

Original Article

“I gestated and gave birth to myself”: a thematic oral history of the constitution of and desire for the maternal occupational role among trans women and *travestis*

“Eu gestei e pari a mim mesma”: história oral temática da constituição e do desejo do papel ocupacional materno de mulheres trans e travestis

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Abstract

Introduction: Gender and sexuality have been widely debated in social, scientific, legal, and other spheres. It is through engagement in human occupations that gender relations take material form, shaping who can engage occupationally and how such engagement is expected to occur within assumed roles. **Objective:** To understand the constitution of and meanings attributed to maternal occupational desire from the perspective of trans women and *travestis*. **Method:** This study was based on thematic oral history. Data were collected between June and August 2023 with eight collaborators, trans women and *travestis* between 24 and 30 years of age. Snowball sampling was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted in a single virtual meeting with each collaborator. **Results:** Regina, Júlia, Medusa, Jéssica, Melissa, Malu, Pandora, and Sol are the collaborators featured in this

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article, and their accounts outline pathways across three interconnected thematic axes. The first concerns hegemonic social conceptions of the maternal occupational role of trans women and travestis. The second addresses the constitution of and meanings attributed to maternal *occupational* desire among trans women and *travestis*. The third concerns possible ways of realizing the desire for the maternal occupational role. **Conclusion:** Occupational-therapeutic action can contribute to the promotion and emancipation of the maternal occupational role by guiding, addressing, and transforming narratives shaped by inequality and violation.

Keywords: Gender Identity, Transgender Persons, Occupational Therapy, Women's Health.

Resumo

Introdução: O gênero e a sexualidade têm sido debatidos em âmbito social, científico, jurídico e em outras esferas. É por meio do envolvimento nas ocupações humanas que as relações de gênero se materializam, determinando quem pode se envolver ocupacionalmente e como isso deve ocorrer nos papéis assumidos. **Objetivo:** Compreender a constituição e significados do desejo ocupacional materno na perspectiva de mulheres trans e travestis. **Método:** Com base na história oral temática, a coleta de dados foi realizada entre os meses de junho e agosto de 2023 com a participação de oito colaboradoras, mulheres trans e travestis, com idades entre 24 e 30 anos. Para este artigo, utilizou-se a estratégia de bola de neve e foram articuladas entrevistas semiestruturadas, em um único encontro virtual com cada colaboradora. **Resultados:** Regina, Júlia, Medusa, Jéssica, Melissa, Malu, Pandora e Sol são as colaboradoras apresentadas neste artigo, que delineiam caminhos por meio de três eixos temáticos articulados. Surge, primeiramente, o eixo das concepções hegemônicas sociais do papel ocupacional materno de mulheres trans e travestis; o segundo eixo foi caracterizado pela constituição e significados do desejo ocupacional materno de mulheres trans e travestis. Por último, tem-se o eixo das possíveis viabilidades na realização do desejo do papel ocupacional materno. **Conclusão:** A ação terapêutica ocupacional pode ser assumida na promoção e emancipação do papel ocupacional materno, direcionando, lidando e transformando narrativas moldadas de forma desigual e violada.

Palavras-chave: Identidade de Gênero, Pessoas Transgênero, Terapia Ocupacional, Saúde da Mulher.

Introduction

The research that gave rise to this article resulted from discussions and paths developed during professional experience in the Multiprofessional Residency Program of the Hospital das Clínicas of the Federal University of Pernambuco, with a focus on Women's Health. This program proposes the practice of care for women; however, although its main focus is the maternal occupational role of cisgender women during the pregnancy-puerperal cycle, there is a gap related to care for the maternal occupational role of trans women and *travestis*.

In this study, we seek to explain, mainly through the mediation of discourses, the construction of the desire for the maternal occupational role in the life trajectories of trans women and *travestis*. Here, we clarify that the term 'maternal occupational desire'

is adopted in the study to refer to the desire of trans women and *travestis* to perform roles, occupations, and activities associated with mothering and parenthood. We also add that the choice of this terminology will be grounded in references from Social Occupational Therapy throughout the theoretical approaches.

At some points in the text, the debate emerges concerning processes of marginalization, invisibility, and violence that affect the concrete possibilities of being in the world, including situations that are not and cannot be separated from the various social textures in which the collaborators are immersed. Above all, we seek to cultivate a space for representations of maternal occupational possibilities that are part of their life experience.

Theoretical approaches

Gender and sexuality have been debated in social, scientific, legal, and other spheres, as they are emerging themes in interwoven frameworks that produce movements of transformation, unfolding into various ways of constructing relationships, everyday practices, and rights.

Historically, the concept of gender has been shaped by social organizations arising from contingencies related to norms, standards, perceptions, and power relations that intertwine subjects' lives. From a patriarchal perspective, the construction of gender defines what is expected to be appropriate for the masculine and the feminine, limiting and dividing the social structure through the different rules, behaviors, responsibilities, and roles attributed to biological sex (Butler, 2000; Correia et al., 2020; Sarmiento et al., 2018).

In her book 'Gender Trouble', Butler (2014) highlights the idea that sex and gender are socially constructed. Thus, the subject is educated so that the "performance of the body" is instituted in the transformation into a man or a woman.

According to this author (Butler, 2014, 2000), the category "sex" is normative, as a regulatory practice, through the forced reiteration of hegemonic social norms. Gender, in turn, is a repeated stylization of the body, based on norms instituted until they are taken as natural, differing from sex insofar as it is influenced by and depends on constructions. When bodies are categorized according to binarity, defined by the anatomy of the genitalia, subjects are directed to assume a prevailing cultural standard, as well as its practices and ways of being inserted into "social normality", whose premises presume cisheteronormativity¹.

In line with Butler's thought, Bento (2006) adds that transgender people do not recognize themselves as belonging to the sex assigned to them at birth, thereby subverting the norm that associates the penis with the masculine and the vulva with the feminine. Louro (2008), in turn, states that what makes a subject masculine or feminine goes beyond the bodily designation received at birth as male or female, insofar as bodily ontologies and the discourses that inhabit bodies permeate the processes that define "trans" and "cis" subjects.

