Imaginary, subjectivity and women's retirement

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ABSTRACT: Women's retirement is a time of reorganization of life, which goes through understanding of its symbolic and imaginary dimension. In this article, it is assumed that the transition from work to retirement changes the imaginary, modifying the subjectivity of these workers, giving rise to multiple meanings about breaking the link with working life. This research was conducted primary aiming to investigate how the phenomenon of retirement is interpreted by the feminine imagery. For this purpose, a qualitative exploratory research was developed, in which eleven standard interviews were openly conducted with women who have retired in the last ten years, in different occupational areas. For some respondents, retirement meant a return to a stage of dependency and inactivity, for others, meant the liberation from what was considered a burden or nuisance, seen as an opportunity to have new experiences that were not possible during professional life.

Keywords: Retirement; imagery; identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of women in the Brazilian labor market has been gradually happening since the symbolic landmark of adoption of the contraceptive pill in the late 1960s. It is therefore undeniable that the growth of the economically active population is also grounded in the feminine presence in this market. This participation gave rise to an increase in the number of women seeking to professionalize themselves and facing the vicissitudes of a labor market, then already quite different, more competitive and demanding different skills. They reached the mature stage of their professional life, hoping to obtain the right to retire. Most women who entered the labor market in the 1970s, not merely as teachers or nurses, as the first ones, are now retiring. The retirement and departure from work, for these women, may represent a breach or even a break in their identity, as well as a reorganization of your entire life plan.

The understanding of the range of meanings concerning this generation of retired women requires an understanding not only of its historical and social constitution, but also the symbolic and imaginary dimension. The current transformations in the work world lead to consider aspects that go beyond the cultural and social integration of these women, i.e., the imaginary permeates and revitalizes the way to see and mean this complex and unstable representations "universe" of yourself and others.

In light of the above, we must consider the status and role of work in people's lives. On this issue, there is no consensus among researchers; some consider work as a vital determinant of life style and condition, while others as playing a minor role (Bendassolli, 2006). Concerning those who defend the central place that work occupies in people's lives are Zanelli and Silva (1996), who state that work is a major source of meaning for human existence. In this direction, Caldas (2000) relates the concept of employment to life, considering that the work establishes the linkage and makes sense of belonging. For the author, represents and organizes people's lives because it determines their commitments, schedule to be met, rules and rewards. The centrality of work is also evident in Dejours (2004, p. 31), when the author, when dealing with "subjectivity, work and action″, says the work goes beyond time and space dedicated to it, as "completely mobilizes personality."

In this article, was assumed that the transition from work to retirement changes the imaginary, modifying the subjectivity of these workers, giving rise to multiple meanings about the breach to the linkage with working life. Among the illustrations found, meaning is considered to be a return to a stage of dependence and inactivity, or also the liberation of what

was a burden or nuisance, or even the opportunity to have new experiences that were not possible during the work. In this sense, retirement can mean both gain and loss, depending on the cultural determinations (time and space) of each subject, on his life story, on his ability to interact with others and with the world (Silva, 1999), on the place that his professional identity held in his life and on how his free time before retirement was dealt with (SANTOS, 1990).

In order to investigate these changes, qualitative exploratory research was conducted, enabling the rescue of the foundations of the social imagery theory, setting as its objective the study of the symbolic contents of retired women's imagery about their daily lives, before and after retirement.

In a first bibliographic survey, several studies on retirement issue were found, but most deal specifically with men's retirement or do not differ the sexes and neither address the subjective side, as is the purpose of this article. This finding indicates, in a point of view, the existence of a field to be explored in the national research schedule; but in another, also points to limitations found in conducting this work. Later, the theoretical reference used is presented, along with the collected data analysis in a set formed by eleven women retired in the last 10 years, with higher education and a successful career, i.e., women who achieved positive results, reaching their expectations established at the beginning of professional life.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The nature of the phenomenon studied required the application of the qualitative research method. The qualitative research, in organizational studies, deviates from the intention of manipulating objects, once the works that use this approach accept scientific knowledge as part of beliefs reformulation process and involve the experience of knowing as something that builds and modifies the researcher (GODOI, et al. 2006).

