The presence of women in school management: gender and power dynamics*[1]

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Abstract

In basic education, school management is mostly female, but there are few studies that problematize the gender dynamics that permeate this position. Therefore, this article seeks to analyze gender and power dynamics in school management in the state education network of Santa Catarina. The survey data was collected from the State Department of Education and by sending a Google Forms questionnaire to principals from the state's 36 Regional Education Coordinating Offices, from which 73 principals responded. The data was categorized and analyzed from the perspective of hermeneutic interpretation. For this study, two categories were analyzed: i) the representativeness of women in management; ii) the challenges of being in school management as a woman. The results show that management in basic education, more than a place of power, is part of the teaching profession, which is expressively female. However, due to the fact that women are in a position of leadership, we identify the presence of gender and power dynamics that reproduce social inequalities between women and men. In other words, they are still absent from the highest decision-making bodies in the education system and when they are in school management, they face the challenge of violent communication and the lack of a fair distribution of domestic tasks in their homes.

Keywords

School management – Women principals – Gender dynamics – Basic education.

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1

Introduction

Throughout history, women have had to fight for equal rights and political participation in different social and professional spaces. In the labor market, over the last two centuries, they have been entering professions whose gender meanings have been constructed as an extension of caregiving work. The places of power or leadership were considered a non-place for women, given the cultural construction that they had a certain "rational inferiority." The achievements for greater equality resulted from processes of cultural change, combined with feminist struggles in favor of equal rights in the social, political, and economic spheres. To do this, it was necessary to break with stereotypes and gender barriers that, historically, limited women's opportunities in participating in the labor market.

Gender inequalities in the professional space were a social construction based on "social arrangements, history, access conditions to society's resources, and forms of social representation" (Louro, 2014, p. 26). Thus, the meanings of gender regarding the masculine and the feminine and the functions that each sex could perform are historical constructions that differ in each society and in distinct historical moments. It is in this logic that the social construction of female teaching occurs and, consequently, the legitimacy of their presence in the management of basic education, as an inherent function of the teaching profession.

Claudia Pereira Vianna (2013) argues that the entry of women into teaching in Elementary Education is linked to the construction of gender meanings, as an extension of the responsibility to care for and educate from the private space to the public space, reproducing the sexual division of labor beyond the private sphere. This phenomenon is linked to the process of industrialization and urbanization that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when men began leaving teaching to enter new professions that became more financially advantageous. Thus, it was necessary to construct new gender meanings so that women could fill the gap that opened in teaching. The narrative was produced that women had a natural vocation for caring for and educating children (Louro, 2014; Vianna, 2013), so that female teaching was considered an extension of private care to the social sphere, legitimizing the process of feminization and precarization of teaching, especially in basic education (Yannoulas, 2011).

In Latin America, the construction of new cultural meanings led nation-states to place in the hands of women the task of reproducing the foundations of the new national identity. Thus, different discourses encouraged women to pursue teaching: a) a political discourse, stating that they were the guardians of citizenship; b) a discourse of scientific management of labor, which considered women as available and cheap labor; c) a pedagogical discourse, which scientifically highlighted women's skills in dealing with children through new pedagogical perspectives of persuasion rather than imposition (Yannoulas, 2011). Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the phenomenon of the feminization of teaching in basic education results from a combination of different social, economic, political, and cultural factors (Louro, 2014).

According to Silvia Yannoulas (2011), teaching in basic education has undergone a process of both feminization, in the sense of the quantitative increase in female participation,

and feminization, which means the transformation of a professional occupation, based on the cultural symbolic meanings of the gender roles reserved for the feminine. That is, in the process of feminization, teaching came to mean the extension of care work from the private sphere to the public sphere.

The process of feminization continues to be significant, especially in early childhood education and the initial years of elementary school. According to data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2021b), "teachers are the majority at all stages of basic education." They correspond to 96.4% of teaching in early childhood education, 88.1% in the early years, and 66.4% in the final years of elementary education, respectively. In high school, 57.8% of the teaching staff is composed of women.

Considering the phenomenon of feminization and feminization in basic education, consequently, school leadership in basic education is predominantly female. In this sense, the data from the 2021 School Census regarding school management, more specifically about the school principals, indicate that the management of basic education, that is, 80.7% are women, and of these, 89.5% have higher education (INEP, 2022).

