

# HOME, STREET, SCHOOL: GENDER AND SCHOOLING IN URBAN POPULAR SECTORS

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## ABSTRACT

*This article is based on a research that aimed at understanding the role of family socialization in the construction of gender-biased educational trajectories from the point of view of 25 children from low-income families of a public school of São Paulo. Information regarding the participation of girls and boys in housework, leisure practices and circulation in the public space were gathered through observation and interviews. It can be concluded that family socialization tends to stimulate a better performance of girls through the construction of femininities rooted in responsibility and discipline, as well as through the positive significance of the school as a recreational and sociability space, in view of the several restrictions that girls endure in their daily lives, at home and on the street.*

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT • FEMININITIES • MASCULINITIES •  
SOCIOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

**T**HROUGHOUT THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, BRAZILIAN SOCIETY WITNESSED SHARP CHANGES regarding the right to education of populations hitherto excluded from schools, amongst which women. If in the past the deprivation or segregation of the access to education hampered the schooling of the female population, this scenario was modified as the democratization of education was consolidated in Brazil. The expansion of places at school initiated in the second half of the last century, added to the equivalence of secondary schooling certificates, brought about the phenomenon that became known as the reversal of the “gender gap” (ROSEMBERG; MADSEN, 2011), that is, the correction of the historical inequalities grounded in sexual difference.

In spite of being oriented by universalizing policies of expansion of the access to education, these measures had as one of their effects the production of a *new* difference, to the extent that today women became the main beneficiaries of the democratization in the access to education. As an example, in the 60+ population bracket, illiteracy rates reached in 2014 27.4% for women and 24.9% for men, whereas among youngsters and adults between 15 and 29 this picture is inverted, with rates of 1.9% for women and 3.6% for men (IBGE, 2014). Along the same lines, it is observed that women comprise today the majority of students at secondary school, representing 53.5% of enrolments (INEP, 2013). Although these differences may at first seem small, they point to the phenomenon that women have been achieving more schooling time

than their peers of the male gender, by dint of following less turbulent schooling paths and with greater possibilities of success at the right age, in a trend also described internationally for a considerable segment of the world's population (UNESCO, 2012; OECD, 2015).

With the purpose of understanding these inequalities, it is necessary to investigate what are the relations between gender and the schooling of children and youngsters. For that, since the 1990s, a field of studies has been developing in Brazil which, making use of the concept of gender, delves into the aspects related to the gender of students in sociocultural processes of production of school “failure” or “success”. In this context, several studies have investigated the role of the school institution in the construction of masculinities and femininities and its effects on the configuration of “student crafts” in greater or lesser conformity to school expectations (e.g. BRITO, 2006; PEREIRA; CARVALHO, 2009). This approach, in short, results from the maturation of a field of research that, appropriating the concept of gender as an analytical tool capable of construing the exercise of power in the relations between the sexes, no longer asks itself merely about the differences *between men and women*, but also questions the distinctions *among men* and *among women*.

Although sociology of education has produced important studies about the relations between families and schools, there is still lack of research about the construction of gender differences within families, and their influence on the schooling of children. This lacuna is even more sharply felt when we take boys and girls themselves as subjects of the research. In the absence of these developments, the resulting gap tends to reinforce a recurrent idea among educators that blames family socialization for the expressions of gender in schoolchildren, with the tendency of attributing to families the origin of attitudes, behaviors and interest – or lack thereof – of boys and girls towards school, according to the survey by Carvalho (2013). Thus, the understanding about families remains dim, particularly about those families from the popular sectors, as remain the relations between their distinct members.

Starting from such considerations, the objective of the research that originated this article was to understand how children from the popular urban layers of the population perceive and re-signify the attitude of their families before gender differences and similarities with regard to rules and controls, uses of time and space, and work and leisure activities, among other practices conducted outside the school. The aim was that of investigating the relations between such practices and the schooling of boys and girls, having as a reference the construction of masculinities and femininities in childhood, and seeking to observe if and how schooling inequalities might be related to the socialization of gender in the family context.

To that end, we attempted to study gender relations within the family context based on a perspective that pays attention to femininities and masculinities, here understood as a set of practices that express the genders in a given social context, in dialogue with the work of Raewyn Connell (2005). We have chosen this theoretical approach having in mind that a look upon masculinities and femininities allows an approximation to the diversity of the forms of “being a boy” and “being a girl”, which are intertwined to power relations expressed through countless daily life practices. It is with an eye to such practices, such as they are described by the children themselves, that the research sought to understand gender relations in the family environment.

## METHODOLOGY

This article results from a Master thesis research whose empirical work took place during the second semester of 2012. A qualitative methodology was adopted, inspired in ethnography and centered on the conduction of observations and semistructured interviews. Thus, during a period of five months we followed in a school from the public system of the city of São Paulo a class of the third year of fundamental education, comprised of 25 children, 14 girls and 11 boys, meeting them between two and three times a week. We tried to interact with the largest possible number of children during school time, including classes, school breaks and other events that could gather pupils and the community together. At the same time, we gave priority to dissolve certain a priori boundaries between the adult, male researcher – present there for the fieldwork – and the group of boys and, particularly, girls from the class studied.