Qualitative research deals with understanding the social phenomenon, concerning their socio-historical context (MERRIAM, 2002). The aim is therefore to understand people's acts, in an attempt to identify their actions and interpretations of the phenomenon socially constructed. The possibility of reaching this goal is only possible when subjects are heard, respecting their reasons and logic (GODOI and BALSINI, 2006).

A qualitative perspective, therefore, comprehend dimensions of reality that cannot be measured or quantified, as claimed by positivists. According to Alonso (1998), qualitative research has some specificities that differ from other methods, i.e., there are basic   categories

for social research, able to grasp the field of the non-verifiable, what we can interpret through an assignment of meaning. Among the categories proposed by the author are the motivations and images. The motivations are understood here as the attitudes that generate social behaviors and are difficult to be expressed, embedded in beliefs, values and desires of the collective imagery. The images, in this direction, would be symbolic condensations that express in a single representation of the projections that subjects execute of social reality, either emotional or intertextual.

The research undertakes an exploratory nature and, accordingly, the selection of respondents was not based on statistical criteria of sample defining according to representativeness and proportionality. A study like such once proposed focuses on finding and pointing ways, rather than to classify and group categories of analysis. As explained by Godoy and Mattos (2006), the choice of participants without the statistical accuracy ensures maximum flexibility to the researcher, making possible the return to the field, whether to expand the number of participants or for further analysis. This freedom allowed, after receiving the answers, return to field to be interviewed more deeply, four retired women.

3. PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PLAN

To achieve the goals of this study, a standardized open interview was developed, containing a list of ordered questions for all interviewees, who also responded in an open manner, as suggested by Godoy and Mattos (2006). Subsequently, in order to better grasp the symbolic regarding retirement, four depth interviews were conducted.

According to Sierra (1998) *apud* Godoy and Mattos (2006, p.305), in a depth interview, the object of research is made *of life - experiences, ideas, values and respondent's symbolic structure of the respondent.* Thus, it is inevitable a researcher's involvement with the subjects, once talk and listen not only allow free expression, but also the relationship that occurs in certain informality, which undoubtedly decreases the distance between the researcher and the surveyed (DEMO 2000).

In this sense, the interview, more than the record of the speeches, undertakes a communicative character, considering the production and interpretation of information through the narratives (GODOI and MATTOS, 2006). For these authors, the validity of this type of interview is based on the relationship between the theoretical construct and the results obtained with speeches, considering the situations in which knowledge is socially built and the unpredictability is inherent to the method.

In spite of all the paradigmatic limitations, difficulties and dilemmas of working in a qualitatively, we must recognize that the apprehension and understanding of the social universe, and specially of the discourse or of the organizational field, become richer, if the symbolic forms in which social actions take place are pursued, considering, of course, their own situational, social and historical contexts (GODOI, FLAG-DE-MELO and Silva, 2006).

In order to profile the eleven women investigated, information such as age, professional training, legal retirement time of retirement and if they are still active were emphasized. With regard to the age group of subjects, four women were between 50 and 54 years, three between 55 and 59 and four over 60 years and the oldest 64 years. The training of these women is quite different, and all have college degrees. Among them were teachers (3), economists (2), a pedagogue, a veterinarian, a biologist, a lawyer, a nurse and a documentation analyst. Concerning the time of retirement, it varies from one to ten years, with the highest frequency (5) located between 5 to 7 years. Of the total investigated, six left work permanently, and five returned to professional activities. The latter group, some did not effectively stop and other stopped and returned to activity after some time.