These numbers approximate the results of the research conducted by the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society, research supported by Unesco[4], according to which, in 2020, the management function in basic education schools had a percentage of 73% women and 27% men. However, the management of women has higher rates in early childhood education and even in the early years of elementary education. When considering the final years of elementary education up to high school and vocational education, they represent 56% to 44% for the male sex (Cetic. br, 2020). This data shows that professional places maintain hierarchical and gendered[5] power relations, that is, more women are placed in management when education is directed towards children because, in a way, a cultural process has been naturalized that women have greater skill for care and in the early stages of school life, children still require more of the feminine care.

It is worth remembering that the term management "comes from the Latin verb *gero*, *gessi*, *gestum*, *gerere* and means: to execute, to exercise, to generate [...] and has its etymological root in *ger* which means to sprout, to germinate, to make born" (Cury, 2002, p. 164-165). That is, it is a space of power to create or execute meaningful actions. The concept of management has changed throughout history, and its broader purpose is framed in terms of "political and economic intentionality" (Thiesen, 2014, p. 197). Thus, the notion of school management[6] is permeated by contextual changes in the historical and political processes of society and materializes according to the spaces in which it is inserted, in a movement focused on education, with a centrality on the learning of its students.

Therefore, considering the existence of few studies that problematize the relationships between gender and power in the management of public schools, the objective of the article

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4- This research aimed to analyze the use of information and communication technologies in Brazilian schools. However, it also conducted a survey of school managers, according to their gender.

5- The term gendered/genderification refers to behaviors, interests, or cultural values typically considered masculine or feminine, whose characteristics are neither innate nor arbitrary, but realities constructed by historical and cultural circumstances that, therefore, can change with the historical-cultural process (Furlin, 2021).

6- In this study, when we use the term school management, we are specifically referring to the function of school leadership.

is to analyze the dynamics of gender and power in the school management of the state education network of Santa Catarina. This is an excerpt from a master's thesis, and for this article, we prioritized analyzing data grouped into two categories: i) the representation of women in management; ii) the challenges of being in school leadership as a woman. It is worth noting that in this excerpt we did not include categories that point to the processes of producing new meanings that women construct by being in school leadership[7].

Research methodology

This study is based on a qualitative approach and, according to Maria Cecília Minayo (2016, p. 20), "qualitative research answers very particular questions" as it deals with meanings, motivations, values, beliefs, experiences, cultures, and customs that are characteristic of specific groups of people. In this study, the group addressed consists of women who are in school leadership positions in basic education, aiming to understand the dynamics of gender relations in this space, based on reports of experiences and beliefs regarding the exercise of the role. It is an analytical exploratory research, and according to Antônio Carlos Gil (2021), this type of research helps to provide an overview or approximate understanding of a certain fact or a little-explored theme. In this sense, this study seeks to explore the indices of female and male participation in school management, analyzing the gender and power dynamics that permeate the representation of women in the leadership of public schools and the challenges that women face in such a role.

For the production of the empirical material, two movements were carried out. The first was the sending of an email to the State Department of Education, requesting information to build a framework of evidence regarding the number of women and men who held the position of director and advisors in the basic education schools of the state network of Santa Catarina in the year 2022. The second movement was the preparation of a questionnaire online in Google Forms, being sent via email and/or through the WhatsApp of the Regional Education Coordinators[8], requesting that it be forwarded to at least two directors from each Regional Education Coordination (CRE)[9]. The questionnaire included open and closed questions, focusing on the objectives set for the research

For some regions, it was necessary to send the link of the questionnaire form more than once for it to be forwarded to the school administration[10]. We received the return of 73 questionnaires, which constituted a sufficient sample to highlight the challenges that women experience in school leadership within the state education network of Santa Catarina, and their perception of their role in this space of "power"[11].

For analysis purposes, the collected data was grouped into thematic categories, combining information resulting from closed-ended questions with the directors' accounts

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[7]- About this, see Dal Maso (2023).

[8]- This was possible because one of the researchers, during the field research in 2022, held the position of Regional Education Coordinator and had the electronic and WhatsApp contacts of her peers.

[9]- Until then, the State of Santa Catarina had 36 Regional Education Coordinators (CRE).

[10]- In these situations, it was explained about the importance of research and that the participants would not be identified, according to the principles of research ethics. In view of this, they were named by the word "Director," followed by an Arabic number, in ascending order.