After a month of informal interactions, children were invited individually or in couples based on mutual affinity to a separate room in the school where they were interviewed and the interviews recorded.<sup>1</sup> A total of 20 children were interviewed (12 girls and eight boys), and there was no mixed gender couple. The interviews attempted to capture details about the children’s routine and about the set of activities they performed outside the school, with special attention to the family environment, the home and the street. We asked, for example, about the kind of rules existing in the home environment, what activities occupied their afternoons, and how was the sharing of chores and playtime among siblings, if any. Although not been studied directly, the family appears in this work as a unit of analysis through the children’s testimonies, that is, through what boys and girls said and represented about their families in their daily lives. Such choice – of giving priority to children as interlocutors of the research – was supported by reflections coming from the area of sociology of childhood (FARIA;

<sup>1</sup>  
A Term of Free and Clarified  
Consent was signed by  
an adult responsible  
for the child, as well as  
by the school team.

FINCO, 2011), which shed light on the protagonism of the subjects in their socialization process.

Out of the 25 children in the class, 13 lived in a large slum (*favela*) near the school, and 10 others lived in peripheral boroughs not technically understood as *favelas*,<sup>2</sup> since they offer legal property of land and urbanization (asphalt roads, sewers etc.). All children came from the popular segments of society; their parents and/or responsible adults had little schooling and worked in low qualification occupations. Nine of them lived within complete nuclear families, eight in monoparental female-headed families, and four of them in other types of family arrangement.<sup>3</sup> Most of the children lived in families composed of four to five members (there was only one case of a single child). Their ages concentrated between eight and nine, with three children being older than the average, one of them being a boy of 13.

Continual contact between researchers and children, and an interview with the teacher responsible for the class allowed us to establish an idea about the school performance of those 25 children. No attempt was made at attributing grades or scores to them, in view of the difficulty recognized by the teacher herself to carry out a school assessment that could be translated into a performance measure. The choice was, therefore, to emphasize the relationships built between children and the schooling process, seeking to identify which pupils approximated the attitudes expected by the teacher, and those who did not, as well as which of them exhibited the best learning progress by the end of the academic year. Under this perspective, six girls and five boys stood out among the children regarded by the teacher as more participative and with better performance. In the “average” group there were six girls and only one boy. And among the pupils with higher than average learning and discipline difficulties, five boys and only two girls were placed. A trend was, therefore, observed on the part of the teacher to assess boys as lower performance students – and observations in the school daily life confirmed this phenomenon.

## DOMESTIC CHORES: WHO DOES WHAT?

Although the inclusion of domestic chores<sup>4</sup> among the objects of study of Brazilian academic production is not recent, this theme has gained in strength during the last two decades as a result of the efforts of feminists to bring the subject to the table of public policies, as well as to the agenda of knowledge production in the Human Sciences (BRITES, 2013). These demands have pointed at the same time to the improvement of data collection about this modality of work and to the need to deepen the academic reflection on the theme. Without leaving aside the participation of adult women, it is also important to bring

<sup>2</sup> For two of the children it was not possible to obtain information about the location of their household.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of these arrangements are: monoparental male-headed family, recomposed family, and foster family. For four of the children it was not possible to obtain information about family arrangement.

<sup>4</sup> In the present text, we take as synonyms expressions such as “domestic chores”, “domestic tasks”, “domestic work” and “domestic services”. Through these phrases we refer exclusively to the domestic services carried out with the purpose of maintaining the household, and not to paid domestic jobs or employment.

forward more elements to think about the participation of men, as well as the involvement of children and youngsters of both sexes in the division of domestic work.

Several evidences were found in the present research for the existence of a sex-based division of domestic work between fathers and mothers of the children studied, which was considered by us as the point of departure to understand the participation of children themselves in these routines. Such results reaffirm the widely observed pattern in societies, such as the Brazilian one, which place upon women the larger share of domestic work (RIBEIRO, 2009; ARTES; CARVALHO, 2010), in a sexual division of labor marked by the opposition between the genders as one of its cultural traits (HEILBORN, 1997). In the class investigated here, a significant part of the children lived in monoparental female-headed families that gave center stage to the role of the mother in the domestic environment. However, even in families that had the presence of father and mother, the sexual division of labor was clear, although not always made as explicit in the children's speeches as did Giselle,<sup>5</sup> when saying that "it's my mother who does everything!". By declaring that they collaborated in domestic chores, children frequently denounced that this help was directed at the work otherwise carried out by their mothers:

*Sometimes I do it. I help my mother. I help my mother to cook.*  
(Giovana)

*Sometimes I help my mother.* (Lourenço)

Apart from mothers and fathers, other female members of the family, such as grandmothers or older sisters could equally contribute to take care of domestic chores. It is the case of Enzo's two sisters, who shared with their mother the responsibility for the domestic services, or of Lourenço's 20-year-old sister, who helped cleaning the house when she returned from her job in a local shopping mall. The same could be said of Yara's grandmother, who apart from contributing with house chores also attended some of the school meetings.

For the children, the participation of mothers and older sisters in domestic chores could serve as a model of activities developed by women and, therefore, as the configuration of a range of female activities, expressions of femininities that comprised the daily lives of adults and children. Sylvie Octobre (2010), in a research conducted in France, highlights that the "implicit education" conducted through gendered practices that, by serving as an example, guide the construction of masculinities and femininities in children can be even capable of overcoming the "explicit education" given through professed rules and

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All names attributed to subjects are fictional to guarantee anonymity.

norms. Therefore, the possibility of gender equality among children within the domestic context would be conditioned beforehand by the division of labor existing among adults, which demonstrated in practice that mothers were the main responsible for the organization and maintenance of the household.