4. IDENTITY AND WORK - THE REAL, THE SYMBOLIC AND IMAGERY

In contemporary society's imagery, the work has a major role. Traditionally, the identities have been largely determined by the work people do. Normally when you meet someone, the first question that arises is: "What do you do?" whose real meaning is "What is your job?"

Is here recognized that the identity of people is made of their experience in society and organizations. The concept of identity has taken a disciplinary nature as the debate has been located on the border between different disciplines, such as social psychology, sociology and political science. In the administration area may be considered that this concept serves as a reference for the construction of transdisciplinarity between the theory of organizations and those disciplines.

The relevance of this concept for understanding the process of constitution of the subject in the organizational context is not questioned. However, the research effort conducted by the organizational studies has produced a conceptual multiplicity, whose flagship brand has been the recognition of its explanatory power and its epistemological location in the borderlands between disciplines. These characteristics contributed to the deconstruction of some theoretical perspectives of analysis that considered identity as an

univocal and unchanging phenomenon, allowing a transdisciplinary vision that recognizes the socio-historical nature and mutability of people's identity(CARRIERI, PAULA and DAVEL, 2008; YBEMA et al., 2009). The dynamic nature of the construction of the individual and collective subject's identity is, thus, recognized, i.e., the identity of individual or collective subject is not fixed and unique, but rather it should be seen as socially constructed in a given socio-historical context, and therefore not subject to continuous transformations (Brito et al., 2008). Accordingly, the identity remains a movement of "destructuring/restructuring and sometimes assumes the appearance of an identity crisis" (DUBAR, 2005). Even subject to these transformations, the repertoire of knowledge, skills and attitudes accumulated is not totally discarded, constituting the basis for the reconstruction of identity (ASHFORTH, HARRISON and CORLEY, 2008).

This train of thinking was heavily influenced by Berger and Luckmann (2002), who conceive of identity from the location of the subject in its socio-historical context. The construction of the identity was a product of socialization characterized by a simultaneous and double movement of social transformation called by them outsourcing (relating to the manner by which the subject is revealed to the world) and internalization (refers to the process by which the subject learns new ways of acting or socialize). This human movement, in turn, gives rise to the institutionalization process, i.e., a standardization of habitual actions by the various subjects. These typified actions are shared, starting to serve as reference for individual and collective action of all individuals. For the authors, the process of institutionalization cannot be seen as something determined by the social structure. Rather, it should be understood as something characterized by the interpretation and reflective capacity of the individuals who have an active role in its construction. This process can be viewed as a product of the subjective dimension (socially constructed) that allows the learning of new patterns of action during the process of socialization of the subject. Socialization, from the perspective of the authors, is socially constructed through the subjects' identity.

The design of the connection between work and identity varies in an ongoing ranging from complete fusion of personal identity and professional role until its complete termination. In recent decades, it incited a debate on whether or not the end of the centrality of labor in society. Bendassolli (2006), while reconstructing the ontology of work over time, identified on one hand, work as a central element in the economic, moral, philosophical, ideological and contractual point of view, associating it to the construction of identity. On the other hand, showed the questioning of this ontology, from the second half of the twentieth century, where

it was erroneously indicated the death of work. The author states that this ambiguity related to the value and meaning of work in defining the identity is caused by the coexistence of several *ethé* that characterize this relationship, leaving the definition of the value of work in the construction of his identity to the subject, due to its socio-historical context, its life history and subjectivity.

In providing its identity, the subject incorporates the objective and subjective dimensions of social life (DUBAR, 2005). This author also points out that understanding the process of building the identity of the subject cannot be reduced to the analysis of these dimensions. The construction of self or identity should be considered as a consequence of the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity of the socio-historical reality in which the subject is found. In this sense, Dubar (2005, p.136) defines identity as the "result at the same time stable and temporary, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographical and structural, of the various processes of socialization which, together, build individuals and define institutions. "

For purposes of this study, the relevance of the professional socialization process in building the identity of the subject was conceived through the instrumental *ethos* (Bendassolli, 2006), in which the work is a source of social recognition, achievement of *status* and establishment of routines.

