

## **Telenovelas brasileiras, mulheres da classe dominante e a moderna tradição de gênero<sup>1</sup>**

### **Brazilian telenovelas, elite women and the modern tradition of gender**

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**Resumo:** *O objetivo do texto é entender os usos sociais da ficção televisiva por mulheres das frações alta e média alta da classe dominante, em particular a construção de uma feminilidade de classe, a qual é capturada pelas visões de mundo que as informantes manifestam. Tais representações se compõem de enunciados sobre as práticas cotidianas – de gestão do corpo, do trabalho e do estudo, da família e das relações amorosas – que dão sentido às práticas e as constituem. Dissertamos sobre a incorporação das narrativas das telenovelas na formação de um capital cultural midiático que endossa o estilo de vida das mulheres heterossexuais da elite. A análise revela que a assimilação da noção hegemônica da distinção burguesa ocorre pela rejeição da figura fútil da “perua” e pela identificação com a imagem da mulher “moderna”.*

**Palavras-chave:** *telenovela; usos sociais; classe dominante; feminilidade.*

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**Abstract:** *The objective of this paper is to understand how upper middle class and upper-class women make social uses of a fictional television genre (telenovelas) in order to construct a class femininity captured by world perspectives expressed by informants. These representations are composed of statements regarding everyday practices – their own control of their physical bodies, work and study, family and love relationships – which give meaning to their practices and shape them. We address the incorporation of telenovela narratives in the formation of a media cultural capital that endorses heterosexual elite women’s lifestyle. The analysis has showed that the assimilation of the hegemonic model of bourgeois distinction occurs through the identification with the image of a “modern” woman and the rejection of the “perua”, shorthand for a woman with an exuberant garish but luxurious style.*

**Keywords:** *telenovela; social uses; elite; femininity.*

The objective of this paper is to understand how upper middle class and upper-class women make social uses of a fictional television genre (telenovelas) in order to construct a class femininity captured by world perspectives expressed by informants. It is not about instrumentalizing the category of social class as a marker of “differences”, in the criticism to most of the studies performed in Brazil (JACKS, SIFUENTES and LIBARDI, 2017); inequality becomes the presupposition to understand culture through the position of social class (LAMONT, 1994). Through the perception of Brazilian telenovelas in prime time of Rede Globo, a moral learning is produced through sharing a consensus around a pattern of femininity of class (RONSINI, 2015). When instituting this pattern, telenovelas administer social relations among gender/classes through the predominant norm or heteronormativity. The gender is structuring of the texture of experience, just as social class, because it is a primary form of giving meaning to power relations based in differences perceived between sexes (RONSINI, 2016)

In this paper, we discuss the relation between sociality and rituality (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2009) by examining the experiences of 12 young, mature and elder women in order to understand the imbrication between melodramatic text and feminine identities through three spheres: work/study, gender/family relations, feminine appearance. With a under-sample composition of 12 informants, our results are supported in interviews with 24 informants performed during two years. Through the depth of data, we believe it is possible to extract indications of more general validity for the study of feminine condition based in social class in medium-size urban context with expressive rural culture. Experience is the raw-material of our cultural analysis on the role of media in structuring social relationships and mentalities, it is worth saying, the path of access of the meaning produced in the socialization of individuals in different institutions.

Feminine identity is originated in processes determined by the social structure and subjectivities: it is collective and individual, being shared by women with equivalent life conditions. The definition of “I”

(RONSINI, 2007) depends of a “we” whose social existence is imaginarily instituted by the narrated representations and by ideologies.<sup>6</sup> The character irreflected in gender identities creates an obstacle, but does not impede transformations in the relation between heterosexual men and women. The evaluation on the personal trajectory – previous, present and future – is, usually, a comparative balance between women in the same social position or from another class in a narrative that hides and unveils male oppression.

The representation of femininity is elaborated with feelings and definitions of the common sense that are mediated by the class experience, characterized by the abundance of economic resources and by the facilitated access to cultural goods of the industry of entertainment and high culture, which determine subjectivities (what they think they are as individuals), the lifestyle and unawareness of class privileges.