All children from the class studied here, regardless of sex, were involved to some extent with domestic chores: making their own bed, organizing their school material and, sometimes, cleaning up their rooms. Differences between sexes became more accentuated with respect to the practices focused on maintaining the household as a whole. In this regard, a *sexual division of domestic work* was observed, in which the participation of girls was rather more expressive than that of boys. For many girls, domestic chores were carried out as part of their daily routine, with the mother delegating responsibilities and representing the reference around which tasks were performed:

*[My stepmother] asks me to make the bed, sweep the floor while she sleeps. Then she wakes up and does the rest. (Débora)*

*I help my mother to cut... My mother tells me to cut tomato, carrots, okra. (Larissa)*

The involvement of girls in the tasks mentioned, being understood as a “help” to the mother figure, reflected a sharing of labor not only between the two sexes, but also between adults and children – it is emblematic that Débora’s stepmother delegated to the girl the cleaning of the house while she rested. There are indications to conclude, also, that in many cases the involvement of girls tended to happen in a natural way, which did not preclude the application of punishment should some transgression take place – as an illustration, Fabiana told us that her mother did not need to give her any domestic task, because she already knew her responsibilities; she also knew by her own experience that she would be physically punished if she did not do them.

When a child had older sisters or sisters with ages similar to them, the sharing of domestic work was common, each one aware of their role in maintaining the household. The same cannot be said about the presence of brothers with ages similar or older. In the case of younger brothers, on the contrary, the participation of girls in the organization of the family increased, since they became partially responsible for them as well. An example is the role that Débora exercised with respect to her younger brother, to the extent that in one occasion the girl was reprimanded by her stepmother because he spent all the coins in their coin box – the reason presented was that she, as the elder sister, should

have made sure that the brother did not make that mistake. A similar degree of responsibility was also observed with regard to Thaís, who was charged with accompanying her brother in his visits to friends: “[My mother] tells me to go along so that I can take care of him”. The care of younger brothers by girls tends to be justified in the literature by the age criterion (PUNCH, 2010), as if the fact that they were older explained, by itself, the reason they engage in caring for them. However, it is fundamental to reveal the gender character behind such assertion, since a typical task for an elder sister may not find a corresponding task in an older brother, an observation corroborated by the results of the present research: none of the three boys who had younger brothers/sisters admitted having any kind of responsibility in caring for them.

In the network of family relations, the activities performed by children echoed the parents’ division of labor – a phenomenon frequently described in national and international literature (WHITAKER, 2002; NILSEN; WÆRDAHL, 2014). More than sporadic or isolated participations, the involvement of girls in the domestic service routine is revealing of a system of social relations that, within the family, constructs gender so as to guarantee unequal access to power by boys and girls.

In this respect, it was highly informative to observe the tension between two categories that, as already pointed out by Heilborn (1997), organize the universe of family relations when described through the viewpoint of children and youngsters: *obligation* and *help*. In the interviews, it became clear that Débora, who had a younger brother studying at the same school and another one still a baby, was charged with carrying out various daily domestic chores. However, when questioned about who “helped” more at home, she promptly answered that it was her brother. Even a cursory reading of the situation reveals this information to be in conflict with Débora’s larger participation in those tasks. Incidentally, this finding suggests that Débora did not see her work as “help”: for her, the domestic chores were part of her responsibility. She was the one who “did” them; it was her brother who “helped”. Along this same line, Thaís recognized that her younger brother, only four years old, “helped” in domestic tasks: his task was to help making his bed, while Thaís took care of other services, such as keeping the house clean (“I enjoy cleaning”), dusting the furniture, arranging the bed and sofa. Even performing a larger number of activities when compared to her brother, Thaís did not attribute to her participation the status of “help”. For these girls, the act of contributing to domestic chores did not have the same weight when performed by girls or by boys.

In short, two senses of “help” were found in this research. The first related to the role played by girls before their mothers and “responsible adults” in the organization of the household, as if the sharing of domestic chores between adults and children required only



the “help” of girls – a help that, according to Kosminsky and Santana (2006), naturalizes a set of gender differences implicit in a situation unequal and unfair. Contrariwise, the second sense of this concept underlay the dyad “obligation” versus “help”, in other words, “the domestic work is dressed as an ‘obligation’ for girls and as ‘help’ for boys conditioned to their will” (HEILBORN, 1997, p. 312, emphasis in the original). To put it even more clearly, the “help” given by girls to their mothers and older sisters would be, if placed side-by-side with occasional contributions from boys, an “obligation”.