This study assumes that the exercise of dominant male supremacy represses social practices that depart from the hegemonic norm. Human occupations are fused with the binary notion of the masculine and the feminine, constituting a politically oppressive structure related to the sociohistorical processes that permeate, amid ruptures and continuities, everyday life marked by tensions in contexts of domination and exploitation produced by patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism (Aravena-Arroyo et al., 2019; Morrison & Araya, 2018; Silva et al., 2019).

¹ Based on the reflections proposed by Butler (2014), Foucault (2010), and Vergueiro (2015), cisheteronormativity is understood in this study through an analytical concept that expresses a position regarded as "normal," naturalizing bodies and subjectivity so that they are cisgender and heterosexual, consistent with behavior and environment. Thus, everything that departs from the cisgender and heterosexual framework becomes censurable and the target of a set of punishments imposed by social institutions and by (re)productions that ensure the permanence of these standards.

Anchored in a field that contributes to the transformation of everyday life, occupational therapy therefore faces the need to denaturalize and question binary logics, so as to move beyond roles defined by cisheteronormativity, which directly influences the ways people engage in occupations (Morrison & Araya, 2018).

Gender relations materialize through engagement in human occupations and are guided by social constructs and traditional values, thus linked to the normative pattern of gender and sexuality. Consequently, multiple social spaces strengthen the oppressions arising from patriarchy, observed in everyday life, a context in which praxis can be mediated, signified, and resignified (Costa et al., 2022; Sarmiento et al., 2018).

Thus, gender is understood to affect the various occupations performed by subjects, determining who can engage occupationally and how this should occur in the roles assumed. Additionally, it influences the ways subjects construct their identities and their subjective ways of being in the world (Ambrosio, 2020; Butler, 2014; Correia et al., 2020; Gómez-Antilef et al., 2020).

Considering this diversity, it is necessary to reaffirm different ways of being and belonging through engagement in occupations (Aravena-Arroyo et al., 2019), including the maternal occupational role from the perspective of trans women and travestis.

According to Matias & Barone (2019), in modern Westernized society, binary and exclusionary categories are used for biopolitical purposes² of control. Thus, "being a woman" is directly attributed to the continuous role of caregiving within the family sphere, so that this activity, regarded as intrinsically feminine, is related to certain stereotypes of being a woman and being a mother, as a merging of these two roles and an extension of affective dimensions (Andrade, 2015; Gozzi et al., 2016).

Regarding the theme of parenthood, which includes fatherhood and motherhood, Angonese & Lago (2018, p. 9) present certain conceptions of motherhood as an important condition for the femininity of cis women. However, "for trans women, motherhood may constitute a prohibition; there seems to be an absence, a silencing in relation to the theme, as if there were an interdiction, which we understand as the 'symbolic sterilization' of the trans population".

In Zambrano's study (Zambrano, 2006), the discourse on parenthood expressed by transgender women and *travestis* was linked to the desire to be mothers, as they affirmed themselves as possessing the culturally constructed "maternal instinct" attributed to women. More recent literature also states that women are not naturally mothers, and that maternal instinct is not a social or automatic myth resulting from the condition of being a woman. Mothering is, therefore, a process of constructing one's own identity based on identity markers (Iaconelli, 2019).

Motherhood and parenthood are terms adopted in this study, and they can be understood as a means of recognizing and valuing the multiple ways in which these women experience and claim their right to the maternal role as an occupational dimension constituted and permeated by meanings and desires. Motherhood, then, can be understood as a continuous process of care and affection that exceeds the restrictions of biological reproduction and is configured as an identity expression, resistant to social norms that restrict this possibility for trans people and *travestis*. Parenthood, in turn, refers to a set of legal, educational, social, care-related, and affective practices that compose the exercise of the parental role, regardless of conformity with cisheteronormative standards.

² Matias & Barone (2019), based on Butler's framework (Butler, 2018), understand biopolitics as governmental and nongovernmental powers and systems that establish and categorize which lives should be valued and protected.

Beyond a feeling or intention, we understand maternal occupational desire as a subjective and socially situated construction that expresses the pursuit of experiencing the role of mother in its materiality and affectivity, including practices of care, bonding, education, and belonging. This understanding is aligned with studies in Social Occupational Therapy, which recognize occupational dimensions as legitimate and crossed by the historical, political, and social conditions of subjects (Melo & Lopes, 2023; Leite Junior & Lopes, 2017). Thus, the reflection can be expanded to address the construction and meanings of occupational desire.

Thinking about the maternal occupational role of trans women and *travestis* requires attention to the multiplicity and singularity of occupational desires, making visible subjects who have historically been placed in sites of abjection. It also means reflecting on the coexisting dialectical relationship between the subject and society, a subject capable of engaging freely in occupations (Sarmiento et al., 2018). In this context, this study is based on the following question: how is maternal occupational desire constituted, and what meanings does it hold in the life trajectories of trans women and *travestis*?

Study design

The research that underpins this article initially sought to review the literature on gender and sexuality markers associated with historical trajectories, identifying that motherhood is intrinsically attributed to women and symbolically rooted in a series of cultural, political, economic, and social discourses and practices.

Thus, the central objective of this qualitative study is to understand the constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire from the perspective of trans women and *travestis*, based on thematic oral history. The methodological choice is justified by the search, in a social sense, for narratives about a defined, pre-established subject or event that is central to the histories of a specific group, determined by a plot or guiding thread to respond to the proposed theme (Delgado, 2006; Minayo et al., 2009; Meihy & Holanda, 2020).

Data were collected between June and August 2023, with the collaboration of eight trans women and *travestis*, aged between 24 and 30 years, living in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil. Their identities were preserved through self-attributed pseudonyms. After agreement with the Informed Consent Form (ICF), accounts of their trajectories, desires, and personal perspectives were articulated through semi-structured interviews, from the perspective of dialogue, based on previously established axes (1. meanings of maternal occupational desire; 2. gender constructions and maternal occupational desire; 3. ways to enable motherhood) and guiding questions, in a single virtual meeting with each collaborator.