Within this perspective and looking specifically at the identity at work, Brito and colleagues (2008) consider labor relations, in which individuals participate in collective activities within the organization and interfere somehow in the games between actors, whose dynamic influences workers' subjectivity and identity. In quoting Sainsaulieu's work (1985), these authors argue that identity at work is based on different collective representations, building actors in the social system of the company. Labor relations are constituted by the spaces in which, multiple subjectivities are constructed, actions and biographies are reconfigured or re-signified by the subject in action in a specific social context. When analyzing the human condition, Arendt (2000) also highlights the link between work and identity. For the author, the work must be seen as a vital element that interferes with the construction of the self-image and social image (identity for itself and identity for the other(s) of the workers subjects.

Following Dejours' stream of thought (2004, p.31), the act of working, although often studied as "a solipsistic experience of the relationship to himself," is also a social relationship. For the author, the work is no longer a simple activity, since they are implicit under work,

"relations of inequality, power and domination." Accordingly, the real work goes beyond the actual task, because it is not confined to the "reality of the objective world" and also belongs to the "reality of the social world." The author states that "to work is also to experience the resistance of the social world and, more precisely, of social relations, concerning the development of intelligence and subjectivity".

Considering the value and meaning of work in building the self-image and social image of these retired women, were asked about their daily lives before retirement. The main reported activities are linked to overwork. Some worked in three periods (morning, afternoon and night), but most of them full time. Besides the work, in the few hours that remained, their daily routine was filled with hours in traffic on their way to and back from work, with family care, and time devoted to their selves, studying or attending to free courses, doing gymnastics or dealing with their personal issues, which strongly reflect the multiple female roles (wife, mother, professional, among others), but will not be objects of analysis in this article.

> I used to spend all day at school between teaching classes, preparing materials, proofread tests and participate in administrative activities, when requested. It was the day long of effective work, and sometimes at night (1).

> I used to wake up early, stay nearly two hours in traffic and go to the bank. There I cared of the administrative routine, I was a credit analyst. In the afternoon I returned home and, three times a week at night, attended to English classes (3).

> I had an eight-hour working day routine and sports twice a week by appointment and home occupations in the merged-hour intervals (5).

After retirement, the symbolic of the work remains, however, through the identity of the retired, who remains as an identity reference, because the models of identification with the reality are not disrupted, preserved by the imagery and expressed by the suffix "ex" or retired, when identifying themselves, what they used to do. This self-representation is a fantasy of their past, but also their present and symbol of their will as future. A feeling of emptiness, lack of new social relations and loss of sense about the identification of interviewees can be revealed in the following statements.

> I. .. I ... (Thought a long time) I think I do not know. Has so long I do not know anyone new. I think I speak I'm a retired veterinary (2).

> My life has dramatically changed because I was a bank clerk, and today I am a grandmother. But, in the beginning, it was even harder because I was so young and I was totally lost. Everybody went to work and I stayed at home. I even stopped the English I stopped, because there was no more sense. I stayed a while in a vacuum. Only when my daughter had the boys the things ... I had a routine again (3).

The difficulty of some subjects concerning retirement is related to their refusal in accepting their new condition, and to the difficulty of building life projects likely continue

life outside work (Santos, 1990). In general, they did not have many activities outside work, which was seen as a source of power and engagement and social investment. Hence the feeling of emptiness and loss of meaning.

Having or not the ability to create in interaction with others and the world is also a determining factor of how people live their retirement (SILVA, 1999). Castoriadis (2003) states that the essence of the subjects is precisely in its infinite capacity to create. This power of creation occurs only through the imagery. In this article we used Ruiz's concept of imagery, which says

> (...) imagery and imagination, in principle, are indefinable, i.e., no rational dense and extensive explanation is able to end imagination. The imagination should always be described by its effects, because it can never be explained by conclusive definitions (2003, p.30).