Among boys, in their turn, there were rare cases in which they declared having no involvement in house chores. On the contrary, many of them enumerated situations in which they participated effectively, only to be soon revealed in the conversation to be a minimal responsibility:

*I put away my shoes, sometimes I do the dishes... go out to buy something [...]. I can also cook. [Researcher: Do you?] Rice. [Researcher: What else?] A lot of things... (Karlos)*

*I make my own bed. I sweep the floor. [...] Sometimes, only sometimes... (Vitor)*

*I do the dishes sometimes [...]. I help to dust the furniture and I also help sweeping the floor [...]. I like it... and my mother tells me to. (Enzo)*

*I do more the dishes. [Researcher: Everyday?] No, not every day, some days [...]. I clean my room every day. (Leonardo)*

The participation of boys in domestic chores, when it extended into activities oriented to the collective, was then characterized by its low frequency and thin commitment. Furthermore, we might suppose that perhaps some of the boys were hiding their involvement in domestic tasks in their testimonies, afraid of being seen by the researcher or by colleagues as “girlish”, or, at least, as “less masculine”. Apart from possible maneuvers to hide involvement in domestic services, several tactics might have been adopted by boys to avoid fulfilling those tasks, as reported by the boys themselves and by the girls in respect to their brothers. As an example, Vítor said that when he was “not in the mood” of doing dishes, he would leave the house soon after lunch and pay attention to see when his mother had already done it.

Nevertheless, these strategies did not seem to be adopted frequently, perhaps because there was no need: the role played by mothers and sometimes sisters seemed to be enough for the demand

of domestic chores. Consequently, the contrasts between sexes became clearer. In a particular case, Juliano expressed quite clearly what the attitude of the men who inhabited his house was. When questioned about the male participation in domestic chores, his response was emblematic: “Of course not!” This attitude was rarely found in the interviews, and the attempt on the part of boys to value the little participation they reported was visible, suggesting that there is a weak support for the complete and declared absence of participation of boys in these routines, albeit the domestic work continues to be a feminized practice.

Exceptions were, nonetheless, also observed in the class studied. Among all boys interviewed, there was one boy who undoubtedly carried out domestic chores routinely; he was called Lourenço. The younger child of a family composed of mother, sister and two brothers, Lourenço said, in a desolate tone, that he had no one to play with because all his siblings were much older. Although he could vary his participation in domestic chores, the interview made clear that the boy spontaneously engaged in these services, an initiative that seemed to be related to the fact that Lourenço spent most of his day at home, with scarce opportunities for entertainment and sociability. As a result of a sensation of boredom, Lourenço was unequivocal: “Well, there’s nothing to do, so I clean the house when it’s all dirty!”

This single case notwithstanding, the smaller male participation remained evident in the class studied, becoming even more visible when contrasted with the responsibility assumed by girls. In families with boys and girls, some testimonies revealed that girls were aware of how much they were overloaded when compared to their brothers. Yara, for example, recognized that her brother did not clean his own room and disregarded the orders of his mother. On the other hand, the girl was aware of the fact that she could not fail with her responsibilities, or she ran the risk of physical punishment. Similarly, Débora said that when her mother was away, she was in charge of domestic services, while her brother was free to leisure activities: “When she [mother] took a course, I had to clean the whole house by myself, while my brother played videogames”.

At the same time, the smaller participation of boys was at no point denounced as a privilege related to their sex. On the contrary, such differences were usually considered from an individualizing point of view, crediting the boys’ little participation to a lack of innate aptitudes or personality traits. “Lazy” was the adjective employed both by Yara and Débora to characterize their brothers, and it was also how Vítor labelled himself. According to Carvalho, Senkevics and Loges (2014), such explanation is also adopted by mothers when describing the unbalanced participations of their boys and girls in the conduction

of domestic work. The term “lazy” performs in this context the function of an excuse that serves the interest of a given configuration of gender relations, as justification for the exercise of certain masculinities.

In summary, the conduction of a routine of domestic chores is marked by mixed, antagonistic feelings of rejection, resigned acceptance and even spontaneous participation. Thus, two contradictory processes were manifested in regard to the division of domestic chores: on the one hand, the naturalization of an attribution of responsibilities based on gender, that not only placed on girls the larger burden of services, but also strengthened the notion that domestic tasks were eminently feminine activities; on the other hand, the expression of forms of resistance to the imposition of this pattern, which, although of little practical effectiveness, oriented critically the girls’ perception of the discrepancies they experienced in day to day family interactions.

## LEISURE AT HOME: PLAYING OR... SLEEPING

In their homes, the range of activities performed by children during their leisure time displayed, once again, sharp sex differentiation. Only girls declared playing with dolls, feeding them, playing house and other pretend plays about family themes, games which are traditionally associated to femininity, since they relate to images connected to maternity, to care and to the domestic environment. Other activities, recognizably masculine, comprised the boys’ routines, and, therefore, were not so easily appropriated by girls, such as videogames:

*I fight with him [brother], because he doesn't let me play. Every time I try to play he is there! (Larissa)*

*My brothers of 25 and 16 are the ones who play more. They play more. [...] They let me play too. (Giovana)*

Cell phones were the feminine equivalent of the videogame. Even if most girls did not have their own mobile telephones, they frequently reported borrowing them from their mothers and sisters and spending a few hours in the afternoon between games and music. Curiously, such practices acquired in their speeches a character of transgression, possibly due to the suspicion on the part of family members that girls could be using cell phones for inadequate activities, or using up their credits.