Regarding sampling, this study used the snowball strategy, based on key informants linked to the Espaço Trans of the Hospital das Clínicas of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), through progressive inclusion. Thus, through the strategy itself, which provides for the indication of new contacts with the desired characteristics from participants' social circles and so on, five of the eight collaborators in the study were not, at the time of data collection, assisted by the University Hospital.

For data analysis and interpretation, the research adopted the process established by Oral History as its principle, facilitating a more faithful transmission of the meanings and intentions of the statements based on the interviewer's perceptions (Meihy &

Holanda, 2020). Subsequently, the methodological technique of content analysis proposed by Bardin (2009) was used: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment of the results.

The project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Hospital das Clínicas of the UFPE (opinion number: 5.974.968).

Trans women and *travestis*: narratives, memories, and trajectories of maternal occupational desire

Regina, Júlia, Medusa, Jéssica, Melissa, Malu, Pandora, and Sol are the collaborators who enabled this study. Their experiences converge in the constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire, in gender-based violence and other social categories, and diverge because of the complexity of each unique and incomparable trajectory.

- **Regina** is 30 years old, single, an administrator, and lives with her father and sister in a municipality in the Recife metropolitan area. The collaborator reports that, since childhood, she has been strongly influenced by her mother, who died in 2022, in envisioning the maternal occupational role. She participates in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and trans outpatient clinics in the state of Pernambuco. Through contact with other women who seek motherhood, she encountered her own maternal occupational desire and is currently seeking to organize herself, financially and socially, to begin the adoption process.
- **Júlia**, like Regina, is 30 years old, works with the *jogo do bicho*³, lives alone, and earns less than one minimum wage. Throughout her maturation process, she found herself permeated by several questions from people in her social circle about her desires and her gender. Júlia has nephews aged 14, 12, and 8, the youngest of whom is her godson and the main figure who led her to perceive the existence of maternal love, through her collaboration in raising him since he was "little." Today, the collaborator reports that she identifies the possibility of realizing this desire through shared motherhood and adoption.
- **Medusa** is single, is enrolled in higher education, and works as a DJ and model. She earns less than two minimum wages, is 25 years old, and currently lives with her sister in the countryside of the state of Pernambuco. She grew up in a loving and caring environment provided by her mother, her reference for a maternal figure, and perceived the construction of maternal occupational desire during adolescence, especially after her gender transition. Medusa reports being extremely affectionate, and, for her, desire also involves this affection and "this love I have for someone," stating that she will do everything she can so that her desires become real through adoption.
- Cultural violence, transphobia and *travestiphobia*, and the struggle for social recognition of her female political-social identity permeate the experience of **Jéssica**, an activist in youth movements, the movement of trans people and *travestis*, and the Black movement. She is currently 27 years old, single, lives with her parents, and works in research advising. The collaborator has great "appreciation" for adoption, although she understands that there are other ways to exercise the maternal occupational role. From a political and organizational perspective, she proposes a network of trans and *travesti* mothers that articulates experiences and develops strategies so that others can also exercise this role.

³ *Jogo do bicho* is an informal and illegal lottery-like gambling game that originated in Brazil in the late 19th century. Despite its illegal status, it remains widely known and culturally embedded in several regions of the country.

- **Melissa** is 24 years old, a teacher pursuing graduate studies, and lives with and cares for her grandmother in the capital of Pernambuco. The collaborator tells us a different story, concerning the origins of physical and verbal violence, and today has respiratory problems as a consequence of the "slaps" she received on her back to "turn into a man" during childhood. Also during childhood, she played with dolls hidden from family members. She underwent hormone therapy, which resulted in infertility, and discovered this while attempting to have a child with a cis friend. Today, for her, the most viable way to become a mother is through adoption.
- Like Melissa, **Malu** lives in the western region of the capital. She is an anthropologist, a researcher for the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), participates in social movements on the front for the decarceration of LGBT people, and is director of LGBT Policies for graduate students at the institution where she is pursuing graduate studies. She is 26 years old, single, but lives with her boyfriend. Her identity was denied at different stages of life, but since childhood she had already identified as a woman and with the role of mother in play. It was after her transition and the beginning of her current relationship that something "lit up," and she began to reflect on her maternal desire, desiring adoption.
- **Pandora** is a higher education student, is 26 years old, is in a romantic relationship with a trans man, and also participates in the coordination of the LGBT movement at the university. Throughout her life, she found herself surrounded by women who assumed the maternal occupational role. For her, the opportunity to have a son or daughter is constituted in the education of another subject, given the real possibility of biological family formation through the dynamic she has with her partner.
- A sex worker, higher education student, and activist in the transfeminist movement, **Sol** is 25 years old and grew up in an unstable environment because of conflicts between her mother and her partner, moving in with her grandmother during adolescence. She reshaped and rediscovered her story amid gaps: "I gestated and gave birth to myself," she told us when speaking about her name, and her identity, chosen during childhood. The desire to be a mother has also accompanied her since then; she dreams of having two children through the possibility of biological reproduction with her partner, a trans man, or, as a second option, through adoption.

Results and Discussion

The processes of historical construction are inherent to the meanings, experiences, and transformations linked to our everyday realities. The results comprise three thematic axes that are articulated and, to a certain extent, intersect from the perspective of thematic oral history. We first present the hegemonic social conceptions of the maternal occupational role of trans women and *travestis*. Next, we address the constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire among trans women and *travestis* and, finally, the possible ways of realizing the desire for the maternal occupational role.

"How can someone who is not a woman exercise motherhood?": (de)construction of hegemonic social conceptions

The discussions surrounding hegemonic social conceptions of the maternal occupational desire of trans women and *travestis* enter the sphere of whether femininity

is affirmed. The structural cisheteronormative context takes the body of the woman, whether cis, trans, *travesti*, or of other gender identifications, as a basis to justify her place and attributes from a perspective of domination. As an example, Medusa pauses briefly while constructing her narrative, breathes, and tells us:

Whether we like it or not, I think that because of the construction of society itself, it makes us also want to be mothers. So this social construction is, first, a form of "affirmation" of femininity (Medusa).

