

UNIVERSITY AND GENDER RELATIONS: NARRATIVES ABOUT FEMININITIES  
AND MASCULINITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*UNIVERSIDADE E RELAÇÕES DE GÊNERO: NARRATIVAS SOBRE  
FEMINILIDADES E MASCULINIDADES NA EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR*

*UNIVERSIDAD Y RELACIONES DE GÉNERO: NARRATIVAS SOBRE  
FEMINIDADES Y MASCULINIDADES EN LA ENSEÑANZA SUPERIOR*



José Raimundo da SILVA JÚNIOR<sup>1</sup>  
e-mail: jose.raimundojr@upe.br



Fernando da Silva CARDOSO<sup>2</sup>  
e-mail: fernando.cardoso@upe.br



Mário de Faria CARVALHO<sup>3</sup>  
e-mail: mario.fcarvalho@ufpe.br

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**Deputy Executive Editor:** Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

<sup>1</sup> University of Pernambuco (UPE), Petrolina – PE – Brazil. Master's in Education in the Postgraduate Program in Teacher Training and Interdisciplinary Practices (UPE).

<sup>2</sup> University of Pernambuco (UPE), Arcoverde – PE – Brazil. Professor at the Department of Law (UPE) and the Postgraduate Program in Teacher Training and Interdisciplinary Practices (UPE). PhD in Law (PUC-Rio).

<sup>3</sup> Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Caruaru – PE – Brazil. Professor at the Department of Design and Communication (UFPE) and the Postgraduate Program in Contemporary Education (UFPE). PhD in Social Sciences (UNRD, France).

**ABSTRACT:** The present study problematizes gender relations in Higher Education from the dichotomies between femininities and masculinities. Of qualitative approach, the production of narratives occurred through semi-structured individual interviews in three undergraduate courses at the University of Pernambuco, Petrolina Campus: Full Degree in Pedagogy, Full Degree in Mathematics and Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. In general, the production of data from the research points to the dissonances and processes of exclusion that cross the institutional daily life, the teaching and the curricula of the courses studied, regarding the maintenance of practices marked by sexism, binarisms and heteronormative patterns in the university. Higher education, according to the narratives analyzed, reproduces gender inequities that have hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity as the foundation for the maintenance of discourses and power mechanisms that have repercussions, especially in the experiences and formative processes of women and LGBTQIAP+ people.

**KEYWORDS:** University. Gender. Higher education. Femininity. Masculinity.

**RESUMO:** *O presente estudo problematiza as relações de gênero no Ensino Superior a partir das dicotomias entre feminilidades e masculinidades. De abordagem qualitativa, a produção das narrativas ocorreu por meio de entrevistas individuais semiestruturadas em três cursos de graduação da Universidade de Pernambuco, Campus Petrolina: Licenciatura Plena em Pedagogia, Licenciatura Plena em Matemática e Bacharelado em Enfermagem. Em linhas gerais, a produção de dados da pesquisa aponta para as dissonâncias e os processos de exclusão que atravessam o cotidiano institucional, o fazer docente e os currículos dos cursos estudados, no que concerne à manutenção de práticas marcadas pelo sexismo, binarismos e padrões heteronormativos na universidade. A Educação Superior, conforme as narrativas analisadas, reproduz iniquidades de gênero que têm nos modelos de feminilidade e masculinidade hegemônicos o fundamento para a manutenção de discursos e mecanismos de poder que repercutem, sobretudo, nas experiências e processos formativos de mulheres e pessoas LGBTQIAP+.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Universidade. Gênero. Ensino superior. Feminilidade. Masculinidade.*

**RESUMEN:** *El presente estudio problematiza las relaciones de género en la Enseñanza Superior a partir de las dicotomías entre feminidades y masculinidades. De abordaje cualitativo, la producción de las narrativas ocurrió a través de entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas en tres cursos de pregrado de la Universidad de Pernambuco, Campus Petrolina: Licenciatura en Pedagogía, Licenciatura en Matemática y Licenciatura en Enfermería. En términos generales, la producción de datos de la investigación apunta a las disonancias y procesos de exclusión que atraviesan el cotidiano institucional, la enseñanza y los currículos de los cursos estudiados, con relación al mantenimiento de prácticas marcadas por el sexismo, los binarismos y los patrones heteronormativos en la universidad. Según las narrativas analizadas, la Enseñanza Superior reproduce inequidades de género que tienen a los modelos hegemónicos de feminidad y masculinidad como base para el mantenimiento de discursos y mecanismos de poder que repercuten, sobre todo, en las experiencias y procesos formativos de mujeres y personas LGBTQIAP+.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Universidad. Género. Enseñanza superior. Feminidad. Masculinidad.*

## **Introduction**

The present research aims to analyze gender relations in higher education based on the narratives and experiences of students from the Full Degree in Pedagogy, Full Degree in Mathematics and Bachelor of Nursing courses at the University of Pernambuco, Petrolina Campus. We reflect on the social constructions formulated on the different manifestations of femininity and masculinity linked to the respective courses or constructed in this stage of training.

