shows us that the conceptions about being a mother are almost antagonistic. While the first, married, is concerned with giving autonomy to her already born child and the one to be born, avoiding putting her children in what she calls emotional dependence, the second, in turn, sees the possibility of being a mother as an



equidistant, heavy experience that, in her speech, makes clear, requires structure in terms of both financial and psychological aspects. So my son, and I believe that the other one that will be born will be like that too, you know, I try to give him as much attention and affection as I can, I don't, I don't think so, I don't want my son to be emotionally dependent on me, although I know that a child can be dependent, "right?", a baby, a child is dependent on its parents, but I try not to raise him in a way that he becomes dependent like "oh I only want to play if I'm near my mother" like that, you know [...] I try to balance it out, give him the emotional support he needs but without creating an emotional dependence, because I know that one day he will grow up, he will leave, he will have a family and he will not want to know about me anymore (laughs). Wonder Woman (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

I see myself wanting and trying to be a mother only when I really... when I leave home, when I am one hundred percent stable, not only financially, but in all aspects, both with my partner, with myself, with my own home, in short, being stable in life, because I don't know how my mother would react. I think she would react very differently if I became a mother while, for example, under her roof; and if I became a mother already, with me dealing with a life. Tiana (Single, interview conducted on May 7, 2024)

Theory, hypotheses and speculations, in theory, prepare for practice, but being a mother reveals how the experience goes far beyond all expectations. It is the journey of constant uncertainties that constitute each one as a mother and a woman (Castro, 2021). And it's incredible, since I found out I was pregnant, we sometimes think that "Oh, there's a manual on how to be a mother", right? But there's no manual on how to be a mother. I think that's something that changes inside us. Rhaenyra (Divorced, interview conducted on May 23, 2024)

Many times, you forget about yourself for the sake of your child and many times, many times you stop feeling your pain, you actually cancel out your pain to take care of your child. And then I think the challenges are very big, I think that being a mother in fact, being a present mother, being a mother is living. Fiona (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

Experiencing motherhood and mothering was unique, because, in line with these phenomena, new perspectives, possibilities, potentialities, knowledge, senses



and meanings are born together with the baby, understanding that the woman feels as if she were being reborn, since a new fragment of her emerges, which is being a mother. However, this fraction manages to encompass her entirely, changing everything, like a space-time milestone in her historicity: before being a mother/after being a mother.

It is worth noting that the new is uncertain, so there was not and there is no way to make the acceptance of being a mother as a synonym for utopian happiness in this research, on the contrary. The sensation and perception that the body experiences of being reborn when a woman becomes a mother is something magnificent and immeasurable, worthy and valid of listening, acceptance and care (Castro, 2021), as it is permeated by profound affects, transformations and experiences, which go far beyond the contemporary ideals that will be discussed in the next category on being a woman and being a mother.

2. Media, motherhood and mothering: idealizations and influences

The media configuration has provided countless conceptions about the most varied themes, among them, the idealization of the feminine, and, in this specific case, motherhood and mothering, in an attempt to substantiate an almost exemplary vision of the feminine, launching and proposing perspectives that the participants of this study bring as influences.

2.1 The perspective on the Media and the feminine ideal

With the accelerated expansion of the internet and its means of communication, intelligence and technology, a contradiction has been observed in contemporary relationships: how much face-to-face relationships are separated and how much long-distance relationships are increasingly closer and, consequently, flourishing, but volatile. Zygmunt Bauman (2001, p. 7) explains that “these are reasons to consider ‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’ as appropriate metaphors when we want to capture the nature of the present phase, new in many ways, in the history of modernity. [...] In other words, has modernity not been ‘fluid’ since its conception?”.

Based on Bauman’s (2001) question, how can we describe such a phenomenon that was born in modernity but is perpetuated daily in contemporary times? Silva, Japur



& Penaforte (2020, p. 2) in their integrative literature review reached the following results:

Social factors are closely related to body dissatisfaction, with emphasis on the influence of the media, which is considered one of the main risk factors for this dissatisfaction (Conti, et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 1999). Mass media, such as magazines, television and the internet, are permeated with images of idealized, thin, delicate and shapely bodies, which generate comparisons of appearance and interfere with the perception we build of our own body and, consequently, contribute to the dissatisfaction we have with it. These images can also promote unattainable ideals of beauty, since they are very different from the bodies of the majority of the population (Marcuzzo et al., 2012; Campos et al., 2016; Derenne & Beresin, 2006).

Bernardino (2021, p. 48) explains that “being the ‘second sex’ places women under a bodily alienation, affirmed by the cultural set and which deteriorates their subjectivity”. Thus, women are forced into a social structure that objectifies their bodies and establishes that their bodily experience is not of a body, but of a thing, being inhibited by a set of elements and social relations, which limit their potentialities and possibilities (Bernardino, 2021).