[11]- It is worth noting that the research was approved by the university's Ethics Committee, by opinion no. 5,786,397

on the subject, obtained from open-ended questions. The comprehensive analysis was conducted from the perspective of hermeneutic interpretation, according to the concepts of Minayo (2014). For this author, "understanding implies the possibility of interpreting, establishing relationships, and drawing conclusions in all directions." The approach materializes "in historical understanding to the extent that the concrete connections of customs and traditions and the corresponding possibilities of their future become operative there" (Minayo, 2014, p. 337). This interpretative understanding was carried out in light of the theoretical assumptions of gender studies, in the conceptions that involve power relations, which allow for the denaturalization and problematization of gender social relations and point to new possibilities in favor of social justice.

We believe that analyzing gender dynamics and the challenges that permeate school management when women take on leadership roles in educational units is a way to highlight the advances and gaps in gender equality in positions of power. We aim, therefore, for the research results to contribute to the construction of strategic actions in favor of an egalitarian culture and, consequently, improve management and humanitarian development processes in the educational space.

Theoretical anchoring: gender and power in school management

In feminist theory, the concept of gender has become a tool for understanding social reality. According to historian Joan Scott (2019), gender relations are intertwined with power relations, which create hierarchies and structure social institutions. Gender is understood as a historical, cultural, relational, and dynamic construction of masculinity and femininity, whose social representations, throughout history, have naturalized social roles for the different sexes.

Thus, the school institution, as a place of socialization, is permeated by beliefs, values, and norms, also regarding gender issues, and this ends up establishing and/or standardizing social roles that can be exercised by men and women. According to sociologist Michael Kimmel (2022, p. 134), institutions are marked by gender, as they "create normative gender patterns, express an institutional logic according to a specific gender, and are an important factor in the reproduction of inequalities." Thus, people of a certain gender occupy positions marked by gender, so it becomes important to observe in the institutional dimension the adjustments and readjustments when these structures are questioned by subjects who can break through gender demarcated boundaries. Saying that there is gender neutrality in the structures only obscures the underlying structure that is marked by gender, favoring the continuation of practices that reproduce such structures "even when efforts to reduce gender inequalities are also underway" (Kimmel, 2022, p. 139).

In this regard, in Scott (2019), one of the elements that constitutes gender relations is related to the notion of politics that refers to institutions and social organization, so that the discourses and established norms can produce the permanence of the binary representation of gender and the places that each sex should occupy. Such structures naturalize social functions for men and women based on cultural stereotypes imposed by society regarding gender relations.

Thus, the role of management in the school space involves power and gender relations, and in this position, both men and women carry their ideologies, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences regarding gender relations that, in general, tend to overvalue masculine values. Scott (2019) has stated that gender relations are permeated by power relations. The author bases this proposition on Foucault's definition of power, according to which power is not situated or fixed in state or legal structures, but circulates within the networks of human relations. In other words, "power disseminates in social structures, operates and is exercised in a network, in all directions, including from bottom to top." In the meshes of this network, individuals not only circulate, because they can both exercise power or suffer its action" (Foucault, 2004, p. 193). It is a power that crosses discourses, knowledge, norms, and social practices that produces effects on the materiality of social life.

This theoretical contribution regarding power has been appropriated by feminist theories, as it becomes fruitful for analyzing the phenomenon of power at the microsocial level, which is where gender social relations are inscribed. Thus, this conception seems to be fruitful also when analyzing the exercise of management in educational institutions, especially in basic education, places increasingly occupied by women, given the phenomenon of the feminization of education.

According to Corrêa (2010, p. 43), in the school community "power relations happen all the time among the people who interact there." That is, it is in the various forms of relationship, being an energy that energizes social processes, which manifests dialectically and continuously. On the other hand, it is also in the exercise of school management that certain political actions are imposed, which need to follow guidelines determined by the educational system of a country. Such determinations are reproduced in the school routine, finding various ways to be realized, often as a means of reproducing state and/or market interests, placing humanizing and democratic relationships in the background.

In the context of studies on school management, Oliveira (2019) states that this theme has been little problematized from the gender debate. According to the author, female directors perform their work amidst "tensions, contradictions, and multiple forms of articulation that relate to the masculinities and femininities of each subject, as well as to the expectations and pressures exerted by the other actors that make up the school" (Oliveira, 2019, p. 109).

According to Oliveira (2019), women in school leadership face, more intensely, challenges, such as balancing relational dimensions, as they also encounter issues of machismo and inequalities that are established in the school between men and women.