*I listen to music on my sister's cell phone. Then, when she comes, I remove the earphone and play some game [laughter]. (Natália)*

*[My mother] says that I should not touch her cell phone. Then, when she goes to work, I am on my own and then I take it [the cell phone]. (Gisele)*

Generally speaking, the discreetness in handling mobile telephones, added to the control in the use of videogames, reduced the leisure possibilities for girls inside the house. In contrast to that, the freedom of access to those devices enjoyed by their brothers indicated an unbalanced leisure routine within the household. One should remember that Débora recognized her overload of domestic chores when compared to the time spent by her brother in video gaming. Similarly, Vítor, Juliano and Karlos, to name a few examples, were not routinely in charge of any domestic service, and played freely on their devices, apart from having ample access to the environment outside the house. More than activities associated in greater or lesser degree to gender significations, leisure practices suggested that the children's daily routines were permeated by a mix of possibilities and restrictions that ultimately tended to confer more freedom in entertainment to boys.

In a social milieu where the access to the street was not free from some form of control, leisure within the household appeared as the main, if not single, form of entertainment for the children – especially for the girls – giving them a time for themselves, spent in entertainment, and not only in the school and house work. In this sense, the television set and the computer acquired center stage in their speeches, so that sitting in front of the screen was a constant pastime, and sometimes the only opportunity for some children to entertain themselves, particularly those of the feminine sex. As an example, Bianca described part of her day in the company of Larissa in the following manner: “We play with the computer, or we watch TV and sleep”. Their lack of alternatives is clear. Since these girls were not authorized to play on the street, all that remained to them was the television, the computer, a few plays, and... going to sleep. To Gisele, the situation was similar: “Hum... like... during the day... [thinking]... I'm by myself... so, sometimes I play with dolls, sometimes I sleep”. Rare leisure opportunities, few excursions outside the house, low exercise of sociability and, in addition to that, an overload of domestic services comprised the more common aspects found in the girls' routines. As already pointed out by Duque-Arrazola (1997, p. 370) almost two decades ago, this ordered temporality of girls guarantees at the same time “privileges to the boy, free time for personal enjoyment, for recreation and timeout with his friends”.

There was also difference in the ways in which games and plays stimulated or not the appropriation of the space among children, influencing their use of the exterior environment. In a research with boys and girls between the ages of seven and 13 in Viçosa (MG), Pinto

and Lopes (2009) observed a tendency among girls to use games and plays that demanded smaller spaces, perhaps the home itself, whilst male entertainment involved wider areas. It is interesting to think, for example, of a soccer match with regard to the masculinized character of the activity and to the inevitability that it is practiced outdoors; or, to offer a different example, playing house, a feminized game par excellence, and its reference to interiority (TRAVERSO-YÉPEZ; PINHEIRO, 2005). In other words, there is a feedback cycle involving the gender of a game/play and its relation to space: girls' entertainment is built largely around a smaller area. In opposition to that, the leisure of boys evokes certain masculinities that enable them to frequent the public space: the street, consequently, becomes the stage on which such games are practiced and, at the same time, where boys are constructed as such.

For the boys, leisure seemed to configure a wide range of activities that alternated with those conducted inside the household, and with other activities developed in open spaces, with wide possibilities for the boys to move from one environment to the other. In the following testimonies, we observe that the boys' routine tended to be livelier than the girls' with regard to entertainment, with the possibility of choosing between staying at home or playing on the street, depending on time of the day and on the presence of friends inviting them to go out:

*Sometimes I spend the whole day watching TV. Sometimes my friends come and call me to play. Then I go. (Gustavo)*

*If I don't have a friend [calling me to play], I stay there all day watching [TV]. (Leonardo)*

*I have a box full of videogames. [...] I go to the streets, I play ball with the guys. (Vitor)*

The exception among boys is Lourenço, already mentioned in the previous section for his involvement in domestic chores. As observed there, Lourenço lived with older siblings and had little company to play in the house. Furthermore, the boy was not authorized to play on the street. At home, few leisure activities were available to him: “five o'clock it's my turn to play with the computer. I play up to six. Then it's my brother. Then they [the two brothers] go to school and I play with the computer: the whole afternoon to play”. By revealing that he had permission to “play” with a computer “the whole afternoon”, the boy was actually informing the absence of alternatives for him, because in front of the computer screen his activities were limited to surfing the Internet and playing a few games. The boredom felt by Lourenço was, indeed, the main drive behind the boy's spontaneous collaboration in

the organization of the house. It is just one case among boys, but we may deduce that, among girls affected by the same boring routine, the lack of leisure could lead them to domestic chores or, why not, being made responsible for the house chores could make their afternoons more tedious, repetitive and controlled.

On the weekends, the situation did not seem to change substantially from what was presented to the children in the other days. For the boys, Saturdays and Sundays seem to be extensions of their free afternoons for entertainment and strolling on the streets. For the girls, two quite distinct scenarios were observed for the weekends. In one of them, the possibility of dedicating themselves to leisure, with occasional and controlled visits to the street, and involvement in less recurrent activities, such as shopping or helping the mother to prepare what were considered as special meals, because on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays the girls found more possibilities to go out, usually with adults, to visit shopping centers, supermarkets or street markets:

*Sometimes I go to the shopping center. I go to [the supermarket]. [...] And sometimes we go to the street market. (Natália)*

*Every Sunday I have to go [to the supermarket] with my aunt. (Bruna)*

*My sister and my mother, sometimes they bake a cake. Then we go to the shopping center. We stay in the park. (Giovana)*