From this perspective, being a woman is seen as coexisting with the main bias linked to it: that of being a man’s wife and, later, of being a mother to his children. And such an imposition cannot be elaborated in any way, it is necessary to be the perfect mother and woman: this is the feminine ideal! This perspective has permeated the constitution of human civilizations for millennia, however, with the emergence of the fourth media power, such duties began to trigger new phenomena, which Tiana, Rhaenyra and Fiona experience and share, even at different ages and in different contexts.

The media's view, nowadays we have TikTok, right? Everyone has it, everyone is addicted, and TikTok has this niche of motherhood and many people I've seen that I accidentally end up following as well, it's a very romanticized motherhood in a way that I personally don't think is very cool, romanticizing motherhood which is such a painful process for so many mothers, so many women, romanticizing it in a way that shows it very easily as if certain problems only happen to someone who is very unlucky, for example [...] I saw a video of a



woman in which she said that there are women who weren't born to be mothers, and that all the problems she pointed out, of women who "didn't deserve to be mothers" in quotes, were real motherhood problems and not a 100% fantasized motherhood like hers was, so this media's view of always romanticizing and saying "no, it's not hard, you really have to put up with it because if you're very tired, it's a problem, if you're feeling being overwhelmed is a problem, you can't cry, you have to do everything, you have to drop everything to take care of your child" because that's kind of what happens because most women don't have that support from their family members, from their own partners, so I think the media's view is a very distorted view of reality, I don't think it's a view that helps many women unfortunately but that's the view of the mass media. Tiana (Single, interview conducted on May 7, 2024)

I have my financial business online, so I'm very present. I remember I followed it a lot when I was pregnant. I was super committed to motherhood, right? Sometimes I would even punish myself there, my God, how can I not be so perfect? How can I not see the light of day? And when in fact, behind my back there was a nanny, there was someone. And I was very alone, right? Her father is in the military. He was away for a long time, I was alone with her for a long time. My mother helped me like that, but I also ended up not demanding much from my mother, because I knew she had her things and I was alone and I, my God, the woman wakes up with beautiful hair and I don't know, at noon, and I hadn't even managed to brush my teeth, because I had to do things, you know? You get into that mental competition like that, with a person who doesn't even know you exist. Rhaenyra (Divorced, interview conducted on May 23, 2024)

Yes, well, first of all, women are already under pressure. There is a traditional structure of marriage, of procreation, right? And, once again, right? When she wants to achieve her goals, she has to take care of all of this and more. And stay beautiful and keep her hair dyed, her nails done, and stay happy. An illusory happiness, right? Fiona (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

It is therefore understandable that the media has a powerful influence on the lives of contemporary beings, especially on the existence of women, whether they are mothers or not, regardless of age group, since Tiana is 19 years old; Rhaenyra is 33



years old; Fiona is 41 years old. Such intervention in the lives of these women proved to be full of illusions and distorted ideals, reinforcing what Silva, Japur & Penaforte (2020) found in their research, such as how body dissatisfaction caused by the media, especially social networks, “can trigger physical and psychological illnesses, such as the development of eating disorders, depression, low self-esteem, social comparison, anxiety, an increase in cosmetic plastic surgeries and a decrease in quality of life” (Souza & Alvarenga, 2016, p 2).

So, what influences are being formed through the media and how is it influencing the lives of women in the context of motherhood and mothering, but also of women who may or may not be included in it in the future? To discuss these issues, the following two subcategories were developed.

2.2 Influences

One of the aspects brought up by the excerpts from the participants' speeches is that which concerns the influences observed by each of them regarding motherhood and mothering. It is clear that there is a mix of perspectives, as can be seen in the following statements:

The certainty

I think that the media definitely influences, but whether it is “for the good” or “for the bad” depends, but I think it definitely influences. [...] I can say that yes, it influences me positively, because it broadens your knowledge, right? Because I am in a place here where I don't know anyone and I don't talk to many people, so the information I have is basically what I research, what I look for, so that is what influences me a lot. Wonder Woman (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

The paradoxes

I think it will influence me in a way that I won't have that desire for motherhood, to be a mother, like in my twenties and early twenties... I think it has an influence in a way that is something that I won't be able to go through, for example, so I think that probably from so much that I've seen, from being bombarded with so much content in different ways, whether positive or negative, it influences me to see that this is not for me, at least not yet [...] So I think it causes an overload in



addition to motherhood itself, there is also the media, which causes exhaustion from comparing, a lot of comparisons like "why is it so hard for me and motherhood is so easy for this person? It's so beautiful, everything is so problem-free, and mine is so tired, I wasn't born to be a mother, I'm a terrible mother?", so I think there are these two extremes that affect both the good and the bad, and that's it. Tiana (Single, interview conducted on May 7, 2024)

