

# Women in Construction Sites of Building Construction

## From Depletion to Practical and Theoretical Refinement

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### Abstract

Since the 1970s intensified the participation of women in the labor market. This occurred for several reasons. In the last years, was registered the tendency of women in positions that was traditionally occupied by men in many sectors of the economy, such as construction. Considering the increasing demand for labor in the construction industry, has become a good opportunity for women in the labor market. In this context, the present study was based on investigation about the inclusion of women in the work of civil construction, which was a sector primarily occupied by men. Defined as general objective to identify and analyze the perceptions of women in the industry operating of two Constructors of Belo Horizonte, responsible for the entry of them into the labor market of construction. The specific objectives were to report and analyze the reasons that make these women to chose work in the area of construction, describe and analyze how these professionals perceive the work in the area of construction, investigate the facilities and difficulties that these women interviewed face in their profession, and, report and analyze how they experience the genders relationships. The research approach is qualitative. The approach to research is descriptive, and works as a study of case. The sample of subjects consisted of 20 professionals at the operational two Constructors of Belo Horizonte. We used the content analysis to analyze the data collected by semi-structured interviews. The reasons that make women to opt for the profession in the construction site were: the interest in the area of construction and being unemployed. All construction professionals claimed to like to practice that work, what reflects on the quality of work. Most respondents showed a good relationship with the men of the construction site. This result allows us to infer that relations of power follow the changing world of work.

### Introduction

The civil construction can be regarded as an economic sector of strategic importance due to its presence and direct impact on the Brazilian economy as well as the importance of indirect and induced development (TEIXEIRA and CARVALHO, 2005). In addition to that, the civil construction sector has provided an important contribution to the growth of the economies of the recently industrialized countries, constituting a key element for the generation of employment and the establishment of links among several sectors of industrial suppliers, equipment and services that are aimed at different subsectors (GAGLIARDI, 2002).

It is considered as a segment historically dominated by men. The civil construction sector has been attracting women who seek a placement in the labor market. It is an

alternative to change their lives: either by the need to support the family or to increase the family income.

The growing demand for labor in the civil construction sector has become an opportunity for the integration of women in the labor market. The women are the majority among the unemployed according to the Brazilian Institute of geography and statistics (IBGE 2010) and they were excluded from this sector. Now, the women begin to receive training to be absorbed as professionals to aggregate new qualities to the job.

Currently, it is possible to state that women have been ordinary characters in this sector according to the data from a survey of the Ministry of labor and employment (MTE) held July 2011, revealing that women in construction sites amount to about 240 thousand workers registered in the civil construction sector in Brazil. This represents a growth of approximately 16 % compared to the last two years. This female growth may initially be attributed to the increase on the demand in the construction market and the shortage of qualified workers in this sector. The inclusion of women in the Brazilian labor market started in the mid-70s, however, the "invisible" work, traditionally known as domestic and the sexual division of work often influence and determine the positions to be occupied by women in the labor market. In this context, three different perspectives can be seen: the segregation in the capitalist labor market for women, precarious jobs and working conditions, reinforcing the complementary aspect between professional work and their domestic "responsibilities", revealing the patriarchy (PESSOA and VIANA, 2008); symbolic violence is present on the relationship between dominant and dominated even if it unconsciously. It manifests itself through the recognition of the woman legitimacy giving the dominant discourse power. (BOURDIEU, 2011); and the empowerment of women conceived as a relational, conflicting and changing process. It is relational because it involves links with other actors and it is conflicting because the empowerment regards implicit and explicit domination situations and the search for changes in existing power relations (MELO, 2011; MELO and LOPES, 2011).

Women's work has gone through changes in the course of the story regarding the sexual division of labor. According to Hirata and Kergoat (2008), the sexual division of work presents several aspects in time and space in all societies. The studies related to gender relations and to the integration of women in masculine environments have been the subject of research in many areas such as transportation and IT (BRUSCHINI, 2007; MELO, 2011), although the civil construction sites are relevant subjects of study they have been given little attention on the researches.