At times, the occasional outings during the weekend acquired almost a character of obligation, as displayed by Bruna when she said that on Sundays she “has to go” to the supermarket. Apart from visiting spaces related to shopping, and even to the maintenance of the household itself – which, once again, relates to the participation of girls in domestic chores –, leisure spaces were reduced, in other cases, to a park close to the *favela* or to some external area around the house. Playing on the streets continues to be, in itself, occasional: “Sometimes I stay for a while on the street”: that was the way in which Gisele expressed these occurrences, conducted only on weekends and with the supervision of an adult. Even when not made explicit by most girls, it is possible to conclude that weekends could become an extension of their boring daily routines, as exemplified in the following testimonies:

*I don't like weekends. [...] It's bad... it's too boring to stay at home. (Pâmela)*

*Yeah [agreeing], stay at home... doing nothing. (Thaís)*

Although they had the whole day to play – or perhaps not the whole day, because of domestic chores –, the occasional boredom felt by girls faced with the lack of leisure alternatives at home, combined with the low circulation in public spaces, could be increased on Saturdays and Sundays. Because of that, those same girls said that the school offered more leisure opportunities than they usually had at home:

*Yeah, like, I come here [to school], it's more fun. [...] We play, we do things... (Pâmela)*

*There's more time to play [at school]. [...] than at home where we have the mother and so on. (Thaís)*

At school, during breaktime, the little park and the school yard offered practically the only opportunities they had to exercise something they enjoyed outside daily obligations. This picture is precisely the opposite of the situation described by Vítor:

*I prefer to play on the street, because on the street I have enough time to play, and at school I have almost none. (Vítor)*

Or also by Karlos in the conversation below:

Researcher: Would you rather play here [at school] or there [on the street]?

Karlos: There! I can stay later. Here I can't.

Now, we are referring to children of the same age living in similar areas. Their perceptions of school and house, despite similarities that characterized their surroundings, were radically different, and illustrate how much children's experiences gave them multiple, sometimes contrasting, outlooks upon their daily lives. More than generalizing the experience of Thaís and Pâmela to all other girls, or that of Vítor and Karlos to that of the boys, what these testimonies show is the importance of paying attention to their contexts, which tend to be organized in a dichotomic manner in terms of gender. If there is a polarization between sexes, we have to ask ourselves what mechanisms produce and sustain it. And, in this regard, we see that the balance between work and leisure seems to be the key to the construction of masculinities and femininities within the family environment.

## ACCESS TO THE STREET: FREEDOM OR RESTRICTION?

Going to and coming from school were the few instants that many children had to enjoy the space of the street, especially girls. Most girls seemed to find themselves in situations of almost domestic confinement, where the “street” was pictured as an environment filled with various dangers. With the exception of Lourenço, all the risks that the public space could offer to children were reported by girls, and varied within a very wide range of possibilities: from the potential danger of being run over by a car to the existence of a “black car that picks up children”, from the presence of “people smoking and drinking” to the risk of catching a cold and getting ill. More than a personal aversion to environments outdoors, it was a rigid control imposed by relatives, especially mothers. Indeed, breaking these rules was liable to punishment:

*My mother told me to stay [at home]. And I went to a friend's place. So when I got there, she [my mother] saw me on the street, and she told me off. (Thaís)*

*My mother didn't let me go on the street. I did. So, when she got back, she gave me a hard time. (Débora)*

Although living in the same neighborhood, Thaís and Débora rarely saw each other outside school. Because they did not engage in any extracurricular activities in the daytime, they spent their afternoons restricted to their domestic environments with rare and brief exits to nearby houses. This pattern, characterized by spending most of the day at home, was also identified in the routine of Débora, Gisele and Bruna and, among the boys, in Lourenço's. The first of them enjoyed playing soccer, an activity that, when carried out at all, took place only in her backyard. However, it was clear in her speech that around her household there was a space where “the boys” played soccer. Although this happened in the vicinity of her house, Débora was limited to the domestic environment, authorized to go out only occasionally and under family supervision: “I cannot walk on the street, because there's people smoking. [...] My dad sometimes lets me stay on the streets for a while, but only when there's nobody smoking or drunk around there”.

Apart from these cases, five other girls were regularly engaged in extracurricular activities in the daytime and, because of that, they found a little time to go out, given that their daily activities coincided with late afternoon. For these girls, the lack of time overcame the risks of the street, although they were still mentioned. Some of them still found in their strict daily routines a few moments to frequent the public space, such as Yara, who said she played on the street, but “just a little”.



There were also differences in the perception of danger on the street as a function of the location where they lived. The presence of *favelas* near the residence was seen as a negative reference for the region, in particular for the children who did *not* live in them: these children, who lived in the vicinity of *favelas*, emphasized what it meant to have in their neighborhood an extended environment as a source of threats from the streets. In a joint interview with Lourenço and Vítor – the latter an inhabitant of a *favela*; the former lived in an adjacent borough – the contrasts in the lens through which they perceived the environment of the *favela* became clear, using it or not to justify the limits of their frequency of the streets:

*[My sister] asked me to go there [...] to her friend's place [...]. I went but I was terrified of someone grabbing me! So I ran. [...] It's close to a favela and there are also these things. (Lourenço)*

*Everyone respects me on the street. [...] I live in the favela. [...] I have no problem with anyone there. My dad likes everyone there. (Vítor)*