In a historically androcentric social order, where masculine values have been overvalued, hierarchizing social relations in the labor market according to the individual's sex, the conditions faced by women are always much more difficult. In this sense, according to Kimmel (2022), women, when seeking to achieve equality in the workplace, need to face a double demand:

> On one hand, traditional gender ideologies prevent them from occupying well-paying positions; they are pushed into the sectors of the economy that pay less. On the other hand, when they

Educ. Pesqui., São Paulo, v. 51, e282406, 2025.

6

manage to enter these better-paying areas, they are prevented from progressing. This phenomenon is known as "glass ceiling." (Kimmel, 2022, p. 296).

For the author, such a situation is experienced by women in any work sector. It is about situations of discrimination against women for not having equality equivalent to that of men, which causes them to face the "twin barriers"[12] of the "glass ceiling" and the "sticky floor"[13], "which combine to keep them on the ground floor and unable to reach the top" (Kimmel, 2022, p. 296).

The metaphors used by Kimmel (2022) corroborate the study by Corrêa (2010), which describes the "glass ceiling" as invisible barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing, rising, and improving their positions in higher scales in the sectors in which they operate, preventing them from being promoted on equal terms with men.

These power relations, which privileged the masculine in terms of leadership in more valued executive positions, are historical constructions based on gender stereotypes. In this way, if they are social constructions, relationships can be modified, being subject to deconstruction, in a cultural dynamic that needs to be jointly embraced by women and men involved in social processes. In this direction, practices in school management can produce new meanings, new logics of action that need to be signaled by the organizational literature on management and gender (Kimmel, 2022). This is because gender relations, while power relations (Scott, 2019), are not only static and unchangeable relations of domination, but complex, dynamic, and unpredictable relations (Foucault, 2004).

Based on these theoretical concepts, we will analyze the gender dynamics that permeate management in schools of the state network of Santa Catarina. It is worth noting that the theoretical-methodological assumptions that arise from feminist theories, such as the analytical category of gender, present a critical perspective that allows for thinking about processes of change in relationships in favor of gender social justice.

Gender and power dynamics in the management of the state network of basic education

As we mentioned, in this study we are analyzing the gender dynamics that permeate the role of school leadership. Thus, we first present data on the indices of the representation of women and men in the role of school management/leadership, establishing a relationship with the female representation in the Department of Education of Santa Catarina and in the Ministry of Education, which are positions with greater autonomy in the exercise of decision-making power in the field of education. In a second moment, based on the information obtained from the questionnaire feedback, we analyze the challenges that women face when leading a public school.

12- The author mentions that women face the twin barriers of the glass ceiling, which "consists of artificial barriers based on organizational or behavioral biases that prevent qualified individuals from advancing and climbing the career ladder within the management positions of their company" (Kimmel, 2022, p. 296).

13- The "sticky floor" is a metaphor to explain the retention of women in low-paying jobs with no opportunities to rise to prominent positions, with salary promotions.

Educ. Pesqui., São Paulo, v. 51, e282406, 2025.

7

Representation of women in school management

According to data from the State Department of Education (SED) and the Educational Management System of Santa Catarina (Sisgesc)[14], related to the year 2022, the state education network of Santa Catarina had 1,054 active schools, with 521,115 students and about 30 thousand teachers. Each school unit has a principal in charge. As of the time of this research, the school principal was chosen through an election process of the school management plan, approved by the school community[15].

The data from this research includes 1,042 schools, given that, at the beginning of the year 2022, at the time of data collection, for unknown reasons, the position of school principal was vacant in twelve schools. In this case, until the appointment of a director pro tempore, the school is under the responsibility of an Education Assistant or Technical-Pedagogical Assistant or a teacher who is part of the school's staff.

Table 1 highlights the percentages of women and men in the roles of school management and management advisor in the year 2022 in the State of Santa Catarina.

Table 1 – Number of Directors and School Advisors of the State Network of SC

School Direction			Directors' Assistants		
Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
1,042	741	301	1,081	803	278
100%	71%	29%	100%	74%	26%

Source: Preparation by the authors, based on the consultation of the Computerized Human Resources Management System of Santa Catarina in 2022.

It is possible to verify that the role of school leadership held by women represents 71%, while men account for 21%. This also occurs in the role of executive assistant, where women represent 74%. These data are close to the 2021 School Census regarding school management, which indicated a process of feminization in basic education management, as women represented 80.7% (INEP, 2022), that is, it reflects their massive presence in basic education.