In his philosophical, moral, and political discourses, around the 19th century, Rousseau relied on religion and on women's responsibility for care and family education to create a feminine ideal and define this role in the family and society, which is still taken as a contemporary reference (Vieira & Moreira, 2020). Thus, through this social crossing, being or becoming a mother would be a woman's function and completeness. This thought, given and constructed archaically within binarism, resonates with the experiences and realities of the study collaborators.

I think it is practically mandatory (to perform the maternal occupational role). Because I always heard that for a person to have a complete goal, they had to marry, have a child, and having a child is something very important. They always asked me whether I was going to adopt or not. I even got a little fed up with it, because that had to be my choice and my own will. So, I think that for society it is practically mandatory (Regina).

In contrast to Rousseau, the technologies of gender, which determine social flow according to the specific norms of binarism, are expressed in the passage above (Butler, 2014). For Butler (2014), cisnormativity creates postulations to be obeyed and produces effects on intelligible identities in relation to gender and sexuality. The repeated stylization of the body, based on instituted norms, violates all those who subvert the prevailing cultural standard. In this direction, Sol outlines the social history of stigmas that, according to her: (...) if we consider it from the medical point of view, the desire to mother should never exist in relation to us trans people, particularly us trans women and *travestis*.

The maternal occupational role of trans women and *travestis* is constantly tensioned by social norms that define it as a naturalized and exclusively cisgender place. The conception of the collaborator mentioned above turns to gender standardization, in which this dichotomy disqualifies and reveals that these women are systematically excluded from the social idea of mother. Validating violence against trans women and *travestis* and excluding them does not occur in isolation, but is deeply rooted in historical and structural systems of oppression such as machismo, patriarchy, and colonialism (Barbano & Cruz, 2015; Melo, 2016; Melo & Lopes, 2023).

The marginalization of the maternal occupational role of trans women and *travestis* cannot be understood in isolation; it is a direct effect of these interconnected hierarchical and oppressive systems. Machismo idealizes that only cisgender women would be legitimate and obligated to exercise motherhood, while patriarchy establishes power structures that subordinate dissident bodies and delegitimize nonnormative forms of care and child-rearing. Colonialism, in its contemporary facet, reinforces

Eurocentric ideologies of the nuclear family, restricting the social and legal recognition of parental experiences outside cisheteronormativity. These systems are articulated and deny legitimacy to life projects, fundamental reproductive, parental, and social rights, as well as affective bonds and maternal practices as occupations of trans women and *travestis*.

Interlinked with this demarcation of maternal bodies, another point debated concerns the invalidation of the desire and moral competence of trans women and *travestis* in the maternal occupational role. In the collaborators' discourses, the social attribution of trans women and *travestis* to the genital organ stands out, associated with the impacts of violence. As an example, Melissa raises the tone of her voice, becomes more emphatic in her speech, and states:

Many people would say, as I have heard before, that trans women should not be mothers, that being a mother is something for those who have a uterus (...) they always saw this as a big joke. Trans women should not be mothers. They said trans women should be whores; I am not a whore (Melissa).

This oppression perpetuated through the female body produces idealizations and guidelines naturalized in relation to sex, sustaining the repression of sexual behaviors, including motherhood. It also excludes any and every subject who is not biologically capable of gestating a child, limiting the maternal figure to gestating/giving birth (Matias & Barone, 2019).

Jéssica's perception, for example, conveys the structured and systematic cruelty that denies motherhoods, harming "everyone who does not conform to the norm established for and by the process of motherhood". The collaborator offers political reflections and adds, regarding the hegemonic cisgender idea:

Before they understand us as mothers, they need to understand us as women. And this is a problem we face because, most of the time, because of cultural violence, transphobia, and travestiphobia, they do not even understand and recognize our identity. So one might soon think: if I am not talking about women, how can I talk about motherhood? (...) How can someone who is not a woman exercise motherhood? If this is a role intrinsic to the female gender (Jéssica).

It is also perceptible, throughout Melissa's and Sol's statements, that their experiences are intertwined with the similar social limits of binarism mentioned above, as is the case with Pandora, who emphasizes that "transphobia marks the biological". Historically, transfeminist movements have denounced the violent effects of transphobia and, we may include here, *travestiphobia*, highlighting the centrality of gender deconstruction in trans bodies denied as feminine at birth, thereby experiencing and modifying possibilities and forms of "*mulheridades*" (Nascimento, 2021)⁴.

⁴ The term "*mulheridades*" (womanhoods) is adopted in this article as not being determined by genitalia or by the sex assigned at birth, but rather by gender self-affirmation and by the multiple forms of what is understood as being a woman.

Corroborating what was reported, Leticia Nascimento, a Brazilian researcher and author of the book *Transfeminismo*, develops her reflections on the diverse forms of the category woman based on the question "Can I not be a woman?" (Nascimento, 2021, p. 20). Thinking about womanhoods allows flexibility in the female gender role and becomes a politicizing element in the existence of trans women and *travestis*. This is discussed later in the chapter "Transsexual women and *travestis*: the outsiders non sisters," in which the term outsider refers to someone who is from outside, who does not belong, in this case, those who are trans and *travestis*, analogous to the category of the Other, initially referring to the feminine, as proposed by Beauvoir. Based on the author's emphasis, trans women and *travestis* are, therefore, the "Other of the Other of the Other, an image distant from what is normatively determined in society as man and woman" (Nascimento, 2021, p. 52).

Thus, the structural barriers of (un)feasibility are also outlined in the statements. If, throughout history, as previously discussed, the maternal occupational role appears as an (im)position or as an imperative and a condition for women's femininity, at other times it also appears as a prohibition or silencing of a role that trans women and *travestis* are prevented from occupying, which we can understand as the "symbolic sterilization" of the population (Angonese & Lago, 2018).