For Castoríadis (2003), there are two types of imagination: the effective and the radical. The imagery appears effectively in the socio-historical through symbolic set, i.e., we are social beings, and since our birth, institutions (family, school, church and others) these sets have as duty, to teach us what is right and what is wrong, starting our process of socialization and construction of meaning. In the other hand, the radical imaginary is the individual's ability to create, innovate and produce new meanings. The human being recognizes the world and its objects through the construction of meaning from the actual imagery, also called social, and through the radical. Therefore, this sense of the individual comes not only from their impressions; the individual is social and "is organized in webs and structures of meaning, in order to establish symbolic sutures that give coherence to human action" (Ruiz, 2003, p. 67).

The construction of meaning undertakes a reflective character, once it is constantly recreated by the subjects. In Ruiz's words (2003, p.59), the culture, i.e., the symbolic network, "is constituted by" and "constitutes" means through which individuals see the world (subjectivity). In this sense, culture cannot be understood as something pre-set, using only rationality to reveal the senses, in identitary-conjunctionist logic. According to Castoriadis (2003), this logic still prevails in society, because we insist on seeing past events through our imaginary signifiers of present, what is wrong, because it does not explain the significance of the real. The natural layer, i.e., the real, supports the society, but does not determine it, as there is flexibility due to the imaginary.

In building senses for retirement combining social and radical imagery, the women interviewed reported that in one hand, after their actual retirement they thought that would be able to perform various activities that were unfeasible due to time, such as traveling to various places, having free time for leisure, for family, attend to crafts courses; in sum, to do everything that give them pleasure. On the other hand, some had a very negative representation of retirement, linking it to boredom, to serve as a "crutch" to others, or simply could not imagine their selves retired.

> At that time I imagined myself free to do whatever I wanted ... to travel without being tied to timetables, mostly. I imagined having much more leisure in my retirement life, I did not think about returning to work and still not thinking (1).

> When I was younger, I imagined that, when retired, I would take care of my house, my children and my husband ... make delicious food, entertaining friends; finally, enjoy my home and my family, something I never had time to do, as I was always traveling for work and sacrificing much of my personal side due to the professional side (2).

> I think I did not imagine..., caring for grandchildren, perhaps. My life has always been linked to the bank that I rarely imagined myself out of it. I always saw people who retired early and stood idle, as marginal people, who all other people use as crutches for help. And I never wanted to be a crutch (3).

Everything lived by the individual, creates, designs, represses, sublimates and settles on layers of socialization like magma (CASTORÍADIS, 2003). This process happens as we, individuals, make layers of meanings, while developing ourselves as individuals and society. Institutions contribute to these layers by its rules, sanctions, ideologies and tradition, and are imposed on individuals leading to alienation, i.e., the heteronomy. Alienation is defined in multiple ways, which are complementary and summarized as heteronomy or regulation by other. Heteronomy means subordination or subjection to others' will.

However, according to Castoríadis (2003), this magma of significations and heteronomy do not prevent the socio-historical subject of creating new meanings through the radical imagery, i.e., all that exists is able to change. This recognition of the active and reflective subject is the process of autonomy. Autonomy is understood as the opposite of alienation. Thereby, subject's ability to reflect and understand that his representation for himself and the others is constituted and instituted social-historically appears, and that is how some of the retired women surveyed constituted new social representations, through a process of understanding the change and its ability to create and reflect.

5. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FEMALE RETIREMENT

By doing a review of studies about retirement, Leão (2002) found that men and women with higher level of education and earnings continue working for a longer time than other individuals in opposite conditions. For Santos (1990), the return to work of people with higher educational level has nothing to do with economic needs, but with the seeking for power and status that work provides. On the other hand, the group with low education usually has to return to work seeking for income for their survival. While in the former group, the main reason for retirement is the service time, as in the second, is the disability retirement and when active, performed activities characterized by intensive labor, low wages and high levels of insalubrity and risk (SANTOS, 1990).