Regarding relations between classes, the hypothesis of work is that the interest of elite women by telenovela doesn't seem mere curiosity for the symbolic universe of middle-class and low-class, on the contrary, it is due to the acted contrast between the fractions of class that ends up legitimating the distinction between the wealthy by blood or merit. Under the optics of class femininity, wealthy women enjoy respectability *a priori* both in narratives of telenovelas and in social relations, even if the partial conquest of sexual freedom is a reason for insecurity due to the institutionalization of gender inequalities in the mark of heterosexual families (ILLOUZ, 2013). This double legitimation we call mediatic cultural capital, which is converted into a symbolic capital (MOORE, 2008) for the classes ruling as a whole in the way of personal and family prestige. It is this way that the elite receptors extract pleasure from consuming telenovelas, even if they do not serve the social distinction in the molds of the goods of high culture.

The mediation of rituality is captured by the forms of interpreting the fictional text and the relations with the position of class. In the period

6 Such as developed by Gramsci in his theory about ideology and hegemony, synthetized by Terry Eagleton (1996).

of data collection, informants mostly watched novelas broadcast in the primetime of Rede Globo de Televisão: *Fina Estampa* (Aguinaldo Silva, ago. 2011-mar. 2012), *Avenida Brasil* (Emmanuel Carneiro, mar. 2012-out. 2012) and *Amor à Vida* (Walcyr Carrasco, may 2013-jan. 2014). The telenovela consumption also happens through the world wide web, being that five informants, three young women and two mature women, access Rede Globo's official website or websites with entertainment content for reading summaries of chapters that wasn't watched or future chapters.

The epistemology of our investigation follows what we designated critical studies of reception (RONSINI, 2014) and the main method adopted are the individual sociological portraits (LAHIRE, 2004), which reconstruct personal, family, school and professional trajectories of the informants. The genealogy of the dispositional sociology of Lahire, centered in biographic stories (LAWLER, 2014), takes back the 19<sup>th</sup> century with William Dilthey, goes through the 20th century with the school of Chicago and extends over the recent interest of sociologists for personal narratives to enquire on the production of identities.

### **Social class, gender and telenovelas**

The premise that a class is defined “in what it has of more essential by the place and the value that attributes to both sexes and their dispositions [...]” (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 101-102) is the starting point for the articulation between class, gender and telenovela. Following Bourdieu's logic, the traditional division between genders in the dominion of the sexual division of work and practices and representations tend to weaken the bigger the cultural capital inherited and the school capital available. To it, we add the historic role of telenovelas in debating gender equality, and, for the interest expressed here, the heterosexual affective relationship. In thesis, the bourgeois modern woman can be defined as the one who conquered economic independence, sexual freedom and

emotional autonomy.<sup>7</sup> However, she seems to restrict herself to economic independence, while sexual freedom and emotional autonomy get in the middle of the way due to the persecution of the ideal of feminine respectability associated to marriage/stable union and motherhood both in telenovelas and the informants' experiences.

The consensus on gender relations in the country is about, on one hand, a bigger equality between genders in middle-class and dominant classes (MATTOS, 2006); on the other, the sexual freedom lived by the more privileged sectors, while the conservative mentality of most impedes the alteration of customs (ALMEIDA, 2007; CARMO, 2011). Almeida's (2007) investigation on the opinion of Brazilians of all ages and social classes about "liberal sexual practices" points that residents of capitals are more liberal than other cities; those who declare themselves without religion are more liberal than adepts of any belief; except the case of homosexuality, men are more liberal than women; the world view of people with superior education is more liberal than people with less education.

The fact that the receptors associated telenovelas to the banality of distraction, avoiding, thus, an approximation with the popular taste (LEAL, 1986) says a lot about the legitimacy of the dominant culture, but not enough about the real importance of telefiction in building mental structures that legitimate social hierarchies and the value of the dominant heteronormative femininity. In the interpretation of telenovela representations, the perception of gender as an issue of learning (GIDDENS, 2002) still contrasts with the automatic evocation of nature of masculine and feminine.

If socially, the body attributes, beauty practices and loving behavior are crucial for the preservation of the traditional notion of feminine respectability, the enactment of feminine lifestyles in telenovelas both serves for the reproduction of this model and presents a portrait of changes operated in the condition of the woman in a private and a public

7 Emotional autonomy is the capability of feeling, thinking and making decisions on your own (REICHERT and WAGNER, 2007)

space, serving as inspiration to attain an ideal of modern woman that is centered in the stories in big urban centers of the country.