About ten years ago, trans women and travestis who wanted to legally change their name had to undergo a process of genital modification or prosthesis so that they could be recognized as subjects of rights and of the female gender. And, beyond everything else, they had to undergo psychological and psychiatric monitoring and submit to hormone therapy. If this travesti wants to generate from herself, does she really have a problem with her genitalia to the point of submitting to that and, suddenly, not generating a child from herself? (Sol).

Sol's statement, marked by several bodily expressions of restlessness, can guide reflections on the violation of the reproductive freedom of trans women and *travestis* and also refers directly to the term mentioned above. Sol continues her reasoning, seeking historical facts to argue about the theme she herself raised:

The hormones we are subjected to are nothing more and nothing less than the contraceptives that cisgender women are also subjected to. So, if these contraceptive methods, these injectable hormones in particular, are harmful to cis women, imagine what they do to us, when they were not designed for our bodies. So I think a lot about this, you know, we come from a place where identity was placed in a position of negotiation. There was, and there was proposed, a process of social sanitization, and although we have had many achievements, we also have many drawbacks, because, above all, this conveys to us something that was constructed and imposed from a cisgender perspective (Sol).

The compulsory sterilization of the transsexualizing process, in which a mandatory social body is often assumed rather than a body of self-identification,

and the symbolic dimension, as a social barrier through which everything that evades reproductive standards grounded in cisnormativity places the desires of the trans and *travesti* population in a position where parenthood is unthinkable (Angonese & Lago, 2018).

Barbano & Cruz (2015) argue that internalized machismo and patriarchy deeply influence the meanings attributed to occupations and not only sustain these roles, but also hinder the dissolution of traditional occupational norms. We can thus reflect on how trans women and *travestis* construct their maternal identities and perceive their social place. The maternal desire of these women therefore emerges not only as an individual will, but also as a political and social position of resistance to norms that exclude occupational experiences.

In the narratives, it is evident that the structure of society limits these women's maternal desire, so that it does not foster it and instead creates means of "exhaustion" and "questioning" as to whether it is "liable and possible to exist" (Sol). Within the confluence that produces these delimitations, Jéssica, like Medusa and Malu, points to scarce medical, social, and bureaucratic assistance, as well as the strain, in the broadest sense, of dealing with transphobic violence in all these environments.

I think it is this fear, which is constructed, it is constructed intentionally, because it is not just "me" telling you that you cannot be a mother; it is, beyond telling you that you cannot be a mother, creating ways to make you understand that "I" do not want you to be one (Jessica).

From the same perspective, society was observed to have a place of action and interference in the construction of the collaborators' maternal desire, and this can occur in different ways, whether through a strand that attributes the mandatory maternal role to women, as in Regina's case, or by creating several barriers so that this role is not occupied, as Melissa states in a saddened tone of voice.

It influences us as it gradually puts into our heads that we should be mothers. That we should have children. And if we cannot gestate, which is my case, then we have to adopt (Regina).

It influenced me to give up (...) in many, many quotation marks, right, paraphrasing society and not myself, "a tranny has to stay in their place and not take the place of real women." (Melissa).

It is in everyday experience that values, ideas, and conceptions are constructed and experienced concretely, enabling different dynamics according to what is apprehended (Melo & Lopes, 2023). It is also through these means that exposure to violence ends up composing roles and regulates the way life is operationalized, delegitimizing experiences that are not constructed from the central places of this norm (Butler, 2000). This axis reveals that maternal occupational desire is not only a subjective act, but a political gesture that confronts and challenges colonial, patriarchal, and cisnormative structures. Recognizing and legitimizing this desire is also a task of occupational therapy, committed to transforming the conditions that produce symbolic, institutional, legal, and material exclusions and violence.

"I want to be the mother, I want to be the girl": constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire

The first word that comes to my mind in relation to motherhood is responsibility, but it also has its ramifications. Responsibility also demands affection, demands awareness of what you're doing, of what you're proposing to do (...) for me, the process of mothering is something complex, but I think it is, above all, political. It is responsibility, and it is also politics (Sol).

One common point identified by the collaborators in this study concerns affectivity and the formation of a subject as elements interconnected with one another and with the constitution and meanings of the desire to perform the maternal occupational role. These meanings do not appear only at a specific moment during the interview, but throughout the entire process and even in the dialogues established before and after the recordings. In this sense, the statements showed that, among the possible constitutions and meanings of this desire, welcoming, care, and affection also emerge, connected to responsibility.

Jéssica reflects on "what motherhood would be beyond this question of affective or blood ties." For the collaborator, motherhood is a process in which one proposes to contribute to the formation of another subject, with responsibility closely directed toward education that transforms, "(...) education that liberates. And when we can exercise this beyond this matter of basic education and so forth, with affection, with love, with tenderness, and with care, I think that is what makes this desire scream." Complementing this point of view, when asked about the meanings of maternal desire in her life and how she understands motherhood, Pandora states hopefully:

If I have the opportunity to have a son or a daughter, I will give them an education so that they are free to make their choices and have no restraints that prevent their full development, you know, social, personal, and so forth (Pandora).

We can understand that Jéssica's and Pandora's statements refer to a Freirean perspective, as Freire (2019) himself highlights that, when subjects are aware of their presence in and with the world, they recover humanity and the right to the word, implying gestures and dialogical relations that are configured in the subject's historical incompleteness. Love, derived from dialogue, appears as the result of an education that cultivates responsibility and lovingness; it is, therefore, an act of creation and re-creation, an act of value, and, for this reason, "it is commitment to men" (and women) (Freire, 2019, p. 111).

The collaborators reported that there is a relationship between maternal occupational desire and the direct desire to form a family, as Regina tells us. In line with this idea, Medusa states that "I always had this desire to form my family, to have my family." For them, maturation, as well as the gender transition process, are identified as influential factors in the desire for family construction as a maternal meaning.

After I transitioned and started dating, the desire began to emerge from the relationship I had with another person, from seeing that the other person

also had the desire to build a family, and a family with me (Malu).