On the other hand, the group with low education usually has to return to work seeking for income for their survival. However, the interviewees also emphasized additional reasons that should be considered: fatigue and saturation of the working environment, illness in family, physical difficulty to continue performing the same task, amendments to the retirement law, financial problems and reasons beyond their control as imposition of the company.

> I closed my cycle at the school; I had my time of service. I was not in good health, my parents needed me. I could not perform all that work and see the same problems without a solution (1).
>
> Since I can remember, I worked at the bank. And then I did not want to leave, but there was a need to cut staff in the bank and they checked everybody who were in time for retirement and asked me to retire (3).
>
> I was already saturated from that environment, I needed to stop. At the day they gave me the time, I asked my retirement. Other work proposals appeared, to earn more and work less. I stopped without regret it (4).

Analyzing these answers, we can see retirement as a time when the decision is sometimes of the woman herself and, accordingly, may be delayed in relation to length of service required; and sometimes is imposed by a policy adopted by the company management, to "renew" its staff. In the latter case, women with disabilities feel unable or even excluded as they are "invited" to retire.

It is also factual that retirement was hit by several changes in work world, interfering in deciding to retire, actually much more influenced by external factors than age itself. Many women retire at a certain job, starting to be devoted to another, either to improve the income, either to do something they have always dreamed of, in the creation sense of the radical imaginary.

On the issue of women's retirement and the loss of professional identity, Leão (2002, p. 185) states that this woman "mobilizes symbols that are shadowed and which can be integrated into consciousness, as well as archetypes of transformation, determining the quality of the confrontation with these changes in midlife." The author concludes that the retirement event promotes the redefinition and reorientation of this woman's personality. Retirement is seen as contradictory, because on one hand, ends the dedication to the professional career, often made with personal sacrifices, but on the other, allows rescue roles relegated to sidelines because of work.

From the symbolic point of view, retirement means breaches or disconnections with a certain reality. At the end of a professional career, retirement is expected and may have different meanings for those who for years have dedicated themselves to work, accumulating, seldom, double or triple shifts. The expectation and experience of a new post-work routine lead to an existential resizing and to a reorganization of personal identity. In this sense, retirement is seen as a phenomenon that marks the transition phase in a person's life.

Retirement, seen as a rescue of female roles and as a reorganization of the personal identity, is revealed in the testimonies of the investigated women. These women who thought they would be traveling after retirement, are now splitting their time between caring for grandchildren and for other people of the family, homemaking, volunteer work, but still there time to do aerobics or walking, attend to some courses and other activities they were unable to perform because of work.

> Today I realized that life is not leisure, that leisure itself is meaningless. It looks like I'm going through stages: first, dived into family problems. (...) Now, I started searching for other activities such as yoga, voluntary work and study groups of the spiritualist doctrine (1).
>
> ... I care of my grandchildren while my daughter is at work. I take them to school and pick them up, prepare the lunch, and take them to the doctor. When someone in the family need to go to a doctor and has no way to do so, they say: Call her; she is at home (3).
>
> I paint, but not as much as I thought. And you know what? That free time that I thought I'd have to travel, I have not had yet. I just got very involved in helping my children, supporting my grandchildren, so my time is filled up. I guess I'm working even more than before (4).

In the statements above it is clear that these women did not make their dream of retirement come true, since they have not left to execute their other functions constructed for women since ancient times. They are still mothers, wives, and now are grandmothers. As a result, instead of decreasing, their activities are eventually increasing. When searching

executive women retired, Jones et al. (2010) found that they did not want to be only housewives after retirement, since they have never been. These job obligations outside of the "workforce" may conflict with their imagination on retirement. Only in one case it is proved that the possibility of this achievement, because the woman built herself another representation based on the radical imaginary.