This descriptive-analytical research is aimed at investigating and analyzing how the women who work on construction sites in two constructing companies located in Belo Horizonte perceive their work. This study sought to describe and analyze the perceptions of the respondents in relation to the activities performed and the gender and the power relations that they have experienced in the construction site of this sector. We used a semi-structured interview script for a group of 20 (twenty) workers of the companies here named A and B: an electrician, two quarry officers, five masons, four grout applicators and eight servants. The interviews were taped with the consent of the workers and transcribed in full in order to analyze and preserve what was said. The choice of the subjects was established by the criteria of accessibility and the interviewees were named E1-E20 to preserve their identity. The collected data analysis went through the following stages of treatment (Melo, 2003): (a) preparation: the interviews were transcribed according to the script of the questions grouping all the responses of each category in each question handled; (b) quantitative tab: identifying components of the answers of the interviewees and grouping according to the theme of the question. This technique of data analysis follows the principles of content analysis, proposed by Bardin (1979) and it allows better visualization of opinions and contents of messages from

the respondents after their systematization in the form of tables, considering the frequency of the topics pointed out by the respondents; (c) thematic/qualitative tab: consists in the definition of topics, according to the purpose of the study, structured in a spreadsheet that allowed the grouping of the most significant extracts from the interviews transcribed giving prominence to the speech of the interviewees. It is possible to work with the knowledge and the experience of the interviewees through this methodology while it allows the researchers a deeper understanding of the subject in study.

The article is structured into seven sections following this introduction. The second section deals with the relations of power as a structuring gender relations and the third section covers issues about sexual division of labor and gender relations. The fourth section brings the contextualization of the sector studied and the fifth section deals with the presentation and analysis of the research results. The sixth section presents the final considerations, followed by the references.

### **Power as a gender relation structure**

The study of power as an empirical field is a powerful instrument of social sciences, serving as a theoretical support for analysis of social practice and understanding of the relationships between men and women in society and in organized environments.

The power is one of the tools for the "understanding of the social processes, especially because in human relations, the command, the control and the obedience are part of common behavior and, in a certain way, they compose the power relations" (CAMPOS, 2005, p. 35). And as I stated by Melo (1985, p. 162), "power is a fundamental and compelling feature of all social relationships".

According to Weber perspective (1991, p. 422) the power is "the possibility of someone to impose their will on the behavior of other people". This conception of power links the power dimension to the ability of certain groups or individuals to impose their will on others in order to achieve certain goals. The trajectory of male supremacy in the power and decision-making territories, even in cases where women are the majority, reflect the patriarchal structure on which the Brazilian society was established historically, giving support to the traditional power.

Foucault (1997) points out that the power is not a general system of domination played only by a particular group or element on the others but because of the successive effect it crosses through all the social body. For the author, the power is an exercise originated from unequal relationships. The power relations are linked to other relationships such as the knowledge and economics and the power relations are the results and the conditions of these differentiations. The power relations are not practiced only from top to bottom, the dominant over the dominated, but at every point, in family groups, in the field of production and social structures, creating networks that underlie the domination.

In this way, the understanding of the concept of power for gender studies is of vital importance as it allows the multiple power relations among all social subjects. It is also allows to admits that there is power struggle between men and women, "free subjects and able to act and react" (LOURO, 1995, p. 121).

According to Bourdieu (2007, p. 45) "male domination gathers all the conditions for its full exercise, because the primacy granted universally to men is stated on the objectivity of social structures and reproductive and productive activities". The author reiterates that women apply this reality perceived to the relations of power that they experience, incorporating these schemes of thoughts that are expressed in a symbolic space, because they learned to decipher its "code".

The author mentions that the structures of domination are an incessant work. They are reinforced by institutions, families, churches, schools, the State, and that they present themselves as physical or symbolic violence. The author explains that "the symbolic violence is set due to the adhesion the dominated grants to the dominant" (BOURDIEU, 2007, p. 47). In other words, it is the practice and the knowledge that men and women have in common that are embedded forms of domination relation that make this relationship be seen as natural. For the author, the paradoxical logic of these power relations is that, at the same time they are spontaneous and extorted with long lasting effects on the social order, it is about women and men supported by the symbolic force which is a form of power exercised without any physical coercion. Thus, acts of knowledge and practical recognition that the symbolic power triggers are contribution to its own domination against or not the will.

But the author acknowledges that "the questioning over the evidence is *pari passu* with the profound transformations that happened to women, particularly in wealthier social categories" (BOURDIEU, 2007, p. 107), and it attributes this situation to the increasing women's access to education with qualifications advancement, which is also related to the transformations of productive structures.