Malu's statement approaches the discourse of transgression, which can coexist with the discourse of belonging, the first being the desire for security and the second the representation of insertion into the hegemonic norm, as proposed by Trajano (2019), as an expression of the desire to legitimize her experiences and differences established by binary facets. The collaborator, continuing her thought, says with laughter:

We recently adopted a little dog; I think the first step is here. It would not be ideal, but I think the way of caring, of looking after, and so on, of having someone else in everyday life who needs my care (Malu).

Therefore, there is a tension between transgression and belonging that, at the same time, fissures norms related to belonging and reaffirms what differentiates the experience of trans people and *travestis* from the experience of cis people in parenthood.

In contrast, some collaborators list the figure of their own mother as an influence on the constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire. This can be justified because, for Iaconelli (2019), parenthood is a subjective place for those who exercise its function, producing filial bonds through the symbolic and through representation for the other.

My mother was the main influence (Regina).

I always had my mother as a reference, because I think my mother was also a reference for much of my social circle, my friends (...). Because I always admired the way she managed to raise us, the collaborator and her sister, alone with so little, and the education she managed to give us, the affection she managed to give us. So I will not say that I have another reference outside, because no, it is her, my mother. It always came from my mother (Medusa).

Jéssica says that, based on her strong and structured affective relationship with her mother and grandmother, she began to understand that she had her own desire to experience motherhood. However, for Jéssica, these maternal influences expand and occupy other spaces beyond the family sphere. When the collaborator had the opportunity to enter undergraduate education and have contact with other trans women and *travestis* who "were practicing mothering," she realized that "it was possible and that there would be a way to do this one day as well." Thus, maternal influences were constructed as follows: 1. "observing the women who were around me"; 2. "understanding that women like me could exercise this function"; and 3. "when I began to meet these women personally."

For the trans and *travesti* population, places of social coexistence that belong to this population, as expressed by the collaborators, permeate the existential condition. Thus, the already established social group is a form of protection against the violence perpetuated in their everyday lives, while also limiting, as observed in Jéssica's statement, access to other experiences and environments, or delaying such access. Thus, according to Monzeli (2013), experiences that dialogue with the "choices" of circulation through

different spaces require dynamics and rules through which these women, often stigmatized, can be welcomed and accepted, enabling or preventing their existence or distancing in these places.

Pandora, like Jéssica and as Monzeli (2013) points out, had, regarding her history, absences of structuring models in the constitution of the meanings of maternal occupational desire. Only after her gender transition did she begin to perceive womanhoods that represented her desire, until then, the maternal imaginary had been denied, as the collaborator "did not have access to this information" and had only "a superficial view of these matters." Thus, the desire emerged concomitantly with knowledge of and identification with *travesti* women who performed, and perform, the maternal occupational role.

I could not see cisgender womanhood as a mirror for this maternal perspective, because it was not my peer, in a way. Not in womanhood, but in terms of identity. I began to recognize myself as a travesti person and, at that time, I did not see a travesti woman being a mother. At least I did not have access to this information before my transition (Pandora).

This situation, like so many others presented throughout the text, reflects what in occupational therapy we can describe as occupational apartheid. Hammell (2020) explains that there is a denial of opportunities for occupational engagement among several groups. Dignified and meaningful occupations are systematically restricted by class inequalities based on race, origin, age, political and religious beliefs, disabilities, and gender.

The lack of access to rights and to these people's occupational choices and identifications, including at different stages of life, is therefore emphasized. Malu, Pandora, and Sol identify that, during childhood, they preferred playing "house" and "family." At times, as Malu reports, the maternal role was outlined and assumed in these arrangements; however, identification as a woman during childhood was not yet feasible.

I was seen there as a queer child, and, like every queer child who plays house, for example, who plays family, I always had that role there of the mother. "Oh, so I want to be the mother, I want to be the girl." And that, I think, is a very singular moment in the life of trans people, when identity is denied from an early age, including because, from an early age, we have these signs in play, and then we grow up and they flourish. So I think this was the first moment that I consider, and that I had this desire, not this desire, I would say, but the place, this role of being a mother, I think it was very present in that, in play, in childhood (Malu).

On the other hand, if for some trans women and *travestis* the construction of a pathway, through scarce, rare, and often invalidated routes, toward this maternal role in childhood is acceptable, for others, assuming this position has a private and restricted value, to be shared with themselves.

In this context, I always assumed the position, not literally of the mother, but in childhood, right, which was before the transition, the father was assigned, but someone who had greater command responsibility, you know? At that moment in the game, which, from my perspective, is the experience of the mother, because the mother is the one who is always beside the child, helping the child, doing things, being there to support their education, their social construction. But at that moment in childhood, I was the person who determined the commands, so there I felt like everyone's mother. Maybe that was the moment when there was a possibility of being a mother, you know? (Pandora).

In this context, Sol perceives that maternal desire can also be correlated with the construction of her own identity. The collaborator reports that desire is a present memory, which lasted through several stages of her life, but that this memory as a woman first becomes prominent around the time of literacy.

During childhood, it was something I cannot explain exactly. Even today, I think I also do not know where it comes from, but I can minimally explain it like this, revisiting myself. In childhood, also because it has to do with my name "Sol" (pseudonym in this study), there in childhood, I think around the time I was learning to read and write, I already said that I wanted to have two children: I had never thought of the child who would be seen as a boy, I always thought of the child as being seen as a girl, and the name I wanted to give this child would be "Sol." And then, even when I transitioned, six years ago, I wrote a text and said that I gestated and gave birth to myself. "Sol," in the end, was the name I kept with me and that ended up flourishing because it was about me (Sol).

Although occupational roles are described as constructed by behaviors, social functions, and culturally acquired representations, critical occupational science enables us to understand that this construction does not occur in a neutral or merely individual way. As Ramugondo (2015) and Galvaan (2015) argue, occupations are permeated by power relations that subtly regulate who can access certain roles, naturalizing inequalities and restricting forms of participation.