> I have quality of life. I live by the sea, I travel when I want, do gymnastics, read, watch movies, walk in the sidewalk, go to the beach on a Monday, attend to languages courses (Spanish and re-starting English), dance class, therapy, acupuncture . Anyway, all that I have never had time to do (7).

For Santos (1990), many women fit the profile of retirement-care, characterized by individuals who build their life projects in relation to each other in which the moment of freedom is used in activities to help family members and friends. At this point, is worthy to discuss the aspect of the work-family-woman relationship. In a study by Massi (1992), it was observed that middle-class women who worked outside had three different explanations about the work: a) work allowed the upgrade, development, and contact with other people, freeing them from private routine b) work as a source of pleasure and c) work as a promoter of financial independence. Interestingly, in this study work as a source of personal success is in foreground, while its productive character appears in the background, as well as financial gain, which only emerge in case of need to help the family budget. More than that, the study reveals that the social feeling of creation and productivity is realized by women working outside, in maternity and care of children. The work is realized as personal achievement and independence, complementing domestic life. Thinking about women work and retirement leads implicitly to the network of meanings, symbols and identity constraints that impose the condition of women.

Along with the transition to non-work is added the midlife, especially delicate stage when concerning women, either for psychosocial reasons, for the passage that symbolizes or the biological features inherent to this stage of life such as menopause.

When considering the midlife women, there is a gap in studies on the imaginary on retirement, although there are works like the researches indicated by Leão (2000), correlating woman/work/retirement. The importance of researching the imagery surrounding the retirement is justified especially when considering that longevity is increasing, which indicates that attention should be paid to older workers. The life expectancy of Brazilians has increased 3,4 years between 1997 and 2007, and reached 72,7 years in 2008 (IBGE, 2009). As

a result, the elderly population over 70 years in 2008 accounted for 4.7% of Brazilians. In the case of women only, it is known that their longevity is even greater than that of men.

If, on the one hand, midlife may represent a maturity in which we live a phase of stability and personal success, on the other hand, it also suggests to many a crisis, permeated by questions about the various roles played by then and a need to preserve what has been achieved. All this requires a personal reorientation, compounded by the ambiguities and contradictions inherent to that period and to the possibility of retirement (LEÃO, 2002). Because of this turbulence the author presents that much of the research indicates the need to invest in programs for retirement, working proactively with the individual so that he can do this "rite of passage" in a satisfactory manner.

In discussing this passage, Hollis (1985) says that while culturally accepted as a period of crisis, it is not necessarily linked to the reorientation of the personality. It is not uncommon at this stage, people questioning themselves about who they are beyond their own stories and papers that represented throughout life. The author calls such transition of "the middle passage," saying it is more about a "psychological experience" than a "chronological event", since its beginning is not simply by age, but when people have to face what has been avoided so far. It could be said that if retirement is experienced as a moment of denial, being delayed until its limit (mandatory retirement); it can be a "psychological experience" that triggers the "middle passage".

When this transition is close to retirement, as pointed out by Leão (2002), is aggravated by the trend towards the disappearance of the rites of passage in the contemporary society, since people tend to some disorientation in this period because of the need to die for the past and revive for the future. During midlife, there is a natural tendency of people questioning the meaning and value of work in their lives, even though it is inherent to the routine and necessary, as already said, for the formation of identity.

This transition work/retirement was voiced by the women interviewed in a continuum of feelings ranging from pleasure/euphoria to depression. Situations of total pleasure and happiness reported, such as not having to get up early and not getting stuck in traffic and have free time to rest and for leisure, are contrasted with reports of feeling of worthlessness, emptiness and depression, especially when the retirement coincides with personal problems, typical of midlife.

> At first, I felt quite euphoric, because I was released of the obligations that I no longer wanted. But then I felt a little lost and somewhat depressed. I realized that others were

BBR, Braz. Bus. Rev. (Engl. ed., Online),
Vitória, v. 8, n. 2, Art. 6, p. 114-131, apr. - jun. 2011

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busy and I was not, I felt kind of useless. And it gave me a jolt, so I am doing some volunteer work (1).

