**Professional Challenges to Women as Educators and as Mothers**

**Abstract**

This article explores the dynamic between the professional tools and identities of women working in early childhood education and their maternal tools and identities. This dynamic reveals a blurring of the boundaries between motherhood and career, which have similar requirements to provide protection, care, and concern. This study sheds light on the perspectives of mothers working in early childhood education regarding their personal and professional lives. It highlights the conflicts raised and prices paid by the women and their children. It also shows the extent to which female educators bring their profession home, including their theoretical and practical knowledge. These women continue to act as educators at home, but the demands on them are multiplied in the private sphere, where they are also mothers. Moreover, the demands they place on their children can cross the threshold from the private domain, making this relationship complex and conflictual as well. Often, the private life and children of a female educator are seen as significant aspects of the “business card” she is expected to present to the world in order to gain respect in her professional life.

Research question: How do female educators who are also mothers experience the relationships within and between the professional and personal realms?

**Literature Review**

**Private and Public Spheres**

Herzog (2002) claims that the perception of the existence of two separate spheres of life, public and private, is based on cultural assumptions. Each sphere has its own set of principles, social functions, and goals. According to this approach, the public sphere is intended to meet economic and political needs. It is based on principles of rationality, practicality, competitiveness, and utilitarian connections. Relations are primarily contractual, formal, and identified with masculine qualities. The private sphere, on the other hand, is perceived as intimate and conducted according to principles of reciprocity, compromise, concern, and emotions. It is identified with feminine traits. The private sphere is associated with traditional rules of behavior, whereas the public sphere is identified with modern codes of conduct, and it is customary to attribute greater power and prestige to it. This distinction reflects a gender-based dichotomy in which the private sphere is perceived as the realm of women, while the public sphere is the realm of men. There is a prevailing social assumption that women's development within the family unit and outside it are contradictory and require making a choice or sacrifice. Thus, the entry of women into the labor market conflicted with social expectations of their domestic role (Herzog, 2002; Pasta-Schubert, 2000). The literature on academic motherhood discusses the dilemma of "the best time" to start a family, since both an academic career and motherhood require a large investment (Dickson, 2018).

According to Irigaray (1985/1977), women need a social existence separate from their role as mothers. However, Pillay (2009) claims that the distinction between these two life spheres is fundamentally incorrect, because it reinforces the designation of intellectual work to the masculine realm. Pasta-Schubert (2000) suggests women investigate how the knowledge to which they are exposed in the public sphere colors their private world.

The perspective of the current study describes the perceptions and conduct of the surveyed population in each of these two spheres, according to their functions. Hence, this study aims to investigate how the public knowledge to which women are exposed colors their private world, and how knowledge from their private world colors their public world.

**The Private Sphere: Motherhood**

Winnicott (1998) promotes the concept of a “good enough mother” who adapts to her children’s active lifestyle and their needs, and gives them a solid emotional basis that enables them to interact with the world. Moreover, Winnicott asserts that maternal care in infancy and early childhood is a necessary condition for mental health. In other words, the actions of the “good enough mother” help babies develop and enable them to fulfill their inherent potential. According to Katzenelson (2005), a “good enough mother” controls feelings of frustration about her children’s demands without turning those feelings against them. In addition, Katzenelson instructs mothers not to impose their own needs or agenda on their children, but to focus on the children and their needs. Thus, these psychologists place the children as the central subject in the family relationship, and see the mother as an object bestowing love and care (Pelgi-Hecker, 2005).

**Blaming the Mother**

Our perceptions of “good mothers” are not the result of experience or in-depth examination, and there is little connection between them and real life, science, or common sense. Rather, our views are a matter of faith and religion, and hence have their own life and internal logic (Warner, 2005). In our culture, the perception is firmly embedded that the mother figure is responsible for her children’s proper development and their ability to love and cope with the world. According to this view, many mental disorders stem from not having “good enough” mothers (Peroni, 2009). A culture that links children's developmental difficulties to deficient maternal care can cause educated and intelligent women to see themselves as inadequate mothers who carry the blame for their children’s behavior (Ladd & Umansky, 1998). Researchers define this as “working mothers’ guilt” (McCutcheon & Morrison, 2016). Thus, while maternal guilt may be ancient, Birns and Hayn (1988) explain that many mothers who have been influenced by psychoanalytic theory blame themselves for failing, in their own view, to meet the challenges of motherhood.