In this context, political consciousness does not operate only as an individual resource, but as a critical process that helps identify how such roles are imposed, legitimized, or denied, revealing the structural dimension that guides occupation and the identities linked to it, as Hammell (2020) also problematizes. For trans women and *travestis*, this implies confronting exclusion from normative models of femininity and motherhood, which associate the capacity to mother with biological markers and cisgender coherence. This critique emerges concretely in Jéssica's statement, as she problematizes how the definition of "being a woman" is shaped by historically prescribed roles:

It is even old-fashioned, the idea, of what it would mean to be a woman because of several imposed roles that must be followed so that they are validated as women. When we begin to tension this, to tension these foundations that delimit what women's roles are, things these women can do or be, then we begin to evolve, understanding that there are other possibilities (Jéssica).

In summary, affirming maternal occupational desire therefore exceeds the individual sphere: it is a gesture that questions structures that have historically denied the legitimacy of their experiences and gender performances. The collaborators' accounts in this thematic axis reveal the complexity of the constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire among trans women and *travestis*. Affectivity, the contribution to the formation of other subjects, the desire for family construction, as well as maternal influences, desire throughout the trajectory, and multiple maternal possibilities are narratives that, together, highlight identity diversities, occupational representations and opportunities, and limitations, constituting a practice inscribed as resistance to the normativities that organize the lives of trans women and *travestis*.

"This process has to be planned in advance": possible pathways to realizing the desire for the maternal occupational role

Regarding the thematic axis of possible pathways to realizing the maternal occupational desire of trans women and *travestis*, the analysis identifies structural barriers related to cisheteronormative, economic, legal, and social markers. Despite these barriers, the narratives point to some viable possibilities for fulfilling this desire. Through the stories, it is possible to understand that mothering occurs in multiple forms: through care for nephews and nieces, neighborhood children, or motherhood through adoption, in which all these experiences connect with a possible form of mothering.

In this thematic axis, the first subdivision addresses life planning and organization as a means to realize this desire. Medusa, Jéssica, Melissa, and Malu mention that financial stability is "important" in the construction of this maternal process. Although, for some collaborators, the desire to experience motherhood is strongly present now, the economic factor for trans women and *travestis* is a critical point in their difficult realities.

We, my boyfriend and I, think a lot about financial stability. Because both he and I come from a place of precarity, of lack of resources, of this very precarity, this issue of money. I think the economy greatly influences the care of anyone, and of a child, who demands a lot, clothes, diapers, food, and so on, all of this is very expensive economically. So, I think exactly about that, about having financial stability so that I can give all the support I did not have in childhood. Actually, it is not that I did not have it, I had it in a very precarious way. I want to provide a good school, I want to give him the right to eat whatever he wants; if he goes to the market and asks for "Danone," I want to be able to give him "Danone." (Malu).

When historically excluded groups are addressed, economic vulnerability is addressed concomitantly, and this must be considered far beyond income, as deprivation in access to rights. The collaborators' accounts revealed complex situations of financial origin, in which the scarcity of opportunities since they were very young is intertwined and still has repercussions today in the work environment and in economic stability. Melo & Lopes (2023, p. 15) explain the relationship between social and economic exclusions and the reality of *travestis*. Thus, the context of vulnerability is a concrete place where identity is produced, not as a result of poverty, but as a way to show that "among all the determinations reflected in the construction of subjects' cultural identities, social class, and therefore the socioeconomic context, is also central".

Malu's experience reveals intersectionality within structural conditions. In this sense, Davis (2016), based on the work *Women, Race & Class*, offers a powerful lens for understanding how motherhood is historically constructed and intertwined with racial, class, and gender challenges. Davis denounces how the ideal of motherhood, constructed based on the white, bourgeois, and heterosexual woman, systematically dehumanized the maternal experiences of enslaved Black women, according to the interests of the slavery-based economy and state control. When this analysis is transposed to consider the realities faced by trans women and *travestis*, we can observe, in parallel, that the exercise of the maternal occupational role is a politically regulatory category. Just as only one hierarchical group could plausibly be "legitimate mothers" in the past, today, in contemporary policies that monitor ways of mothering, trans women and *travestis* occupy the other place of symbolic exclusion.

Collins (2019) advances this discussion by addressing motherhood as a "political practice" among Black women who perform collective and community motherhoods, sharing responsibilities and presenting a collective response to conditions of vulnerability in contexts of violence and exclusion produced by structural racism. Understanding the construction of trans and *travesti* motherhoods also involves reconfiguring sayings, affirmations, and social roles. These arrangements simultaneously broaden the notion of motherhood beyond the limiting logic of biological filiation.

During data collection, the possible and existing methods for fulfilling maternal occupational desire were also addressed. The adoption process was the most frequently mentioned means among the collaborators, identified as the "priority" and "appreciation" (Medusa).

(...) in the process of constructing a person who is already here in the world and, for some reason, is in a vulnerable situation or did not have access to what we minimally understand as family (Jéssica).

In the Brazilian context, the adoption process formally occurs through the State, via the Judiciary and the Public Prosecutor's Office, before it can be completed. Although, in our political scenario, conservative forces have threatened the rights achieved by the LGBTQIA+ population in recent years, a growing struggle for advances in the field of human rights can be observed, seeking to ensure this population's rights. Similarly, the performance of the parental role by the trans and *travesti* population is constantly questioned because of the cisheteronormative stigmas that structure public policies and social services. Formal and informal obstacles are created so that this population's right to care is recognized and, even with legal possibilities for adoption, the path is crossed

by processes of institutional exclusion and moral discrimination, making adoption even more difficult to fulfill, although possible (Trajano, 2019).

Teixeira (2021) proposes reflections on the dilemmas and expectations present in the dichotomy and intersection between gender and other social structures. When maternal experiences are proposed by people who do not perform binary stereotypes, it becomes clear that the denial of reproductive rights, whether through legal, affective, or symbolic factors, is not accidental, but a provoked and direct effect of the interdependencies between machismo, cisnormativity, transphobia, and capitalism. Thus, the very possibility of raising children outside binarity exposes institutional resistance that marks parenthood as what the author explains as territories of subversion.