Like many social institutions, the university is also a space and mechanism for controlling and dominating subjectivities. Practices, almost always not noticeable due to speeches and narratives, naturalize and reinforce, especially, the inferiority of women and LGBTQIAP+ people and the heteronormative standards seen as acceptable. Such standardizations deny diversity and singularities and marginalize and exclude, above all, women, LGBTQIAP+ people and other groups that dissent from gender and sexuality standards.

The gender issues that accompany educational training, from Early Childhood Education to higher education, gain, in the latter, markers and dimensions known as feminine and/or masculine. Such attributes interfere from the choice of degree, personal choices and alternatives of each individual, often leading them to ratify the idea that some courses match the social position of men and women (GUEDES, 2008). This directly influences the presence of women and other LGBTQIAP+ identities in the spaces in question, in jobs and socially.

We cannot say that professions and the option for certain higher education courses for men and women are directly linked only to vocation or preference. Such choices cross the social, cultural, political and economic context and are imbued with meanings that bring together or distance both sexes, maintained in the imaginary of the social formation of careers and degrees seen as feminine, as is the case of training linked to health, humanities, social assistance and education (in courses such as Nursing, Social Work, Pedagogy, Psychology).

The opposite occurs in Exact Sciences, Earth Sciences and Engineering, areas in which the male presence predominates and which include courses linked to Finance, Administration, Technology, Mathematics and Engineering. These are fields of knowledge in which professionals achieve a greater financial return, which is always added to the social prestige and status of the professions, which makes the presence and demand for men greater.

The university is, therefore, implicitly crossed by gender relations that exist in Higher Education. Crystallized stereotypes related to the chosen professions are therefore present. For

this research, we considered the network of higher education courses offered by the University of Pernambuco, Campus Petrolina, based on the argument that they bring with them gender markers that influence the daily training and beyond. Among the courses offered by the university, we chose to investigate those that contemplate, in the social imaginary, the aforementioned characteristics, namely: the Degree in Mathematics, considered on a daily basis as a 'male course'; the Degree in Pedagogy and the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing, for which female stereotypes are usually added.

We seek to problematize and discuss gender stereotypes in the higher education system and, therefore, some questions mobilize us: how are the social constructions of masculinities and femininities related, implicitly and explicitly, in higher education? Is there a given profile of students who opt for Pedagogy, Mathematics, and Nursing courses guided by gender markers? How are masculinities and femininities constructed and reconstructed in the daily life of Pedagogy, Mathematics and Nursing courses? To this end, the aforementioned questions gave rise to the following problem: how do the narratives of university students express the gender stereotypes present in Higher Education, related to the dichotomy between femininity and masculinity? Higher Education is seen as a place conducive to understanding the influence of certain gender markers in the structure of social relations that go beyond the academic space and accompany professions, opportunities and everyday inequities.

### **Methodological Path**

The Full Degree in Mathematics, Full Degree in Pedagogy and Bachelor of Nursing courses at the University of Pernambuco, Campus Petrolina, were the universe of the present study. We start from the assumption that Education is not a neutral field, but crossed by social aspects that differentiate the position of men, women and LGBTQIAP+ people within different fields of knowledge, previously delimited, whose lines define so-called feminine and masculine expectations.

The subjects' narratives are the path to immersion and, due to the importance given to their substantial elements, this is a qualitative study (CARDOSO; CARVALHO, 2018). In other words, the chosen phenomenon was assessed in a non-structural way (GOMES, 2012). This is not just a focus, but a perspective that contributes to the problematization and scope of speeches of the elected group, as the sociocultural dimensions of opinions and representations are the core of the investigation.

The research participants are men, women and LGBTQIAP+ people who attend the Full Degree in Pedagogy and Mathematics and the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing (evening and evening courses), all offered at the Petrolina Campus of the University of Pernambuco. We will count on the collaboration of 9 (nine) students, 3 (three) from each of the highlighted courses, enrolled from the first to the seventh period of the Degree in Mathematics and Pedagogy, or from the first to the eighth period, in the case of the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. Consent was formalized by signing the Free and Informed Consent Form.