The heroes of the modern romantic novel, such as telenovelas, are, in their vast majority, independent and brave. Commonly, they touch the supposedly untreatable masculinity of their love interests, actively producing love (GIDDENS, 1993). This potentially subversive character of the romantic love, however, remained latent due to the indispensable association with marriage – and with motherhood; and also due to the idea that, once found the true love, it would be “forever”.

As we will see in the analysis of the representation of femininity, the receptors, resident in cities in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul, showed difficulty in accepting female sexual freedom; when detaching the idea of romantic love from its associations with female passivity in love conquests and female and male as antithesis, because the origins of the modern tradition of romantic love can be glimpsed in the empathy with the caring functions of the mother and wife and the typical conflicts of confluent love (GIDDENS, 1993), where loving passion is exercised by men and women.

### **Individual sociologic profiles**

Beyond the classification according to the class position<sup>8</sup> and the heteronormative sexual orientation, the informants were distributed by generation. The generational arc of the young interviewees<sup>9</sup> is from 20 to 24 years old; of the mature ones, from 30 to 50; of the elderly women, from 68 to 76. The sociologic portraits – which offer a landscape of mediation of experience – comprise the demographic data of the informants (age, professional occupation, marital status, place of residence), the school cultural capital, the objectivated cultural capital in the consumption of high culture goods and massive culture goods, as

8 The category of sample in fractions of class considered the economic capital (most well established family member) and cultural capital (school degree, consumption of material and cultural goods) and symbolic capital (authority and prestige).

9 The names of the informants are fictional. The personal information of the 5 interviews applied to each one of them were categorized with the help of the software NVIVO9.

well as the desires expressed about who they want to be and what they'd like to learn. These reveal which capitals legitimate the lifestyle of the bourgeois woman.

Five interviewees, the elders Lia, Liliane, and Soraia and the matures Roberta and Rute, are the most well-off economically in their families. The other five, the mature Marina and all the young women, Ísis, Gina, Lena and Taís, are supported by their parents. Marina's father is a retired military man; Isis' is a civil engineer; Gina's owns a print shop; Lena's mother is a professor in a federal university and Taís' mom is a land owner and owns an insurance company. In the families of the elder woman Cora and the mature Neusa, their husbands are the most wealthy members of the family – respectively, a retired veterinary colonel and anesthetist and partner of a private clinic. Lia, Liliane, Roberta, Neusa Ísis and Gina were classified in the upper-class, while the other six – Soraia, Cora, Marina, Rute, Lena and Taís – were classified in the upper-middle class.

The young women Gina, Taís and Lena were born in Santa Maria and Ísis was born in a small city in the northwestern region of Rio Grande do Sul. Ísis (24) and Gina (23), upper-class citizens, study, respectively, Law and Architecture in federal universities. In addition to study, Ísis is an intern in the Federal Public Ministry. Lena (20) and Taís (24) belong to the upper-middle class, the first studies Journalism and the latter is graduated in Advertising in a private institute of superior education, she works in the area of communication and marketing of a insurance company (which belongs to her mother) and a professional school that offers MBA and post-graduation courses. Two of the interviewees (Taís e Lena) are daughters of divorced parents and live with their mother. Gina lives with her father and her mother is deceased. Isis lives in Santa Maria with her sister, student of Civil Engineering, and her parents live in the countryside of the state. All of them are single.

The mature women were born and are living in Santa Maria. Roberta and Neusa belong to the upper-class and have graduated in the area they currently work with. Neusa is a social worker in a hospital and

finished her PhD in Social Service in a private university. Roberta is a pharmacist, she ended her masters in Pharmaceutical Sciences in a federal university and works in a clinical lab where she's also a partner. Marina and Rute belong to the upper middle class, the first had graduated in Accounting and had a specialization in Human Resources, and the second one is graduated in Arts. Marina worked as an accountant in an office, but currently have been studying to go through public contests. Rute is the owner of a company of decoration and events. Roberta and Marina are single: the first lives alone and the second lives with her parents. Rute is divorced and lives with her two teenage children. Neusa is married and lives with her husband and two sons.