Thus, regarding the relations of power in organizations, related to the gender, Capelle et al. (2004, p. 13) show that:

Therefore, it is stated that the balance of power in the organizational environment have been articulated in order to meet this need for diversification and innovation, and what we see is a transformation in the context of male domination on the perpetuation of women in organizations.

Thus, according to Melo (2011) the empowerment of women is also related to the power relations as the social relationship is a conflicting process because it involves situations of domination that can be explicit or not, but at the same time seeks changes in power relations. The female work has achieved a greater space amid the diversification and professionalization and the new organizational concepts that have produced changes in the patterns of relationship and in the power relations, which signals changes, opening spaces for the possibility of empowerment of women, in general (MELO, 2011).

### **Sexual division of labor and gender relations**

The theoretical concept of sexual division of labor was initially formulated in the 1970, in France, in the middle of the expansion of the feminist movement. It first started in ethnology, sociology and history. During this period, two ways of thinking the sexual division of labor were developed: from the differentiated distribution between men and women in the labor market; and in relation to the distinctive division of housework (HIRATA and KERGOAT, 2008). Later the concept was expanded to encompass the power relations between the sexes which go beyond the domestic work and build the base for social relations and cultural representations to become the employers' strategies of the State and the practices of resistance by women and men.

Cacouault (2003) explains that the concept of activity division, the work and lately, the professions evolved from the antagonism between the feminine and the masculine domain compose a permanent feature of the societies which has only been questioned over the last twenty years. The author also states that

[...] an activity can be defined as "feminine" or "masculine" at different times in its history, because the type of qualification and professional ideology that characterize it as well as its own functions specific to this profession ... have suffered modifications. It is,

therefore, the attention given to the development of rates of feminization or masculinization of a profession that allows you to formulate the hypothesis that transformations are under way, involving both the future of the profession and the modalities of social relations between the genders (CACOUAULT, 2003, p. 33).

Complementing, Cacoualt (2003) sets out that the rate of feminization or masculinization of a profession is what will indicate whether the profession is male or female at different times in history.

In the productive aspect, jobs that require strength and heavy work, carried out in inhospitable environments, dirty and unhealthy, and in turns, are usually associated with male stereotypes, which require courage and determination, while the femininity is associated with light work, easy, clean, which requires patience and thoroughness" (HIRATA, 1995, p. 43).

To Yannoulas (2003) inequalities in gender relations are organized socially and historically, based on the sexual division of labor. They occur in two ways: in the horizontal sexual division and in the vertical division of labor. The first refers to the restriction of women to activities considered feminine, usually connected to the social reproduction and biological functions or to professions with characteristics such as patience and gentleness, imposed and learned by girls from early childhood, which reduces substantially the scope of remunerated activities "allowed" and possible for women. The second configures the disadvantages experienced by women which do not reach the same wages, positions and recognition and are in inferior working conditions. Usually, both types of sexual division of work overlap, resulting in even more perverse results. Even in professions that are traditionally seen as feminine, such as education, nursing and social work, the highest positions are filled by men, disproportionately to their participation at the base, forming a occupational pyramid difficult to be changed.

Gardey (2003) explains that, historically, women have always been working in activities related to domestic and commercial jobs among others. The change of women's professional activity happened due to the social movements that occurred in the early 20th century that allowed the recognition of the existence of their work and the same wages enabling the access of women to new professions considered masculine.

The female labor participation in areas previously monopolized by men does not mean that there has been the extinction of prejudices. However, many wounds were opened, weakening ancient fortresses (SADEK, 2003). Regarding prejudice, Falcão et al. (2004, p. 632) defines it as "any kind of threat to human dignity derived from gender, religious or sexual option, nationality, among others". The authors state that "modern prejudice is never conscious and purposeful and it manifests itself in a more subtle way, such as the preferences from what is known, similar and satisfactory" (FALCÃO et al., 2004, p. 631).

Another view raised by Kergoat (2003) concerns the link between sexual division of labor and social relations of gender. To the author, there are two terms that have an inseparable relationship, in which the sexual division of labor determines the social relations of gender in a particular society at a given historical moment.

From the perspective of power relations, Hirata and Kergoat (2008) argue that the sexual division of labor is a result of social relations, which grant the men the productive service and the women the reproductive one.