As a technique of production and data collection, we chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, since, in this format, "[...] The informant has the possibility to talk about his/her experiences, based on the main focus proposed by the researcher; at the same time that it allows free and spontaneous responses from the informant, [which] values the professional's performance" (ALMEIDA; FILE; LIMA, 1999, p. 133, our translation). The experiences narrated by the participants were systematized based on thematic axes with the intention of organizing the narrative movements, namely: i. representations, gender roles and sexuality; II. Discourses on masculinities and femininities in higher education; iii. gender and higher education; iv. markers of gender, femininities and masculinities in universities; v. gender issues and their dimensions of femininity and masculinity; vi. relations about professions and gender stereotypes; vii. gender inequalities and LGBTQIAP+ people; and, viii. non-neutralization of the academic field in relation to gender issues.

We resort to narratives and the aspects revealed in the story. Even though the theory appears as support for a critical reading of what is said, often naturalized by the power structures that produce gender-conditioning norms, the experiences crossed by these norms are the starting point and the ending point of the reflections in this study. Listening and reading the narratives were based on two categories, explored in the analyzes below: 1) Masculinities; 2) Femininities. However, such markers are present in the experiences in an indistinct manner, concomitantly, having been grouped into categories only for systematization purposes.

## Results and discussions

### Daily life, university and new questions for the field of masculinities

A gender marker deserves attention in understanding how social constructions are produced and aggregated to certain subjects based on narratives and discourses that naturalize relations of power and social dominance at the university. It is through heteronormative models that masculinities are constituted as an archetype to be followed, whose binary appears as a mechanism that sustains patriarchy and sexism and that makes men privileged in this space (PERES, 2009; LIMA *et al.*, 2017), as well as in other spheres of society.

In this category we learn that the narratives of the interviewees are related to the different forms of masculinity present in their particular trajectories and that have repercussions on the path to higher education. The university field, in the dialogues, is read as a non-neutral space, marked by gender issues and stereotypes that construct new meanings about masculinities. Such stereotypes, in turn, are accentuated in certain courses analyzed and lead, for example, to the strong presence of elements considered to be from the universe of men, especially in courses that integrate the area of knowledge of Exact Sciences, namely, Mathematics. From this perspective, we emphasize that, even though the interview was focused on the 'masculinities' marker, the majority of participants reported numerous so-called 'feminine' aspects to refer to the subject. We understand that the relationship with female figures is crucial so that they can better relate how masculinities permeate their individual experiences, including at university (ZARBATO; MARTINS, 2022).

One interviewee explains that: "I had my father and some uncles, but I kind of avoided spending time with those people. I felt safer and more comfortable with the feminine" (BENTO, our translation). The discomfort attributed by Bento to the male presence relates to the generational repression exercised by men, a constant in the lives of many children and adolescents who identify as such. The interviewee also reports that, when he was little, some events marked him negatively and that this had repercussions throughout his life: "I got a job and there were only men. It was with my grandfather, my uncles and my father, in a mechanic shop, I felt cornered, I couldn't be myself" (BENTO). Thus, references to the theme 'masculinities', for the interviewee, dimension aspects beyond formal education, reflecting everyday situations, commonly accompanied by micro violence.

Another interviewee, Paulo, says that he questioned many times about "being a man": "I mainly asked my father what it means to be a man? Why be the man? It doesn't make sense."

This excerpt is reinforced when it also mentions: “Why, I never thought, being a man meant being an alpha male, etc. I always thought it was an identification that the person had.” By highlighting identification as the only criterion for determining genders, Paulo recovers the cultural and historical meaning attributed by scholars in opposition to biological and natural logic (BUTLER, 2018; MISKOLCI, 2013) that removes desire and experiences as presuppositions.

As it is a cultural marker (ABREU, 2017), masculinity is linked in the narratives produced to the relationships that organize the personal experiences of the interviewees and, consequently, higher education. In addition to a deterministic reading of the phenomenon, we cannot fail to note in the narratives the importance of experiences in the process of personal identification, especially how these experiences distorted or failed to relate issues related to gender, as Miguel describes: “My parents, they are married, a straight couple. And it is that, consequently, it also influenced me to be, by knowing and being in contact with them daily”.