The elderly women, with the exception of Lia, who lives in a small town in the region of Alto Jacuí, RS were born in Santa Maria. Lia and Liliane belong to the upper-class and Soraia and Cora are upper-middle class. Liliane and Soraia are retired, respectively, as a university professor and a state teacher of Portuguese. Liliane had graduated in Philosophy and ended her masters in Education, and her biggest source of income comes from her rural properties. Soraia had completed the teaching degree and did not conclude her superior education, but she also lives with the pension of her late husband, who worked as a bank manager. Lia and Cora are housewives. The first, due to her father's determination, didn't complete the elementary school and the second one finished high school. Lia's income is originated from the company, managed by her brothers, that commercializes grains and farm products. Her husband was a farmer and a cattle breeder. All of the informants are mothers. Lia and Soraia are widowers and both have four children; Cora is married with a retired military veterinarian and has three children; Liliane is divorced and has one child. Lia and Liliane live alone; Cora, with her husband; Soraia, with one of her daughters. Only Liliane has completed superior education.

The high school capital of the informants – six of them have incomplete superior education (four young women and an elderly one) and four (an Elder and three mature) are PhD, masters or specialists – reflect

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the level of instruction of the women occupied with complete or incomplete superior education in the city of Santa Maria, which is bigger than the national average (IBGE, 2011, 2015). However, the capital objectivated in the form of diplomas does not guarantee the disposition of legitimate culture, once it also depends, among other factors, of the cultural capital inherited from the family (BOURDIEU, 2008). It is how the biggest familiarity with goods of high culture coincides with the most elevated title among the elders (Liliane), but, amongst the mature ones, it is Marina who has the biggest cultural capital objectivated, despite the title of specialist in comparison with the titles of master and PhD from Neusa and Roberta. Among the young ones, all with equivalent scholarship, the most regular consumption is blockbuster movies and concerts, except for Gina, who monthly appreciate art expositions, annually goes to plays and/or dance performances. Isis and Lena also occasionally appreciate plays, while Taís enjoys cinemas and concerts.

The ideal feminine figures contemplate public and mediatic personalities of social and professional prestige. The elder Liliane and the youth Taís and Lena direct their predilection to elegant women, whose careers are around fashion/high-fashion, respectively quoted: the stylist Coco Chanel; the fashion consultant Constanza Pascolato; the editor-in-chief of *Elle* Brazil, Susana Barbosa. Kate Middleton is the indication of the young Gina in relation to beauty and “power”. Evita Perón is the model of woman pursued by the mature Neusa. The TV presenter Hebe Camargo and the actress Fernanda Montenegro were the choices, respectively, of the mature Roberta and the elder Lia. The admiration for the violinist and conductor Andre Rieu makes the elder Soraia dream about a music career in the orchestra. The mature Marina finds in the “intelligence” and “sensibility” of the writer Martha Medeiros the skills she wish to develop. The elder Cora and the young Ísis, on the other hand, did not indicate any name in particular. The first talks about her frustration of not being a “business woman” and the second one projects her future as a “very beautiful, very rich, very intelligent and successful woman in a professional, personal and love level”. The mature Rute, finally, legitimates her qualities as a “mother and housewife”.

The desires manifested about what they “wished to learn if she had the chance” are presented as activities complementary to the cultural capital they already detain. They are the following: learning or perfecting languages (Liliane, Roberta, Rute, Neusa, Taís, Gina, Marina), studying singing and/or musical instruments (Cora, Gina, Lena, Ísis), graduating in a superior education (Cora) and learning how to use the internet (Lia). The most mobilized capitals for the legitimation of self identity are the economic, cultural (intellectual or school) and the symbolic (gender): wealth, professional success, dominion or fluency in a foreign language, intelligence, elegance, beauty.

### **Defining what it is to be a woman**

When asked to define themselves, none of the interviewees were induced to talk about belonging to a particular class. Even so, most of them – all of the young women, the mature women Rute and Marina and the elders Liliane, Soraia and Cora – characterize themselves by the economic or cultural capital (“good education”, “posture”, “leadership skills, appreciation for traveling, good literature, plays, classical music, etc.). In addition to that, seven informants define themselves by a symbolic capital based in a habitus of gender: the elders Soraia and Cora for being dedicated mothers and wives; the elder Lia for the disposition to organization; the mature Marina for considering herself a “modern woman”; the mature Roberta for the commitment with the family unity; the young women Taís and Lena highlight, respectively, the virtues of being delicate and being vain/affectionate.