Look at social media, it's a double-edged sword, right? Eh, is it necessary to have one? Ah, a very balanced measure for using it, right? [...] Eh, the exposure, right? Of this motherhood, it, in some way, is both harmful and beneficial. Fiona (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

A complex connection

There are some profiles that they idealize a lot as that very beautiful thing. For example, I don't even follow them much, but every now and then I follow a blogger from Manaus who has a child, and then another, she had one child after another. There is also another blogger who recently had a child and is pregnant again. And sometimes the internet makes things dangerous because of that, because there are parents who can't be around their children, there are parents who work and so on, but I also realize that nowadays, I know this because there are cases in families, of parents who are with their children 24 hours a day, but only in person. But they're always on their cell phones and so on, and the child is dying and you're there posting "I love you my son", a beautiful photo of the child and the child there, for the love of God, pays attention to me here, something, right? I think there's a lot of that and then you see that the internet connects people from different social classes, so I think that people who don't have the legal understanding will think it's okay to have one child after another and everything, when sometimes their bodies aren't even prepared for it. They have a follow-up with 1,000 doctors, right? Do they have an obstetrician? Yes. Nutritionists have, I don't know, a network of professionals ready to serve these bloggers, these people who have, you know, a good financial situation. And a person from the lower or middle class is not, let's say, even from the upper middle class, but a person from the middle class, they do not have this condition. We know how dangerous it is, and how delicate our body becomes after



pregnancy, and it took me, I don't know, about 2 years for my body to return to normal. Rhaenyra (Divorced, interview conducted on May 23, 2024)

Heidegger (2015) understands that Dasein is a being-thrown-into-the-world, subject to the facticities inherent in the daily journey through life. What does this represent in relation to these women? That the media continually brings information that, as we can see in their statements, is extremely influential in several aspects. So much so that they consider the information, at times, paradoxical and conducive to existential disagreements, resulting in a look of distrust regarding what is brought, mainly, by social networks. Bonow et al (2021) show how media plurality in mothers' views on motherhood during the pandemic, in which they allude to the fact that many women are unable to perceive the various dimensions of being a mother, due to what the media exposed as the most correct, that is, the view of these women about themselves, about who they have become and, mainly about who they are becoming as mothers, goes through differentiations based on what the media structure in which they live brings as the "correct", "right" of motherhood. Corroborating this aspect, Castro (2021) understands how the way I look at myself can suffer harsh attacks from the outside, providing a way of looking at myself from a distorted perspective.

2.3 Modes of influence

As we saw in the previous subcategory, the influence of the media permeates the daily lives of these women, those who have already experienced motherhood and those who have not yet experienced this phase. The ways in which influence is experienced are brought by these women from consistent and differentiated points of view:

Under information, pressure through no's

In basic things like that, basic things, in a matter of a "little pain" that you don't know what it could be, a tantrum that your child throws and starts crying like crazy, "should I kill you or should I give you a cuddle, should I give you a hug?" (laughs), you don't know what to do, "right?" because if my mother were to do a show like that she would hit me, but like that we try to be better, we don't hit you the first time, we try. So these things help a lot, you know, and you see, this information helps us to think a little, to think before acting in any way that could



make us explode because, when we become a mother and the child does something, like without any idea, we explode with anger but, like, it's an anger that we're feeling that we want to, let's say, express, like, when you hit, it's not because the child deserves to be "beaten" it's because you want to explode, you know? You want to hit to feel relieved of that pressure that you have, you know? Wonder Woman (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

The information that results in tiredness and exhaustion from the possibility of being wrong

Most of the things I see on TikTok, because there is a lot of cool content about motherhood too, a lot talking about positive education and everything, but I really find most of this content a bit problematic, because it affects women whether they want it or not and I think it does, a lot, it really does affect a lot and that's it [...] the media is increasingly inflated with things and opinions, so I think it would influence [...] I think the media has a positive effect on motherhood, for example, in the motherhood niche, I think it's much better to have a lot of content like this, you know, because whether they like it or not, mothers sometimes look up to each other, they see a good way, another way of dealing with certain situations, and they see that they are not going through it alone and that there are other mothers going through it too... forms of education, which are a lot on the Internet today, advice, videos that show a certain real motherhood too, so I think it's really cool that everything is shared so much [...] But there is also a side that I think it negatively affects the romanticization of motherhood. Imagine, a mother who is completely tired, exhausted, worn out, watching a video on the Internet of a mother who says that everything is fine and that she absolutely cannot, absolutely cannot, for example, be rude to her children. Not that being rude is something plausible, but sometimes, certain human relationships happen and when we expose so much that certain things are not allowed, that are forbidden, especially in motherhood, which is such a difficult environment for women, it ends up being labeled as wrong, as if everything you are doing is wrong, regardless of how tired and exhausted you are, you have to put up with it. Tiana (Single, interview conducted on May 7, 2024)