Among those interviewed, a Mathematics student, regarding masculinity, states that, when she was little, she did not think she was so feminine: “I was much more masculine, I hung out more with boys, I was more closed off, even though I loved pink, I never went out with pink, I was more closed to myself” (Judite). It is common, therefore, to attribute so-called 'masculine' behaviors only to boys, without associating them with girls – or, at least, with cis and heterosexual girls. Thus, even though a cultural expression is socially imposed on girls through toys, colors, games and even narratives about what it means to be a woman, not all of them feel like they belong to this universe. The excerpt below, present in Judite’s speech, alludes to this perspective:

I once saw a boy in high school and I said, oh, you pass by and don't even talk, then he kind of said, yeah, but I talk to people like you too, I stayed with people like me, what did he want? To say that, because I thought the most it could be was either me not being very feminine or me being a black girl, it was incomprehensible, because generally my friends were white, more feminine and everything. Then I became a little withdrawn, that was in the first year of high school, I was a little like that, I said, damn, I didn't really like what I heard (JUDITE, our translation).

The speech referred to Judith allows for different interpretations. The reference to friendships, the way of walking, the tone of voice, contrasted with the “sweet and delicate” standard, affirm discursive expressions that, also in Education, demarcate another place, different from “normal”, the mention of which is usually accompanied by justifications that reinforce the condition of subalternity attributed to those who occupy it.

The instituting conception of 'normal' is fed by a sociocultural imaginary that removes girls who opt for so-called “masculine” games from female territory, as well as by the presence of boys to the detriment of other girls. Moreno (1999) emphasizes that, for them, the spaces and dynamics associated with play have always been limited when compared to boys, that is, the use of force, heroic and adventurous performance are positively seen as reinforcing virility.

Another narrative from the interviewee Judite, which also situates the process of social construction of association between the identity reading made about her in social relations and the everyday behaviors that deviate from the standard, refers to the idea that, for the university student, the gendered experience is beyond the university. This data is also present in Miguel's narrative, who states: “[...] because of my personality, because I was more restrained and my circle of friends was made up more of women, people ended up having this view that I was gay, in the High school ended more because I started dating.” Everyday behaviors, set against gender standards, are presented as aspects that lead to the emergence of stereotypes (PEREIRA, 2013).

The analyzes carried out on 'human being', in the field of Mathematics, for example, contribute and construct images that reflect how such stereotypes are reproduced. All people interviewed and linked to the Degree in Mathematics highlight the number of male students in relation to the low presence of women. The narrative about the aforementioned environment not having a relationship with women has repercussions not only in the daily life of higher education (especially regarding its place of speech), but also in work spaces (SOUZA, 2016). Regarding this, Micael confirms: “you can really see that the women present in the course tend to interact less with the class”, and continues: “the vast majority of the participants' speeches tend to be male. I don't know if it's due to the quantity or difference of people on the course, but, really, there is a much greater male contribution than female.”

According to Fernandes (2006), most people consider the mastery and application of Mathematics difficult and complex, obtained through rationality, a quality attributed to cis men. Such imagery contributes, according to the narratives analyzed, significantly to locating men at the pole of privilege of knowledge and, epistemologically, responsible for organizing rational thought. Limited to the opposite pole, women would be destined to exercise mere intuition, marked by an emotional charge. As a result, at universities, the presence and existence of male references is common, with mentions of the importance of women being rare, especially when it comes to Exact Sciences.

Arguments for the large presence of men are more common in Exact Sciences courses. The systematized statements even argue that this is a marker reinforced by practical teaching in



the classroom, as Judite states: “there are a lot of teachers who end up making bad jokes, they pay attention to the boys, they think they are more intelligent and I think the family itself said 'ah, it's a more masculine course'”. The excerpt reveals the challenges of women occupying spaces such as universities, where their place to speak is generally limited:

When you say you're going to do exacting, it's already a shock and if you're a woman, they always say, “you're crazy”, yeah, “it's not an area for you.” So I think there's a lot of this, when the school doesn't encourage you to pursue what you want, I think this makes it difficult for many people to want to follow that path, or fear of getting there and being alone, right? Because the majority will be men and have that fear, before something even happens, they already have that internalized environment of the matter (JUDITE, our translation).

Thus, the systemic removal of women from so-called 'masculine' courses, such as Exact Sciences, is the result of a broader picture of oppression forged from men's positions of power. It must be problematized by overcoming attitudes that reinforce structural gender inequalities in teaching practice and the curriculum. The teaching role, in this sense, is decisive, as Judite argues in her interview: “teachers already say that it is an area in which it is very difficult to have a doctorate in pure Mathematics, so I already feel that it is more for men, imagine me in kind of there.” The language highlights and measures various inequalities that, in higher education, are still the focus of experiences lived mainly by academic women. Therefore, there is no way to stop questioning her.