The sexual division of labor is a form of social division of labor resulting from the social relations between the genders; more than that, it's a priority factor for the survival of the social relationship between them. This form is historically and socially modulated. It features the priority to designate men to the productive area and the

women to the reproductive one and, at the same time, the appropriation of higher added value functions in the society by men - political, religious, military, among others - (HIRATA and KERGOAT, 2008, p. 266).

According to the authors, the social division of work has two organizing principles: the separation and the hierarchical. The principle of separation is based on the existence of works for "men" and "women". The hierarchical principle refers to the degree of importance and prestige that a work performed by a man has rather than one that is held by a woman. These principles are applied in all known societies in time and space, however, the sexual division of labor is not an immutable data. It takes up, in time and space, different modalities described extensively by ethnologists and historians.

In this way, it is noticed that throughout history the meanings assigned to work correspond to the time, the culture and how the individual relates and understands the world in which he is inserted. Similarly, the meaning of the sexual division of labor also varies in the course of the history, according to Hirata and Kergoat (2008), showing the various aspects in time and space in all societies.

### **The civil construction sector**

According to Lamera and Uchoa (2010) the term civil construction is used routinely to name generally the building sector, which covers the residential, commercial and industrial construction built up by small, medium and large companies, which may be public or private.

Holanda (2007) and Carneiro (2010) reinforces this idea by saying that the intrinsic characteristics of the construction sector to distinguish it from other industrial sectors. Besides multiplying investments, the construction drives other productive chains and has importance in strengthening the internal market, because it is where you get the raw materials and inputs, which are converted into high value-added goods. This sector causes a multiplying result in other sectors of the economy. The civil construction chain absorbs large quantity of qualified and unqualified labor and it produces and distributes income.

For better understanding of the construction industry, Carneiro (2010, p. 4) defines construction site as the "environment where the main construction activity is carried out, and it is also the moment and the place of greater interaction between the majority of the elements of the supply chain".

The construction worker process prevails as a production based on manufactures, in which the representative of the working process control remains with the employee in your work environment. The base of the organization of work in the sector is the structure of work (DUL and WEERDMEESTER, 2001).

The Brazilian Association of technical standards (ABNT, 1991, p. 18) defines construction site as "areas for the implementation and the support of the work of the construction industry, in operational and experience areas". The living areas are "areas to meet the basic human needs of food, hygiene, rest, leisure, ambulatory, and coexistence and should be physically separated from the labor areas"

The construction site is a dynamic and flexible structure which, throughout the course of the work, takes on different characteristics depending on the workers, companies and equipment presented. It is planned to facilitate the control of workers by the direction of the construction company. The hierarchical activities and technical-productive functions are mingled (BENITE, 2004).

Regarding the tasks carried out at the construction site, Tomasi (1999) emphasizes that they are dangerous, unhealthy and demand a young, strong and courageous workforce willing

not only to live with these conditions but also willing to acquire the knowledge needed for its implementation. The author explains that the construction sector is faced with three problems related to labor and its formation: (1) traditional vocational training (acquired by the practice of knowledge passed on in the construction site, i.e. one that goes from father to son), which is not enough to keep up with technological developments in the industry, and the need to complement through training produced within the school system; (2) the traditional labor composed and available in the market, represented by the artisan or small contractor, which companies have always appealed to, is in extinction in the current country situation; (3) the increase in the educational level of the population in almost all over the world, providing for the construction a more educated workforce, a fact that is one less a problem than a solution. However, workers involved in new processes continue using part of their knowledge and skills.

Productivity in construction is sensitive and dependent on the worker's arm and his socialized knowledge in the structure of the work, which does not happen in other sectors such as industry, the instructions related to the production process are largely transmitted man-man and the human management at work overlaps the technical management. Thus, the pace and quality of work depend on the worker almost exclusively. Silva (2008) mentions that the evaluation and analysis of the satisfaction degree of employees provide important contributions to companies in order to target them to improve quality and increase productivity.

### **Studied organizations**

The two constructors, object of analysis in this study were here named A and B. The construction company, headquartered in Belo Horizonte-MG, was founded in 1957 and has 750 direct employees, of whom work in the construction sites of Belo Horizonte, 550 men and 40 women, and the salaries of the officers and servants (quarries, grout workers and electricians) are, respectively, R\$ 748 .00 and R\$ 1.170 ,40. The construction company B, headquartered in Belo Horizonte-MG, has offices in São Paulo and has investments located in Minas Gerais, Goiás, Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It was set up in 2007, from the merger of three companies, and it has 1,749 employees, 1,465 allocated in Belo Horizonte. In the operational sector, there are 206 women and 889 men. The wages of servants is R748 .00 and from the quarries, grout workers and electricians varies between R\$ 1,323 .40 to 1,170 .25. These values are calculated according to the Collective Convention Agreement (2012-2013).