I lost my ground, mainly because it coincided with my separation and my daughters leaving to live abroad. I guess I am not found yet. The impact was huge (2).

Having no more obligation to get up early and face the traffic to get to work. I'm learning to be alone and enjoy every moment on leave with pleasure (7).

However, this crisis raises the possibility of renewal. Living consciously the "middle passage" requires a separation of who we are, in reality, from what would be the baggage of internalized experiences, so that we can, more authentically, "get closer to our potential and achieve the vitality and the wisdom of aging" (HOLLIS, 1985, p.20).

6. FINAL THOUGHTS

In order to study the female imagery on the issue of retirement, there was a qualitative exploratory research in which the symbolic contents of women retired in the last ten years about the perception of themselves, before and after retirement.

Was found that the transition from work to retirement has changed the imagination, interfering with the subjectivity of women and giving rise to multiple meanings about the breach with the link with working life. Were found cases in which this transition meant a return to a stage of dependence and inactivity, but there are also cases in which it was given the sense of liberation from what was a burden or nuisance, or even the opportunity to have new experiences that were not possible during the work. Certainly, there is a universe to be explored, addressing imaginary and subjectivity.

In their professional life, these women were extremely focused on work (instrumental *ethos*), with no time for themselves and their families. Some of them imagined retirement as the chance of recovering this time to leisure, to take care of themselves and their family. In some cases, there is a partial materialization of this dream, once some could enjoy leisure and free time. Others, however, found themselves bounded to a new routine of work or activities of assistance to next of kin and friends again. A deepening seeking the life history of each one of the interviewees, or even its subjectivity, would certainly help in understanding the subject.

As seen in the literature review, retirement is seen as contradictory, because if on one side, ends the dedication to work, on the side, allows rescuing roles relegated to the sidelines because of work. But the opening of this possibility, not necessarily means its implementation, nor the success of these women.

From the symbolic point of view, retirement means breaches or disconnections with a certain reality. It's a rite of passage, a "middle passage", that as seen, is much more a psychological than chronological event. At the end of a cycle represented by the end of a professional career, retirement comes up with different meanings for women who often accumulated double or triple shifts. The expectation and experience of a new post-work routine lead to an existential resizing and to a reorganization of personal identity. In this sense, retirement is seen as a phenomenon that marks the transition between phases in a person's life, which does not happens always in a calm way. Some of the interviewees, also retired from a job, but continued their career in another activity, which was justified by them as a way to supplement their income. But was it an indication of a difficulty in dealing with this passage? Studies suggest the resumption, as the search for the *status* and power lost from the departure from work and the pursuit of social engagement and the resumption of their relationship.

Everything that these women lived in their professional life is settled and is brought to the construction of their new retired representation. However, some of them could better elaborate this change and, in a process of autonomy, made come true what was present in the imagination. Others are still living the transition or alienation, getting stuck to the roles previously institutionalized in an employment relationship socially constructed.

The theory evidenced that the socio-historical subject is able to create new meanings through the radical imaginary, i.e., all that exists is able to change. This recognition of the active and reflective subject is the process of autonomy, understood as the opposite of alienation. Thereby, subject's ability to reflect and understand that his representation for himself and the others is constituted and instituted social-historically appears, and that is how some of the retired women surveyed constituted new social representations, through a process of understanding the change and its ability to create and reflect.

Aware of the limitations presented in this research, concerning the generalizations of the results, we stress its importance because of the lack of studies specifically addressing this issue. This article emphasizes the need for specific studies that enlighten women retirement, addressing the various justifications that women point to work and to what extent these reasons influence their imagination about retirement. The centrality of work on the theory of subjectivity, involving aspects of psychoanalysis and sociological analysis can also be studied in other experiments, which would give them a disciplinary character.

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