In the excerpt “I feel like this, because there are few women, I end up doubting my ability, like, can I really get there? Will I get the space I want?” Judite highlights the insecurity that is part of the daily lives of women who enter not only the field of Mathematics, but also university. After all, it is common for female speeches and contributions to be considered of lesser importance when compared to those of men. The social role of the university in overcoming gendered discourses and practices must be demarcated from a broad set of roles. After all, insecurity is, a priori, the feeling that demarcates the experience of vulnerable groups in terms of gender, in Higher Education, as Judite reflects: “Even though I feel that some teachers embrace and encourage me, I keep thinking, are they really encouraging, or just saying so as not to leave it aside. I'm going to say that I'm helping just so I don't feel bad, there are these issues too”.

The aforementioned gender markers not only permeate the experiences of undergraduate students. Female professors who make up the faculty of predominantly male courses are also read through gendered lenses that place them within the university.

Interviewees often adopt perspectives that are products of stereotypes. Micael, for example, stated that “you can drastically notice the difference between a class taught by a woman, the issue of affection, care, this issue of her knowing and shaping the subject much more markedly than with men”. The speech suggests that male professors generally adopt rigid, closed and more complete methodologies in teaching, or even that “[...] as my course is basically dominated by men, I believe it is a characteristic that will last for a long time” (MICAEL, our translation), so that these characteristics place the teaching practice of women in a zone of less rigor and scientific value.

We noticed how masculinities give rise to a “serious” teaching identity, in comparison to the caring and affective tendency typical of women in higher education. The speech highlights the argument about the inferiority of female intellectual capacity: “When you say that you know Mathematics, around 500 people will come and try to show that you don't know” (JUDITE, our translation). The interviewee also mentions, at another point, how misreading – and marked by gender – is something common: “[...] students end up not being as respectful when it is a female teacher, especially in Mathematics. When I was a substitute, I felt this a lot.” Barbosa (2016), in this sense, postulates that teaching does not escape gender relations, that it is culturally constructed and subject to power relations that dichotomize and hierarchize notions of masculinity and femininity, overvaluing the former, including at universities.

The analysis of the limitations experienced by women and that demarcate the condition of men by criteria from the notion of masculinity, when related to the inequalities that affect the LGBTQIAP+ community, highlights layers of exclusion that make other aspects even more complex. There are numerous challenges for this group to enter and remain in university spaces, especially regarding courses linked to Exact Sciences. In this research, when interviewing a trans man enrolled in the Mathematics course, the intersectional violence suffered is perceived. The neutralization of gender as natural and heteronormativity in the university space and on the course defines its narrative:

So, it's kind of sad because I knew that UPE was very inclusive. But when I arrived at the Mathematics course, I thought there would be more people like me, so when looking at the other courses, things are very different. There was a luau one day, I saw that there were so many people like me, I thought, boy, it's crowded here. But when I look at the Mathematics course, I see so little that I wonder, is everyone hiding something? Or else there really isn't one (PAULO, our translation).

The excerpt highlights that, for LGBTQIAP+ people, the university is not a space for welcoming and valuing difference (SCOTE; GARCIA, 2020). As the only trans man attending his course at the institution studied, Paulo denotes the group's unviability in Higher Education and Exact Sciences, an aspect also present in Judite's speech:

I think it's a course that if you go looking for an LGBT group, you'll almost never find one, it's very difficult. I did the math with my friend, I think there are about 5 at most. I was really shocked because, even though I know that it is a male-oriented degree, I see other courses where I notice that there are more LGBT people, very different from the Mathematics course, so I keep asking why this happens. I know there's that theory that says it's obviously going to be more attractive to men, but it's still shocking (JUDITE, our translation).

The narratives above problematize not only the formal condition and the right to access and remain in higher education, as common to everyone, but also the violence that demarcates permanence. The discussion is emphasized by Vargas Carneiro and Bridi (2022) when they refer to higher education as designed for specific audiences and distant from vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQIAP+ people. These, when they manage to enter universities, find themselves faced with contexts that disrespect their existence and make their right to exist fully unfeasible. Just as inequalities pre-exist higher education, they remain throughout and after the training process, gentrifying it. Paulo points out, on the subject, that the choice of professionals does not occur equally:

[...] both by the school and by the students' parents, as there are always students who want to look at the teacher's Instagram. You want to discover his life and like to comment. Even though students don't have much interaction with mathematics, because it's usually numbers, comments are inevitable, such as, oh, he's trans, he can't teach numbers to my son (PAULO, our translation).