### **Presentation and analysis of results**

The demographic data provided in picture 1 indicates that the age of the interviewees ranged from 20 to 44 years. It is observed that 55% of the interviewees are aged between 31 to 44 years and have completed or not the elementary school, signaling that "mature" women and more educated are gleaming in the construction sector an option for their professional replacement.

Picture 1 - Demographic analysis of the group studied

Interviewees	Age	Marital status	N° of kids	School background				Time seniority	Position	Position previous
				Elementary school		High school				
				Comp.	Incomp.	Comp.	Incomp.			
E1	6	Divorced	3	X				1 year and 4 months	Mason	Cleaning lady
E2	6	Single	5	X				1 year and 4 months	Mason	Cleaning lady
E3	0	Single	4	X				3 years	Mason 2	Mason
E4	2	Stable relationship.	2		X			10 months	Mason 2	Housewife
E5	4	Single	3			X		3 years	Mason e Grout worker	Mason
E6	0	Single	1				X	5 months	Servant	Servant
E7	4	Single	2				X	1 month	Servant	Apontadora
E8	4	Single	1				X	1 month	Servant	Restaurant attendant
E9	7	Stable relationship.	1	X				3 months	Servant	Cleaning lady
E10	4	Married	4		X			5 months	Grout worker	Cleaning lady
E11	6	Single	1			X		8 months	Grout worker	Production op.
E12	3	Stable relationship.	2	X				3 months	Servant	Cleaning lady
E13	1	Single	1	X				2 months	Servant	Clerk
E14	5	Single	-		X			1 month	Grout worker	Grout worker
E15	1	Stable relationship.	3		X			3 months	Servant	Elevator operator
E16	1	Single	2				X	2 months	Servant	Cleaning lady
E17	4	Single	1				X	3 months	Grout worker	Grout worker
E18	3	Married	2		X			9 months	Mason	Servant
E19	7	Single	2	X				10 months	Eletricista	Cleaning lady
E20	2	Stable relationship.	2			X		2 years	Mason	cashier

Source: Data from the research

Still according to picture 1, the absolute majority (95%) of the interviewees has children and more than half (60%) are single, which indicates that are responsible to support the family. This reinforces the ideas of Bruschini (2007) and Queiroz et al. (2010) when

mentioning that women remain active economically in the period in which they are raising and caring the offspring.

Another relevant data is that 35% of those professionals who occupied former cleaning positions in the enterprises or in family houses opted to work in the construction sector possibly lured by wages, which are higher.

### **The work at the construction site of the civil construction: the enchantment with the new job**

The day to day of the professionals of the construction site is difficult. Generally, they live far from the place of work having to wake up early in the morning, take two or more buses to get to the work and start the activities at seven o'clock in the morning and punch the card. Usually, the work schedule is Monday through Thursday from seven to five and on Fridays from seven to four, lunch is included, a total of 44 hours per week. On Saturdays, they sometimes do overtime. In addition, they still have the roles of housewife, mother and wife.

The most prominent reason pointed out by the interviewees in relation to the admission of women in the construction site of civil construction is the facility of professional replacement, what confirms the information of D'Amorim (2011) that the shortage of manpower in construction facilitated the entry of women in this male environment. According to the author in 2007, they accounted for 109 thousand and in May 2011 hit 189,3 thousand, still a little representative considering the total of 2,4 million workers in the sector. However, it is considered a breakthrough, the breaking of a taboo. The statement of the interviewee account illustrates very well the current moment of the demand for the civil construction professionals.

It is a profession that never lacks in the market. It is always in need. Look in the newspaper, the newspaper is full of ads. It is always in need. No lacking in this area. (E2)

Other reasons alleged by the professionals interviewed were: salary, work interest in construction, possibility of professional growth, interest in learning the profession, benefits offered by the construction, financial independence and the equal pay with men.

The interviewees highlighted the opportunity of obtaining higher wages than the minimum to join the civil construction sector. The salaries offered by the companies studied are above the minimum wage stipulated by the Government, which sets up an attractive to these professionals operating in the sector of the construction industry.