In the representations of gender relations, described above, it gets clear the contradiction between domination and submission. When thinking about the positive aspects of femininity, they reproduce the hegemonic view based on motherhood, in the sensitive and emotional nature of the woman and in the pleasure of beauty practices. Only two informants, the elder Liliane and the young woman Gina, claim full “autonomy” for women (including sexual freedom), while the mature Marina believes that women already have the same rights and autonomy

in relation to men. The mature Neusa remembers her youth envy in relation to the boys' freedom.

When they evaluate “the worst things about being a woman”, the disadvantages are divided into those attributed to the gender inequalities and those understood as coming from the biologic nature (physical and emotional/sensitive), emphasized by the elder Cora and by the young women Lena, Ísis and Roberta. Gender inequalities – related to the overload of demands in public and private space, to the authoritarianism of the spouse or the absence of credibility in the workplace – are highlighted by eight informants: the four elders (Lia, Soraia, Cora, Liliane) and the mature women Neusa and Marina and the young women Lena and Gina. We observe, therefore, that the representation of femininity as nature rivals with the social and cultural determinants of feminine oppression, creating obstacles for its perception.

For 11 informants, with exception of the young woman Taís, the life of women is harder than the men's due to their multiple tasks. They don't approve the convenience of men, almost exclusively dedicated to work outside of home, without claiming the division of chores, enabled by the help of housekeepers. The only one who defends the natural skill of women for home activities is Marina. Liliane and Lena highlight, respectively, the demand of beauty as a criteria for the social value of women and wage inequality; the restriction of female freedom in the marriage and the social acceptance of male infidelity. About the hardships of educating children, there are a consensus about sharing responsibility between mother and father. Another challenge that keeps women's lives harder than men's is the need to take care of their appearance, pointed by six informants from different generations. We can observe, therefore, that only two informant are capable of questioning the key-aspects of female subordination – economic inequality in the work Market and the restriction of female freedom through marriage.

In the election of the mother or female figure that played/plays a role of exemplary woman, the predominant reason for admiration is regarding the conquest of economic independence, at the same time of taking care of the family. The generational gap is clear, once only the elders

(Lia, Soraia, Cora) highlight the virtues of traditional femininity of the woman who gets pregnant and takes care of their home.

The understanding of the interviewees about what they consider a sensual woman is permeated by female modesty: disapproval about the exhibition of physical attributes and hiding sexual impulses. If the care with the appearance brings the intentions and, because of that, it mustn't be exaggerated, the modes – of walking, seating, eating, speaking, looking and smiling – are valued by the informants as properties of a well behaved woman. Vulgarity is the opposite of sensuality and is defined by short clothing and the way of behaving socially. Another characteristic of vulgar women is having sexual intercourse with different partners successive or simultaneously. The elder Cora spontaneously mentions the TV celebrity Mulher Melancia while the young Lena uses the term “skanky” to designate a vulgar woman.

For 12 interviewees, the care for the appearance is the own definition of femininity. The concept of beauty is associated to taking care of body, appearance and the emblematic sentence is “there are no ugly women, there are poor women” (Gina, 23 anos). The mandatory nature of beauty practices is questioned, but all of them adjust to the standard through the care of appearance (skin, hair, nails) and physical appearance by practicing exercises and having surgical interventions. The reproduction of gender inequality or the advances for their overcoming – especially linked to the Family stimulus to economic Independence – have their origin in the teachings they received in their primary families. In the speech of nine women, mostly mature and young, there is the existence of an education that contributes for the female emancipation based in the economic autonomy. The generational transformation is clear regarding preventive sexual education to avoid diseases and unwanted pregnancy: while the young women received these types of information, elders and matures needed constant permission to interact with boys when they were young.

The representations about the female condition are presented in a fragmented form. On one hand, the most recurring dissatisfaction is with the overload of tasks for women managing the home and their conciliation

with the work outside of the home. In a minor scale, they talk about the difficulties for women to be respected in the workplace and they compare the sexual freedom of the man with the lack thereof for women.