The massification of motherhood and mothering



Her daughter, like, xxxxxx and her daughter, they were months apart. Her daughter was a little older, so I ended up adopting a lot of the things she introduced during the introduction of food, that part of weaning, that she gave me some tips on. So it was good on the positive side, because as you said, there wasn't that much of a massification of social media, it wasn't that much back then. There was, but not that much, today I see that it's a very dangerous thing. I'm even writing an article about this, about parents who expose their children on social media, right? So I, I was very worried about it, but at the time for me it was positive. It wasn't that negative, no [...] Sometimes I even feel a little bad, but she likes this routine. Rhaenyra (Divorced, interview conducted on May 23, 2024)

Production of anxiety-provoking situations

15 years ago, well, social media wasn't so, it wasn't that strong. And during my pregnancy I had some health problems. And today, if it were in today's reality, I, I, I would get better information support to deal with that to, uh, take care of that critical stage. Why? Because access today is a lot, it's very easy. You have access to information, you have a support group, you can ask questions, uh, with everyone, but at the same time, when this is excessive, it starts to make you anxious. Fiona (Married, interview conducted on May 21, 2024)

Fabris-Zavaglia, Vinsintin & Aiello-Vaisberg (2022) reveal in their study that in contemporary times, supported by the immediacy of information, that is, the

Fabris-Zavaglia, Vinsintin & Aiello-Vaisberg (2022) reveal in their study that in contemporary times, supported by the immediacy of information, that is, by the media, childhood is the sole responsibility of the mother, thus generating a series of consequences in the existence of these women.

Nunes, Deslandes & Jannotti (2020), when researching the motherhood and mothering of imprisoned women, found that prison rules and care standards are in tension and converge in a dynamic that seeks to benefit the baby, while still punishing the woman. In this way, the experience of mothering in prison acts as a way of reaffirming a gender morality, defined in the role of a good mother, an element largely produced by the media. In the study on motherhood with multiparous women, Silva, Pereira & Rodrigues (2022) confirmed the results observed in self-report research,



indicating that previous experience of motherhood favors more effective responses both at the beginning of the interaction and at resumption. Since motherhood is a learned behavior, other family members can also develop caring behaviors, sharing the joy and responsibility of parental care. In this specific case, this contrasts with what the media brings as a value judgment, in the sense that it is only up to women to take responsibility for the child's growth and development. Heidegger (2015) draws our attention to the fact that, as beings-in-the-world, we are led to exercise authenticity, when it is necessary to be careful with what is proposed by the social environment - here, the media - and, therefore, we should not allow ourselves to be led by the bias of the influences suffered, which is fully brought out by the statements of the participants in this study.

Final considerations

Motherhood and motherhood are experienced and perceived as a painful experience, full of difficulties, uncertainties, pressures, judgments, abandonment, sadness, etc., but also of joy, new transformations, discoveries, possibilities, potentialities, perspectives, knowledge, senses, meanings and sensations. Regardless of whether it is good or bad, it is understood that being a mother is a unique experience! Even with studies and preparation, the woman who perceives herself as a mother could never measure the multidimensionality of the experience itself.

When a woman becomes a mother, she is reborn, because something new, far beyond what she imagined, is placed in her path, moving her to constitute herself as a new person. Thus, being a mother has shown itself to be a mystery that continually leads to the search for its discovery, or rather, unveiling. Because it is a unique experience for each woman, many of them, especially the younger ones, no longer aspire to be mothers as they did in past decades, due to the realities that affect them in contemporary times.

The research concluded that women's perspective on the subject is multidimensional, highlighting that, even with the powerful influences of the media idyll of motherhood and mothering, being a mother is no longer the fulfillment of femininity, but rather a fragment of being a woman, if she wants to be, and is no longer an obligation, or rather, the feminine ideal seen and accepted by contemporary women.



However, it was observed that this phenomenon was born with the endless struggles for the rights and dignity of the female gender, that is, it presents itself as a contemporary movement that will still undergo media, social, historical, cultural, political and economic repression, since distortions and idealizations are quite real in the lived world of women, who live, perceive, feel and understand through their corporealities.

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