It's good, right? Because I've never had the opportunity to earn a good salary, right? Always minimum wage [...]. (E20)

There are reports that claim the interest in acquiring financial independence and also to learn the profession, which, in most cases, it is learned on the job as the ideas of Ilda (2005) which states that the activities of the construction site are made by persons with short or no previous training.

I think the need be independent, right? And want to learn, right? In this profession we learn something different every day. The independence and the need that many like me entered the area knowing nothing and through necessity learned a lot and enjoyed. (E5)

One important data highlighted by the interviewees is the equal pay of men and women in the companies studied unlike the literature, because, historically, the man's work is more valued than women's work (CAMBOTA and PONTES, 2007). Yannoulas (2003) and Hirata and Kergoat (2008) also expose that hierarchical principle, one of the principles

organizers of social division of labor, the male work is more valued than the female. In these companies, there is the weakening of this hierarchical principle, because there is no wage differentiation between men and women.

Yeah, we are treated equal to men. At least in this company is like that. The same wage of men is the same as for the women. There is no distinction, really. The way they treat men is the way they treat women. (E5). First is the equal pay which we are getting the same as the servant. In other jobs we do not receive the same thing. (E16)

Table 1 confirms the definitions submitted by the respondents of what it is to work in the construction site of the civil construction. It is sensed an enthusiasm in the vast majority of professionals, all of which stated that they like to exercise the profession. Moreover, they feel pleasure in what they do; they claim to be living a dream; they are recognized; and they feel proud. Only one interviewee revealed that the work is difficult.

Table 1 – Working in construction worksite in the perception of interviewees

Topics	Interviewees	Total	%	Total number of interviewees
Like the profession	E1 a E20	20	100	20
Fullfil a dream	E2, E3	2	10	20
Feel pleasure	E15, E17	2	10	20
Do a hard job	E1	1	5	20
Have recognition	E4	1	5	20
Daily Superation	E6	1	5	20
Feel proud	E17	1	5	20

Source: Data from the research

Note: the sum of the frequencies is above 100% amking it possible for the interviewees to give more than one answer.

How I would set it? Folks, it's a world so that you can't explain. There are things that you look at a person working on a wall, you think this person is just playing, a simple thing, no!! Everything is very difficult. For us women is even more difficult. Masonry is yo place a brick on top of the other, it is not? So, there are many details which you look at who's doing. You say: "But this is easy". It is not, understand? It's a world so different (smiles). Is very different ... I like it! (E1)

The report presented highlights the importance of the know-how which according to Franco (2001), refers to the ability in carrying out the tasks and how to perform them. Even struggling she doesn't allow focusing in the hardness of the profession and see the other side, "one world, so different" and concludes: "I like it".

For me, it was like a dream this profession because I didn't ever expect this to happen, never in my life, you understand? Never, never, never. And until now in my family, among my brothers, I am the only one. I have four brothers and four sisters and I'm the only one. For me, it was a spectacular experience. For me, it is being wonderful. (E2)

The majority of women working in the construction site of the civil construction feature a rewarding sense of working in the industry. Thus, the practice of the profession is the realization of a dream. It is a spectacular experience. These women are getting in touch

with a new reality and they see themselves in a different way they represent a breakthrough, the breaking of a taboo as says D'Amorim (2011).

Positive sensation related to resilience and strength is cited by the respondents to describe what it is to work on a construction site. It is inferred that these women are fascinated about the activities they perform and show the phase of fascination for the "achievement" of a new professional area. In this sense, considering the principle of separation defined by Hirata and Kergoat (2008) in the social division of work that defines the existence of works of "men" and "women" there is a weakening of this division by the interviewees in civil construction industry, because it is no longer a male environment.

Table 2 configures the feeling of exercise one activity in the construction site of the civil construction mentioned by the interviewees. The feeling that stands out is the happiness and fulfillment when carrying out the professional activities.

Table 2 – The feeling of exercising one activity in the construction worksite

Topics	Interviewees	Total	%	Total number of interviewees
Feel happy	E2, E4, E10, E12, E14, E15, E16, 20	8	40	20
Able to performe the tasks	E1, E6, E7, E9, E17, E18	6	30	20
Feel important	E1, E3, E11, E16	4	20	20
It is respected by the men in the worksite	E5, E17	2	10	20
Still think it is odd	E8, E13	2	10	20
Feel diferente	E3, E19	2	10	20

Source: Data from the research

Note: the sum of the frequencies is above 100% amking it possible for the interviewees to give more than one answer.