While Lourenço described his fear of walking the streets, Vítor expressed composure and self-confidence. In the field observations, as well as and in the interview, we noticed how Vítor used to assert his masculinity through the exercise of authority over his brother and sisters, apart from provocations of “sissy” address to the field researcher. As we saw in the dialogue above, his relationship with the street, contrasting with Lourenço’s withdrawn attitude, followed the flow of this reaffirmed masculinity. Vítor’s self-assurance leaned on the figure of his father, well related with “half the *favela*” and, according to the declaration he gave subsequently, a man ready, if need be, to resort to physical aggression to ensure his son’s safety. Not by accident, Vítor’s *father* was the boy’s reference with respect to the sphere of the public space and to the interactions established therein, configuring a “project of masculinity” for the boy, in the sense of the phrase given by Connell (1995, p. 190). A hierarchy of masculinity was outlined within which Vítor occupied a place of dominance, since in the relationship between the two boys in this interview a position of power was clearly established: Vítor undoubtedly had more access to the street and this fact conferred privileges to him, both over the group of girls, and over Lourenço. And this privilege was masculinized – apropos, Vítor added to his description of the street aspects related to his father’s brute force, certain measure of authority, and a corporality that signified the public environment as a place of freedom, safety and respect. The street, in his view, was masculine.

In his turn, Lourenço did not have similar references in his household – his two brothers were teenagers, and his father was away in Paraíba –, added to the fact that the presence of the *favela* in their vicinity was seen in his speech as a danger that the “street” offered, being therefore perceived as a diffuse entity. In summary, it was as if for the children that lived in the *favelas* there was not in the region an area with more precarious conditions than theirs that symbolically occupied the place of abjection. On the other hand, the other children, although having no inside knowledge, saw *favelas* as constituting a stereotyped environment in its negative aspects, and consequently playing the role of antagonist in the relationship constructed by boys and girls with their places of residence. An example of that is the interjection “God forbid!” used by Bruna when she was asked if she lived in the *favela*, followed by an explanation: “There’s shooting there every day”, or Enzo, who reported being careful when playing on the streets so that he would not inadvertently enter the *favela*. It is symptomatic, to give once again Lourenço’s example, the picture he painted of this same *favela*:

*I was told that at night there’s police there all the time. [...] And also deep in the favela police go there and there’s shooting with the guys there. I don’t even go out when... ah... when I hear the shots.*  
(Lourenço)

By beginning his sentence with the phrase “I was told that”, Lourenço reveals that his observation was largely based on hearsay. Police, shots and fire exchanged with “the guys there” composed his image of the adjacent area, and justified the limits of his circulation in the public space. Vítor, on the other hand, lived in the *favela* so characterized by Lourenço, and at no time in the interview brought up such difficulties.

If in previous reports we saw two children of the same sex relating to the space of the street in a contrasting manner based on distinct places of residence, one same place of residence could also engender divergent interpretations, depending on the sex of the child. Bruna and Karlos, for example, resided in the same street, but diverged sharply in the way they interacted with the area surrounding their homes. In separate interviews, their testimonies indicated that she faced limitations as to the possibility of frequenting the street, whereas he understood the street as a place for playing and circulating freely, corroborating the notion that, as a function of their sex, girls from the urban popular sectors tend to be confined to the domestic environment. Thus, we see here a parallelism with the sexual division of labor: one and the same activity can be related differently to children as a function

of their sex – at home, what for some of them meant obligation, for others was an occasional help; the street could mean either a space of possibilities or of restrictions.

Indeed, it would not constitute an exaggeration to say that the public space was understood by most of the boys as an extension of the leisure they heard at home. In the interviews, we observed that few risks were associated by the boys to exterior environments (or, at most, their potential dangers did not acquire relevance in their speeches), and the street was treated naturally:

*I play on the street. (Juliano)*

*Depending on the day, I play soccer. Some days I can ride my bike. (Alberto)*

*Sometimes my friends come and call me to play. Then I go. (Gustavo)*

*I can go out during the day and I can stay until the evening [on the street]. (Vitor)*

Frequenting the street brought, for most of them, leisure opportunities usually denied to the girls. The notion previously presented in the literature (PINTO; LOPES, 2009) is then confirmed; that the boys construct masculinities having wider areas at their disposal. And, in this respect, it is worth noting a distinction between the street and the school: whereas in the former the possibilities of access and circulation were quite discrepant between boys and girls, at school there was some degree of equality in the use of the spaces. Without denying that some places, such as the sports court and the small park were attended more often by some of them than by others, we have to recognize that the times-spaces to chat, run around and play were a priori similar or, at least, that the notion of equality is a premise of the school institution, and guarantees certain measure of autonomy to the subjects that socialize within it (CHARLOT, 2009).