In a way, the presence of women and LGBTQIAP+ people in higher education and in competition for jobs is a factor that encourages change. However, it is necessary to establish strategies that enable not only access, but permanence and the training processes that precede such stages. The narratives regarding existing actions at the university, aimed at overcoming these inequalities, are an important finding. Judite, for example, states: "I think it would be very important, because many people would like to be here, in this environment, many stop being there because of this, they need to feel included in this environment". Paulo also mentions: "in the WhatsApp group, when the coordinator sent a warning, he used *todes*, he never expected

this to happen. Then there was the issue of the social name, because if it hadn't been in the notice, I don't think I would ever be using the social name here, right?"

Therefore, the organization of inclusive actions regarding gender issues, within the scope of Higher Education, must permeate the particularities of the topic and be aimed at changing beliefs, values and attitudes (BORTOLINI; VIANNA, 2022). The perspective of a society without sexism, machismo and homophobia, capable of including marginalized people through Higher Education, must involve the university itself, decharacterizing stereotypical and dichotomous identity perspectives.

### **Femininities and (other) gender issues in Higher Education**

The reflections mobilized in this analytical category converge with those developed in the previous item with regard to the sociocultural constructions of gender that mean the narrative of the interviewees and how they are read by them. Just like masculinities, femininities are markers that are generally unnoticed, even though they are nurtured in everyday life. The theme 'femininities', especially in the narratives of students on the Full Degree in Pedagogy and Bachelor of Nursing courses, traditionally read as "feminine", show how the idea of hegemonic femininity organizes various images and actions.

Brabo and Oriani (2013), regarding models of femininity, state that they are constructions that cross education and other social spheres. There are countless mechanisms that naturalize behaviors under binary logic. In Pedagogy in particular, there is a great predominance of women in teaching, as, historically, it was assumed from the idea of care, by resuming representations that allude to certain functions seen as those of women. Caring, emotional contact, the ability to educate were naturalized impositions on women and constantly associated with an innate tendency to teach.

Just like Pedagogy (CASTRO; REIS, 2017), Nursing also tends to be associated with social roles considered feminine (BANDEIRA; OLIVEIRA, 1998). The historical burden of social assistance, the provision of domestic services, the exploitation of maternal care by wet nurses are arguments that constitute it in the social imagination. The figure of the nurse predominates as the materialization of basic health care – unlike the field of Medicine, for example, generally associated with the intellectual capacity of men.

Thus, when questioning interviewees about how forms of femininity were and are present in their paths, many start from the family context to situate the image of female figures,

such as the constant presence of mothers, grandmothers and aunts. Bento says that: “I was always raised like this, in a family with, with a strong female presence, my mother, my grandmother, my aunts, I was always more inclined towards the feminine side”. This story is also shared by Micael: “I lived with my mother and I lived with my sister, so my coexistence was basically feminine” and by Bello “I always had my grandmother with me, who is synonymous with the strong woman who fought to raising her children, so I look up to her a lot, right? For having fought alone and for doing what you have done to this day.”

The fact that female figures are, in these reports, positively valued and associated with strength, determination and persistence is not, however, the keynote when it comes to the relationship with Higher Education. The close family ties established with women are recognized as essential for the construction of the private subjectivities of some of the interviewees, such as João: “I have always identified much more with my mother, so I believe that good part of the way I am today comes from this very close relationship I have with her”, but they do not follow the images constructed about the university, as the narratives reveal.

When it comes to the territory of training in Pedagogy and Nursing, the statements related to the experiences of the students are narratives marked by the attributes of femininities that emerge in a condition of subalternity, as João says:

[...] it is a course where the majority of women are usually present there. My classroom, in a class of more or less, with about 37 students. I think 7 are boys and all the teachers who arrive are surprised by this number, which is relatively low, but still high for the Pedagogy course (our translation).

Unlike the Mathematics course, in which there is a predominance of men, the quantitative aspect highlighted in the interviews alludes to gender stereotypes read from the male image, as Bello points out: “we still see a lot of boys enrolled in Pedagogy, but they never give continuing the course, there is always the issue of dropping out. I think this also comes up a lot in the issue of prejudice, which is blatant in relation to everything on the course, right”? The interviewee sees Pedagogy as having less social prestige, as it involves educating children and has low pay compared to other courses.