The statement illustrates the sense indicated by the interviewees showing the female labor traces in construction:

Ah! I think what the woman does, she gives more attention, perfection, you understand? I think the woman is like that ... there are men who say: "Oh, if I damp it there it is good". The woman does not. The woman wants to do right, wants to show that she does so, right. Like they say: "perfection!" You don't want to do wrong you want to learn better, understand? The men have already been on this site for a long time and the woman is entering now. Equal to me. Don't have much time. And every day that goes by you want to learn more. You want to do with perfection, with quality, and that is what the work asks, Hey, quality. Oh, I'm a happy person because I am learning new things in my life. ... (E2)

It is also observed on Table 2, that the interviewees express the ability to pursue the activity even when historically it is pointed out as being a male activity, and as a result, they feel important and respected by the men in the construction site. Some interviewees pointed out that they feel different and others also feel strange working in construction sites.

The interviewees showed happiness to compete with men in a male dominated area and they highlighted the willingness to learn, as well as the female characteristics which bring

quality to the work they perform: "do right" and "the pursuit of perfection". These characteristics come from the thought of Yannoulas (2003) regarding the sexual division of horizontal activities considered female, linking them to characteristics such as patience and gentleness.

Regarding the professional projects, all interviewees have expressed a desire to continue in the construction site, the vast majority want to take preparatory courses aiming to assume top positions, while others want to take courses for improvement and continue in the same position. Tomasi (1999) highlights the importance of the qualification produced within the school system to monitor industry developments and these interviewees corroborate this theory.

Concerning the level of difficulty at the construction worksite some interviewees noted the accomplishment of all tasks; they do well and they are detail oriented. Regarding the difficulties to carry out the activities, the most representative was the difficulty of dealing with weight. The following stories illustrate the points discussed by the interviewee:

The woman it is more detailed, understand? Then, to make a square, to pull a level, we look at them with more detail, we do everything with more care, you understand? Now the difficulty is the question of weight, get it, because you cannot choose work, understand? Today, you are here doing something then working on the floor, you understand? The difficulty is the weight (E1). The most difficult is the heaviest service, working with mortar. But day by day I don't think about it, I have no difficulty there. Ease is the lightest thing, so, to make small masonry, grout. Grout! We have already done it for quite some time. (E3)

It is observed that the facilities highlighted by the interviewees correspond to activities that require female characteristics like being detail oriented and the search for a job well done which according to Yannoulas (2003), it is attributed to women in the sexual division of work. The difficulty of performing heavy duty mentioned by interviewees in the sexual division of labor is the horizontal activities for men (YANNOULAS, 2003).

### **Gender relations in construction site of the civil construction: practical and theoretical exhaustion**

Regarding the acceptance of colleagues on the space occupied by women in construction site, some interviewees stated that colleagues accept the presence of women in the construction site; other reported that acceptance is not total, because a small part of colleagues still demonstrates prejudice. The compliment coming from the colleagues accounts for 65% of the interviewees and 35% said they receive more compliments than criticisms from the workmates.

The report below shows a situation of prejudice faced by a woman in the workplace. The servant refused to assist the workmate. It seems that the servant did not realize that this is no longer exclusively a male environment, showing irritation by finding a professional woman, and having to take hierarchical position below her. For him, based on Bourdieu (2011), it remains in the hands of the men the domain of the area and power of public space.

[...] I didn't get to run a job that my boss gave me because my servant was a man and he said he wouldn't help a woman. That day I left sooner, right? And then, the other day when I came back, they changed my servant (E18).

However, when they were questioned about how the relationship among the co-workers occurs, 85% of the interviewees stated that the relationship is good; and 15% stated that the relationship is great and that they respect them.

Concerning the acceptance of the managers, the vast majority of the interviewees said that the managers accept the professional women in construction site; and only one interviewee thinks that not all bosses have this acceptance. As the outcome of the tasks performed, the situation repeats and the vast majority of interviewees reported that they receive compliments from the heads and only one interviewee mentioned that only sometimes she gets compliments. This result allows us to infer that the female presence in the construction site of the companies studied is being accepted by the male audience, without much apparent conflicts, and they even praise the performance of women.