In counterposition to women in lower classes, the female condition is not seen as a destination which they have to settle from (RONSINI et al., 2015): motherhood, embellishment, caring for others, moral respectability in the exercise of sexuality are “choices” that elevate women to a special place. The female ideal is the woman capable of handling every aspect of public and private life, in addition of being professionally recognized and legitimated for her appearance.

### **Women in telenovelas**

The receptors were questioned about the role of telenovela in understanding the female condition and if there is an identification between them and the characters. Most of them think that the narratives contribute to reflect on the female condition, but six of them deny the identification with the characters (the elder Cora, the mature Rute and the young women Ísis and Gina) or with upper-class characters (the elders Lia, Liliane and Cora and the young women Ísis and Gina), claiming distance from disapproving motherly conducts, demonstrations of futility or characteristics for the worker class.

Other five – the Elder Soraia, the mature women Roberta, Neusa e Rute and the young woman Lena – identified themselves, respectively, with the emotional balance of Débora (*Avenida Brasil*); her romantic side and her wish to constitute a family; the vanity and good taste/elegance of Tereza Cristina (*Fina Estampa*); characters that evolved economically like Griselda (*Fina Estampa*); the condition of class and “Débora’s romantic personality”. Two interviewees, the mature Marina and the young woman Taís, chose to highlight characters of the popular class: Nina (*Avenida Brasil*) for her determination and sense of justice, and Amália (*Fina Estampa*), for her finesse and elegance. The identification happens with characters that represent the way of life of the upper and middle class and that enjoy economic independence or with the middle

or working class woman that can handle her public and private spheres. When that occurs, they emphasize the proximity regarding gender and highlight the differences in class between them and the characters.

The distinction in the ways of being between classes is reinforced when they are asked to describe the story of the characters in upper and lower classes. Prevail, among the female characters associated to the upper class, those whose position of class comes from family inheritance or the upward mobility created by marriage. Ten informants referred negatively to women that did not have any profession.

They also have a consensus in the evaluation about the elegance of upper-class fictional women, described as “well dressed” and “well groomed”. Despite deeming deviant the character of most of them – Tereza Cristina (Fina Estampa), “Cadinho’s wives” (*Avenida Brasil*) and Carminha (*Avenida Brasil*) –, the way they dress or present themselves socially is legitimated as a reference of the “sophisticated” and “charming” woman. About the school degree of the characters mentioned, half of our interviewees describe them as having a high educational background. The other half told they don’t remember about this information or it wasn’t explicitly presented in the telenovela.

The lack of affectionate bonds of upper-class characters with the family is another reincident point. For eight of them, the characters listed didn’t comply the role they assume to be adequate for a woman in a domestic field: “She isn’t a good mother”, “Selfish” and “Thinks more about herself than her family”.

When requested to report stories of female characters of lower class, we see the predominance of an almost opposed model to the representation of the upper class, summarized by the adjectives “go-getter” and “fighter”. With the exception of the elder Soraia and young Lena, all the other interviewees accentuate the presence of honest and hard-working women that promote in a decent manner their own sustenance as well as their children’s. The perception of our interviewees about the school cultural capital of the referred women is unanimous: such characters had low or no school degree, recognized by the manner of speaking or the “manual” professional activities.

The understanding about the appearance of the female character of lower class is unanimously characterized by sloppiness, vulgarity and bad taste: “Boobs out, big ass, hair down, short dress, beautiful legs. She is not refined” (Liliane, 72, about Dagmar on *Fina Estampa*) “A total skank, wearing top, shiny belt on her belly, tight pants and high heels. She has long hair and wiggles when she walks” (Lena, 20, about Suelen in *Avenida Brasil*) She wears a huge flower in her hair, her clothes are ridiculous!” (Soraia about Márcia on *Amor à Vida*).

The elder informants have a positive notion of the women that embody conservative values, associating them to the insolubility of the marriage, to the ideals of female respectability (purity) and religiosity, with exception of Liliane – due to her Family story, high income combined with a cosmopolitan experience in travels and courses abroad, living with intellectuals and artists during her academic formation. We can observe the generational gap as mature and young women understand conservative characters as being “old fashioned”.