Resistance, on the part of cis men, to studying Pedagogy, therefore, is a marker of gender: “I believe that, structurally, it is our society, it already makes men leave home to work and women have this role of taking care of children” (JOHN, our translation). This reflects the heteronormative structure that keeps the majority of women in this field. This demarcates the school routine itself and reinforces discourses that prevent the presence of men in classrooms,

as pedagogues: “I have heard from managers, from teachers themselves, reports of prejudice against men who graduate in Pedagogy” (HELENO, our translation).

The context is quite similar when it comes to the Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. The narratives gathered, when explaining the female presence in Nursing, are constructed since the naturalization of this place: “I see that it is a course that is largely female, right? There are many women on this course and it is dominated by them” (PEDRO LÚCIO, our translation). The student reported an experience that occurred in his classroom and that helps us reflect on the significant presence of women in Nursing:

There's even a real example that happened in my class, where at first there were more men, as soon as we arrived at university. And some of them had this virile masculinity, and they always clashed with the women in the class. However, in many moments, as I said, when women gain the power of speech and knowledge, these men felt cornered, as they did not act as they wanted due to female numerosity and this power of speech that they they had, they ended up seeing that the argument goes much further than gender itself, at times they spoke over women, but they didn't let them. I don't know if it was for this reason, but they left the course, went to study Nursing at another college, but they had this clash right away, because, at least in my class specifically, it is women who have dominance, they have a lot of voice and a lot of ownership in what they say (PEDRO LÚCIO, our translation).

The heteronormative assumption, present in Higher Education, strengthens virile masculinity, has the support of the institution itself and acts to reinforce power mechanisms. In the case of Nursing, discourses that bring together gender and sexuality stereotypes are common in order to make it a space distant from the male universe of Medicine, for example. Miguel narrates: “my course is predominantly attended by women, and I feel that even professionals, the processes always question the sexuality of men who are participating in the course or even nurses”. At the same time, he highlights: “it is a course largely made up of women, in my class I think there are only six men and, of those, not all of them are straight” (MIGUEL, our translation).

Training spaces, therefore, reorganize the stereotypes related to the expectation of the profession – being a nurse – as kind, dedicated, affectionate, obedient, servile. The social role of subordination is also reserved for women in this training space. Professional practice in the courses studied ends up reproducing private life activities. Thus, we cannot fail to consider the influence of gender roles for different fields of knowledge and for the professional training of different subjects (PINTO; CARVALHO; RABAY, 2017).

Even though Pedagogy and Nursing are courses where the presence of women predominates, the men interviewed reported feeling welcomed in these spaces, which is not seen in the opposite direction, as already analyzed. Bento points out that: “[...] my friendships here have also always been with women. Occasionally there is a boy, but the feminine one was always more present with me”. In a similar way, Micael recognizes the importance of women at the university: “[...] I believe that the friendships I have conversations with are the vast majority of women, since I find it easier to talk to them. I don’t know, but I find it much easier to talk to them.”

The reasons that led the people interviewed to choose their courses also help to expand the production in question. While some pointed to chance and the unexpected as factors, such as Bento (“it was quite out of the blue, quite unexpected”), others credited the family with the influence: “[...] I come from a family where everyone is teacher, from my mother, my cousins, it's more on the feminine side, right? Among the men, I think I have a cousin who is a teacher”, said Uelder. For Bello, it was no different: “I come from a family of teachers, so since I was little, I already had references from aunts and, soon after, from older cousins and, in a way, this influence and passion came”.

There is great concern about entering the job market. Depending on the professions and degrees chosen, however, we see that different aspects are present. Although Pedagogy and Nursing courses directly refer to women due to the demands of femininity, this marker affects the options of men – and, in particular, cis men – who choose to pursue these fields.

Thus, some narratives refer to equality and job opportunities in schools, for those in Pedagogy, and in the health sectors, for future nurses. The answers always converged towards the negative. We took as a reference João's speech, who stated: “when looking for a job, we see a lot of prejudice, because the students' parents themselves do not accept us being in the classroom because we are men, you know? Like, how are you going to deal, for example, how is a man going to deal with my daughter if she wants to go to the bathroom.” The same interviewee also mentions that:

I've heard stories from friends of mine who went for job interviews in the same place and had 4 competitors for 4 vacancies. And then, 3 were women and one was my friend and he didn't pass. Even though there were 4 places, the 3 girls stayed, he participated normally, there was no direct comment with him, but he felt that he didn't stay just because it was a class, I believe that of Children I and because he was a man and clearly gay Because he was effeminate, this kind of had a negative impact on the school, especially because it was private (JOÃO, our translation).