However, it must be taken into account that women express enchantment for the new job, the market is demanding professionals for the sector and the role of them in construction sites is still small.

Focusing on the theme of "prejudice", the majority of the interviewees said that they obtained the support of family and friends to the professional choice. The enthusiasm is also highlighted. The acceptance of the people usually expressed by comments shows admiration.

I had support. (smiles) Everyone thought it was my face. I had a lot of support (E1). Ah! My family has supported too. They laughed, they told joke ... Many people do not know and many people doubt. They say you work for something else. So I just tell to whom is in the family, as well. Who asks me, I say I work elsewhere: "work work", just say so. There are too many questions when I say: "as quarry". Noh! Congratulations! Many people congratulate me and say: Noh! You're too chic! Oh if I could! Women say and men too. Then, a woman the other day, at the bus stop asked: "you work where? I said: "I work that worksite". "You do what?" I said: "I am a quarry there". "What? Girl, you're new! Congratulations! That chic! Our Lady"! The market is very advanced with women. They are ahead of the men. I said: we are! "I think it's cool"! (E2)

However, according to the statement, a small proportion of these professionals faced prejudices of family in which the husband manifests his disapproval concerning the professional choice of the wife denying it when dealings with friends. It is observed the manifestation of prejudice on the husband's behavior. It seems to be because of the recent female insertion at the construction site, little widespread yet, configuring the ideas of Falcão et al (2004) in which the prejudice is manifested through preferences that are known, similar and satisfactory

I have faced it nowadays. My husband finds it an absurd to work as a servant. He is ashamed to talk to his friends that I'm a servant. He says: "My wife works in a worksite out there." He doesn't say as what. He does not like. He tries to talk me into leaving. He thinks women have to stay inside the house, taking care of a child, taking care of him, and only him that can have a job. (E9)

It is interesting to note the perceived contradictions found in this research such as: heavy and unhealthy work versus women's enchantment by exercising it; admiration and respect of the men in construction versus rejection and prejudice; support and family pride vs. prejudice and family denial. In essence, the data obtained in this study indicate a challenge to the classical settings of sexual division of labor and gender relations.

## Final considerations

The objective of this research was to investigate and analyze how women in two constructing companies of Belo Horizonte realize and experience the everyday operational work in the civil construction sector at the construction site.

The professionals surveyed claim to like to exercise the activity at the construction site despite the difficulty of dealing with the heavy duty and they intend to continue at the construction site. The women interviewed show concern for professional development, planning participation in preparatory courses to take higher positions or, even, to be qualified in order to obtain better professional performance.

These findings related to the satisfaction of the construction professionals contradict theoretical positions such as the equal pay between men and women and they explain the inclusion of women in this sector where the demand for labor is increasing in the country's social and economic moment. It should be noted that respondents are aware of their difficulties and limitations in the construction sites, they face prejudice and they support the hard work and the double shift. They demonstrate to have clarity as to what they want, overcoming the adversities concerning function and pressures suffered in the family or in the society.

These facts confirm new moments in gender relations in the occupation of new spaces by women and in the breaking of paradigms and preconceptions, based not only on technological and market changes, but above all, on the subjective constructs that allow the women to fight and advance in their autonomy and aspirations based on the construction of a new female identity: safer and bolder.

It was found in this research some enchantment in the new field of work either because of the pay or the appreciation for the opportunity to grow professionally when comparing the current position to those ones formerly occupied by the interviewees. In addition to that, the effort required by the work that these women are subjected to.

There are strong indicatives of male domination in the construction. They are based on the history, biology, culture, psychoanalysis and ethnology. Bourdieu (2007) recognizes changes in gender relations, but it is restricted to diverse fields. The literature suggests that professions that became more feminine are devalued or are in a declining phase. Yet, the presence of women is restricted to certain levels along the career or the hierarchy. It cannot be left aside the existence of a symbolic negative factor that affects everything they are and do.

However, the changes are occurring, even though in many cases, slowly. But, empowering means: the possibility the people have to take charge of their own lives. The women empowerment goes through the challenge of the patriarchal relations, a continuous qualification and awareness of their real position in society. Although the gender inequalities remain visible, there is also evidence that the women work has been professionalizing, diversifying and taking up progressively more space and greater importance in the labor market.

It is suggested that this study can be carried out with other women who are working in the construction site, with more time in the profession or reapply the research after having the women in this sector for a longer time.

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