Finally, just as in the discrepancies in the responsibility for domestic chores, girls were also able to observe inequalities in access to the street. As a result, they subtly expressed discomfort, as in the crestfallen statement by Débora, saying that she was unable to practice her favorite leisure activity (soccer). Another girl, Yara, played with her sister at home, but not with her 15-year-old brother, who spent most of his day flying his kite on the streets, coming back home only in the evening. According to her report, the reason why the brother was authorized to stay late on the streets was not related to the fact that he was older. The two main justifications for the permission were: “Because

he's a boy, and he's a nuisance in the house". What Yara described as being a "nuisance" inside the house was due to the fact that the boy did not help with any domestic chores, therefore he did not contribute to the organization of the household. We should add that Yara's brother did not even make his own bed, leaving his clothes scattered around the floor in his bedroom. Not being involved in domestic work, on his part, entailed a rather peculiar "punishment": remaining outdoors. The near confinement of the girl was associated to her importance in the execution of domestic chores. In the eyes of her family, Yara would hardly be understood as a "nuisance".

Beyond the gender issue, other elements – such as the location of the household, the presence of older siblings and the relationship built between family members and the "street" – seemed to influence the distinct forms in which children interacted with their locale of residence. This does not stop us from concluding, however, that the public space appeared in the testimonies of the children as a rather masculinized environment, revealing a division between interior and exterior spaces, between girls and boys, from which other factors acted to minimize or reinforce inequalities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Even if the interface between family and school has been the object of many discussions in the sociology of education, these studies are seldom enriched by casting an eye over gender relations and their importance to understand the schooling of boys and girls, especially when the children themselves are taken as subjects of the research. It was this gap that the present research aimed at filling.

Based on our findings, we can think about two main paths through which the family socialization processes in urban popular layers can act in the production of gender inequalities in basic education. Firstly, the expectation that girls should take part in domestic chores and, furthermore, that they should be proactive in cleaning and tidying up the house, and in taking care of younger brothers and in committing themselves to the domestic organization seemed to serve as incentive for them to develop attitudes such as organization, discipline and responsibility. These attributes converged to many of the qualities that the school institution requires or expects of their pupils: to keep themselves clean; to be aware of their obligations and to fulfil them autonomously; to adopt a mature and responsible attitude; to be assiduous and forego part of their leisure time to correspond to the expectations coming from adults; etc. it is not just a matter of obedience and submission to rules, since various studies have shown how much educators also expect some degree of autonomy and initiative on the

part of the pupils (BRITO, 2006; CARVALHO, 2009; PEREIRA; CARVALHO, 2009). In the case of the girls studied here, we observed that the house environment also stimulated some of these values, in so far as it set the scene for a more rigid, restricted and controlled routine, which could offer them elements for a “student craft” characterized by responsibility and by the habit of engaging in obligations regularly – a phenomenon analogous to the notion of “domestic moral order” proposed by Bernard Lahire (1997).

On the other hand, boys – with the more lax rules of their obligations – found in their households and on the streets possibilities other than the relinquishing of leisure in the name of a duty above their individual wishes. Not accidentally, the single boy that regularly carried out domestic tasks was Lourenço, stimulated by a feeling of boredom, since the absence of alternatives did not give him choices of activities other than helping in the household routines. This single exception corroborates that the balance between labor and leisure was eminently an opposition between taking part in domestic chores and having opportunities for leisure and circulation on the streets.

Another aspect related to the connection between family socialization and the schooling of children regards the distinct meanings acquired by the school institution for boys and girls from the urban popular sectors as a function of their daily lives outside school. It was not difficult to observe that the range of activities found by girls at home systematically kept them away from leisure and sociability. In this context, when compared to the family environment and to their own sociability exercised in the public space, the school could be seen as an institution that “favors the success of women or, at least, that does not discriminate them so much as other areas of society”, according to Charlot (2009, p. 167). Despite claims that the school is a stage for situations of sexist discrimination, these mechanisms by themselves do not explain everything that happens within it. And, in this respect, we noticed the presence of a positive signification of the school on the part of most girls, as a space that offered them what they were being denied in their ordered daily lives.

It is essential to observe how much masculinities and femininities are not a fixed and determined product, but rather a process that is being continuously constructed (THORNE, 1993). Among the children studied here, the gender associated to their leisure activities, or to the absence thereof, unveiled every day the existence of reiterated forms of socialization that gave priority, in the case of girls, to the attribution of domestic responsibilities and smaller possibilities of leisure, in opposition to what was observed for the boys. In this sense, are even more up-to-date the conclusions by Duque-Arrazola (1997, p. 390) that the school “for some is a place of recreation and of meeting friends and,

contrariwise, for others, above all boys, is a time that interrupts their leisure on the streets”. Perceiving the school as a pleasant space and attending it with pleasure – which was much more frequent among girls – may constitute a first step towards the construction of successful school trajectories, and even to a fruitful approximation to the process of construction of knowledges.

If, on the one hand, it is true that we cannot establish a linear relation between contributing at home and having good performance at school, on the other hand, we have enough elements to state that family socialization, in particular among children from the urban popular sectors, is a highly sexist process built upon a binary logic: the participation in domestic chores and the deprivation of leisure in opposition to the circulation on the streets. There is, therefore, a set of practices based on which masculinities and femininities are constructed, offering distinct references to approach, or move away from, the schooling process. Other studies are necessary, nevertheless, to deepen investigations such as the influence of these processes both in parental occupation and in regard to the relationships among brothers and sisters.

In view of the results presented here, we conclude that both these paths – family socialization as an engine to the construction of femininities in tune with school expectations; and the positive signification of school in contrast to family routines marked by control and responsibility – suggest ways of understanding gender inequalities in Brazilian education, eminently characterized by a superior performance by girls.

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