In the case of Pedagogy, there are multiple discourses that express the social stigma arising from gender roles, inherent to training and professional practice: “In the job market, it requires a certain delicacy, a certain autonomy of the teacher in terms of how to do with these relationships, of taking care of children from a very early age” (UELDER, our translation). Care, therefore, is always linked to the female figure.

Gender relations, in Nursing training, commonly refer to the job market. The answers refer to the massive presence of women: “[...] I ended up not doing some procedures because they thought I would have a different point of view from other women who were in the service. [...] Lately I was in practice and I could see this, I saw how people trust women” (MIGUEL, our translation). The narrative describes how the position of women organizes the field in question and beyond, as Bento suggests: “I never noticed anything, either in a positive or negative sense. It’s never been a place that makes it clear that its doors are open, but it’s also never said that it doesn’t accept it, right?”

In this sense, thinking about the aspects related to these two fields of knowledge still proves to be important, with the aim of deconstituting – and revealing, considering the symbolic permanence that is not so easily perceived – narratives, discourses and representations that construct gendered stereotypes that use stereotypes related to hegemonic femininity. At the university studied, we see that changes have occurred timidly, which alludes to the need to strengthen possibilities for reflection, access and permanence for vulnerable groups, which will certainly guarantee greater plurality in Higher Education and the job market (SIMÕES; CARDOSO; SILVA, 2022).

The university needs to systematize instances and actions that enable encounters with the different forms and expressions that gender takes (SANTOS, 2014). In this way, prejudices and discrimination can be transformed, explicitly or silently, into opportunities. And, therefore, the access, permanence and social and educational advancement of LGBTQIAP+ people and women is, particularly, a process that will have a positive impact on this dynamic.



## **Final remarks**

The narratives recovered experiences of the participants that influence the way in which gender issues are conceived by them within the scope of higher education. Gender crosses the most different perceptions, as well as the way of seeing the educational institution and the spaces of power maintained within it. They show the subtle appropriation of bodies, behaviors and subjectivities. They highlighted that the Higher Education system carries remnants of a sexist heritage that organizes people according to the genders arbitrarily assigned to them and that, in this condition, makes women and LGBTQIAP+ people invisible and subordinate in particular.

Masculinity, as a gender marker, from naturalizing discourses, assigns men the place of superiority and grants them privileges. In higher education, this is also expressed when aspects are added that reinforce the dichotomous organization of the fields of knowledge, such as: the Humanities destined for them, the Exact Sciences to be occupied by them. The narratives constructed by the research participants and woven in this study demonstrate how the sociocultural context also influences their lives and limits the possibilities linked to ongoing training. The expressions of masculinity presented by the interviewees are the result of constructions linked to the family environment and expanded at the university. The Mathematics course stands out in terms of its correlation with masculine aspects, due to the presence of men – students and teachers – cis and heterosexual.

Regarding femininities, it can be seen that they are also the result of social constructions and the binary gender model experienced socially and at university by the interviewees. The meanings mobilized on the subject, broadly speaking, refer to aspects that, almost always, are personal images that accompany the interviewees in their daily lives. However, they reinforce stereotypes associated with the condition – so-called natural – of protector, caregiver, affectionate which, historically, is related to the female position, including at university. In the narratives, the affective relationships held within the university are noticeable, which are generally valued positively when it comes to the figure of women.

When it comes to Mathematics, Nursing and Pedagogy courses, the object of analysis of this study, the first is read under the contours of hegemonic masculinity, as a space marked by virility and rationality; the last two are strongly marked, in turn, by less prestigious stereotypes pertaining to femininities and are, for the most part, signified from the place of subalternity or availability of women.

We conclude, therefore, that the Higher Education offered at the institution analyzed is marked, in the view of the people interviewed, by multiple and subtle forms of inequality that are present from teaching practices and permeate the curriculum, forming the imaginary that permeates the degrees studied. The defense of a neutral conception of gender issues, according to systematized narratives, reinforces the image of a training process that is alien to diversity and difference. The narratives of the interviewees also point to the university as a place marked by asymmetrical gender relations, from personal dynamics to the institutional approach and perspective on the topic. Finally, they reveal important meanings about the male/female dichotomy, which see the university as an environment responsible for the reproduction of hegemonic gender patterns in the courses in question.

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