Davis's (2016) intersectional critique can be incorporated into the reproductive marginalization of the women in this study, articulated with devices of exclusion. When trans women and *travestis* claim the right to motherhood, care, or agency over their own bodies and affections, they rupture the hegemonic family model, which, among other aspects, determines who can be recognized as a mother. For trans women and *travestis*, reproductive alternatives, adoption, and the various ways of assuming the maternal occupational role may emerge through the historical construction of forms of collective care and child-rearing. "It takes a whole village to raise a child," says the African proverb, contemporarily used in psychoanalysis through Vera Iaconelli and others, which can be understood through the lens that a child's welcoming and educational process is, and must be, influenced by different factors and people, including the nuclear and extended family, friends, teachers, and the community. This logic opposes that of capitalism and patriarchy, which restrict care to the nuclear family, especially centered on the maternal figure, placing on the woman, ideally accepted as cisgender, the meritocratic burden of performance effectiveness and, consequently, the burden of guilt associated with perceptions and feelings of self-efficacy. What is presented and debated is not restricted to the capacity to gestate, but to denaturalizing and subverting traditional molds of loving, caring, and belonging in the multiple forms of maternal existence.

Adoption is, among other possibilities, a choice for some trans women and *travestis* to perform the maternal occupational role, whereas for others it is the only available means because of the sexual reassignment process and, as previously discussed, hormone therapies that can, and often do, cause infertility. The search for assisted reproductive technologies has not yet gained prominence because of the high financial cost (Trajano, 2019); therefore, the alternative and attempt of biological reproduction is considered and practiced by the collaborators:

In vitro fertilization is a possibility, adoption is a possibility, but I think that, from my perspective, it is more through sexual intercourse. Adoption is also a possibility. But because I am in this trans-centered relationship, in which this trans man is willing to gestate a child, because it is also worth noting that not in every trans-centered couple relationship is the trans man willing to gestate, right, or interested in doing so, but in mine this is a very well-settled conversation. It is from this perspective that I can think about the family possibility, you understand?

Through sexual intercourse to gestate the child and everything, but I do not rule out the others (Pandora).

From the perspective of public policies, the exercise of sexual, reproductive, and childbirth-related rights by trans people still encounters a system that controls ways of life through discourses and practices consistent with the hegemonic biomedical model, even in spaces that seek to counter institutional transphobia. Access to reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, remains distant because institutions are unprepared to recognize, welcome, and legitimize the concrete demands and possibilities of trans parenthood (Avelino et al., 2025). This complexity appears sensitively in Sol's statement:

Regarding the means, the ways of gestating this child, in my mind, so far, there are only two ways. Surrogacy in our country is not possible, I think it is even a crime, but for me it is distant. In vitro fertilization is also very distant, because it is very expensive. But gestating organically, let's say, right, having a process in which someone gestates a child who is biologically mine, is a traditional means between two people who have opposite genitalia. For me, that has always been something that would be possible and, on the other hand, there would be adoption. These are the two means I think about: biologically or through adoption (Sol).

When Sol points out that in vitro fertilization is "very distant" because it is "very expensive," she deeply reveals the economic and institutional barriers to access to reproductive technologies, in which the maternal occupational desire of trans women and *travestis* remains an act of resistance. Hooks (2017) invites us to reflect on love, understood as commitment, mutual liberation from logics of domination, and recognition of the other as legitimate, as a practice of freedom, especially when practiced by historically marginalized subjects. Detached from normative expectations, the experience of maternal love desired by trans women and *travestis* often extends beyond the biological dimension, as a political practice, in adoption, collective mothering, the creation of affective bonds, and the expression of the freedom to be.

The possible pathways to the desire to perform the maternal occupational role are crossed by more direct effects of cisheteronormative norms, not only through the delegitimization of trans women and *travestis* in this role but also through rigid models that predispose socioeconomic instability and distance society from the coexistence of diverse family configurations and arrangements. There is no single and ideal family model, but obstacles exist, and are constantly imposed, to the fulfillment of the maternal occupational desire of women who do not conform to the norm.

Final Considerations

In summary, throughout the text, we sought to address the perspectives and trajectories of the constitution and meanings of maternal occupational desire among trans women and *travestis*. By following nonhegemonic paths, the collaborators and

other groups challenge the structures that deny their motherhoods, facing, as discussed, processes that invalidate them as mothers and as women.

Regarding the limitations, the presence of statements that portray violence at different moments in the text is notable. This can be justified by factors related to the complexity of the experiences of trans women and *travestis*; however, because this was not the central theme of the article, although it intersects with the narratives on maternal occupational desire, it could not be addressed extensively. To do so, it would be necessary to frame scenarios and problematizations from a critical perspective on the social dimensions and social markers experienced.

Another point that is not developed within the scope of this theme is the need to decolonize knowledge, especially in the field of health, which emerges as a crucial step toward understanding motherhood as transcending and not being socially restricted to the biological bond between mother and child.

By providing a space for reflection, the research became a valuable instrument for trans women and *travestis* to recover and recognize their desires, allowing reconciliation with parts that had been denied. Reflection on the maternal occupational role, in an authentic and inclusive way, is the beginning of the search to overcome barriers imposed by cisheteronormative society. Therefore, occupational-therapeutic action can be assumed in the promotion and emancipation of the maternal occupational role, guiding, addressing, and transforming narratives shaped by inequality and violation.

Finally, this study assumes itself as a political act and aims to reverberate the collaborators' voices so that they themselves can tell their own life stories, recognizing themselves in the trajectories and constructions of the maternal occupational role.

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Author's Contributions

Maria Luisa de Sá Peregrino Arrais is the lead author of this study, which resulted from her final paper for the Multiprofessional Residency Program in Women's Health, under the supervision of Cíntia de Oliveira Castelo Branco Sales. Maria Luisa de Sá Peregrino Arrais was responsible for data collection, organization, and analysis and for drafting the manuscript. Cíntia de Oliveira Castelo Branco Sales and Caroline Cavalcante Vidal contributed to the writing and final revision of the text. Gersiane Tereza Maria Silva Ferreira and Thaislane Costa dos Santos contributed to the writing of the text. All authors approved the final version of the text.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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