Without distinction of generation, the evaluation of characteristics of the liberal character as being a synonym of modern woman is the one who works and/or have emotional autonomy. Other aspects that characterize the thinking and actions of modern characters is, for most of them, the disapproval to male infidelity. The more conservative interviewees criticize these conducts, but justify them on the belief of “male instinct”.

The initiative in love encounters is a theme that is not very debated. The admission of sexual experience as an issue of desire for both sexes is more common among mature and young women, but young women demonstrate divergence with certain valorization of female chastity in opposition of male freedom. The traces of the patriarchal view appear in defense of the decency of the female character that is desired by men, in the disapproval of the character that desires to have an “open” relationship, in Suelen’s vulgarity, in the vehement disapproval of female infidelity when opposed to male infidelity.

All generations praise economic independence manifested by the modern character, preserving the conservative imaginary of romantic

love in opposition to the confluent love: they oppose sexual freedom to female modesty, a female essence and a male one, especially about the ethics of caring and the search for sexual pleasure. They approve the character that embodies the modern woman, with an emphasis in the dedication of work and family, and reject the futility of a character. The observance of the submission of gender in the stories, which is disapproved, limits itself to the acceptance of marital infidelity or the extreme female subservience to her husband. The sexual conducts of upper-class villains are questioned and had as deviant individual behaviors that are not associated to the standard expected for the elite. In opposition, the sexual practices of lower class characters, considered inappropriate, are seen as attributes of women of a humble origin, just as the sloppiness in the appearance of honest and hard-working women.

Either mentioning characters of drama or referring to family and personal problems, the theme of LGBT rights remains silenced or polarized between disapproval and comments about the discrimination of “gays and lesbians”. Feminism, on the contrary, is strongly rejected as “radical” for most of them.

## Conclusions

Telenovelas offer women of dominant classes the confirmation of an acceptable standard of sexual behavior that involves the moderate sexual experimentation to choose the ideal boyfriend or husband, the endorsement of the bourgeois lifestyle based on elegance; the appraisal of the “modern” woman dedicated to the career and the family which is close to the “go-getter” model of lower classes. It is in this aspect that occurs an identification with characters of lower class, based in the experiences of gender.

The sexist principle of private life as female responsibility is lived in its entirety of the informants, even by those who work outside of home, that still are in charge of chores or the administration of the home with the substantial help of house keepers. The awareness of this type of inequality is soothed by the adoption of the notion of a female nature – caregiver/protector, loving, agile to solve everything at once – seen as

a gift, a special ability. Because of that, the mechanisms of identification with the modern hero in telenovelas operate reinforcing sexism.

The exam of the reception of telenovelas allow the reveal of class struggles in the field of moral values. The opposition between filthy rich villains and hard-working heroes is mitigated by the resource of distance in relation to the futility of class/gender and the identification with “modern” women, either them being workers that had social mobility and dedicate to work and family or those who were born wealthy and embody the ideal of a woman that conquered a place in the job market without giving up on her family and romantic love. The “refined woman” in telenovelas is the mirror of bourgeois respectability, since the absence of moral virtues of the villains are individual pathologies that do not threaten the dominating model of femininity.

Femininity of class means maintaining the traditional values of gender relations envisioned by the romanticism – heterosexuality, protection, idealization of the loved person, female passivity – and living with the benefits of the modern love based on sexual pleasure. The shadow of tradition remains effective and in a visible way in control of sexual conducts and in the preoccupation with respectability, maybe because half of the sample is composed by single women in an age of competing in the marriage market in a medium-sized urban center.

If women in lower classes endorse the bourgeois lifestyle and feel ashamed not to attain it, the symbolic violence to which the dominant class women are submitted consists in managing it and, thus, ensuring its reproduction, weighting the difficulties they found to balance femininity with economic independence and the care with the domestic sphere.<sup>10</sup>

10 The contributions of each author for the development of this article are described below: this investigation partially contemplates the results of the research “Learning to be a ‘classy’ woman with media” (UFSM/CNPq), coordinated by the PhD professor Veneza Mayora Ronsini. For the production of this study, the authors were conjointly involved in the collection, description of data and final writing.

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