These data also approach the results of the International Survey on Teaching and Learning (Talis)[16], conducted in 2013, by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), coordinated in Brazil by INEP. At the time, the Talis research revealed that women in Brazil represent 71% of the teaching profession, while in other countries they reached 68%. As for the management position, while in Brazil they represent 75%, in other countries this percentage was 49%. This shows that in other countries the management is more male-dominated, whose data may have a direct relationship with cultural and contextual meanings.

14- Consultation in November 2022.

15- They are part of the school community: parents/guardians of enrolled students, teachers, administrative and pedagogical technical staff, and students enrolled in the final years of elementary and high school at the school unit.

16- The research was conducted in 34 countries and involved the participation of 106 thousand teachers. In Brazil, 14,291 teachers and 1,057 principals from 1,070 schools participated in the survey (INEP, 2013).

The majority presence of women in the management of basic education does not always mean that they are conquering spaces of power, but rather an extension of the teaching profession, since women are much more represented in basic education[17]. It is also necessary to consider the process of feminization, in the qualitative sense proposed by Yannoulas (2011), whose professional occupation is permeated by cultural symbolic meanings of gender roles reserved for the female universe, a place where the professional career is little valued. Thus, taking on the role of manager in basic education, more than a place of power and prestige, ends up being part of the process that involves the teaching profession.

On the other hand, when we look at the representation of women in the highest positions of education management, where power is actually exercised, in terms of political decisions regarding the educational system, we find that women are practically absent, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Number of Ministers of Education in Brazil and Number of Secretaries of Education in SC

	Ministers of Education (Years 1930 to 2023)			Secretaries of Education SC (Years 1937 to 2023)		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Quantity	72	1	71	50	4	46
Percentage	100%	1.3%	98.7%	100%	8%	92%

Source: MEC/Brazil gallery of Ministers; SED/SC and Civil House.

It is possible to verify that, in the Ministry of Education (MEC), the space of greater power in education management, women have practically been absent. In this place, between the years 1930 and 2023, history records that only one woman was Minister of Education, Esther de Figueiredo Ferraz[18], during the period from August 24, 1982, to March 15, 1985, when João Figueiredo was President of the Republic. Despite all the challenges she may have faced for being the first woman in this position of power, still in the 1980s, this achievement is also an expression of the recognition of a significant career in the field of education, as she had already served as the Secretary of Education of São Paulo (1971 to August 1973), and as a councilor of the Federal Council of Education (1970 to May 1982). Moreover, she had been the first female faculty member in the Law course at the University of São Paulo, in the subject of Criminal Law, in 1949[19] (Brasil, 2023), which shows that she was a woman breaking gender barriers in places historically considered masculine, whose struggle was certainly marked by great challenges, considering that this was in the last century.

The absence of women in the MEC highlights that this place is culturally gendered and decisions about educational policies have a gender. This, consequently, operates in

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17 - According to data from the MEC (INEP, 2021a), women accounted for 88.1% in the initial years and 66.4% in the final years of primary school. In secondary education, they accounted for 57.8% of the teaching staff.

18- Esther de Figueiredo Ferraz was born in São Paulo on February 6, 1915. She studied law and philosophy, was a secondary school teacher of Portuguese, French, Latin and mathematics; she taught in several primary and secondary schools.

19- In 1961, she was a professor of Criminal Judicial Law at the Law School of Mackenzie University.

a symbolic sense, as it ends up legitimizing a society based on hierarchies and social inequalities (Meyer, 2003).

As for the role of Secretary of Education of Santa Catarina, between 1937 and 2023, it was held by 46 men and only four women, which represents a percentage of 8%. The first was Eliane Neves Rebello, who served for one year (1998-1999) and the second was Miriam Schlickmann, the only one who remained in the position for four years (1999-2003). It is worth noting that they appear in this space of power precisely in the decade when women begin to have a greater role in spaces historically considered masculine, which shows that this was also made possible by the processes of cultural transformation, mobilized by feminist struggles.

The third to assume the position of Secretary of State was Elisabete Nunes Anderle, who also remained in power for only one year (2006-2007) and the fourth was Simone Schramm, who was in charge of the Secretary of State for a few months during the year 2018[20].

In summary, this data shows that only one woman took on management in a four-year period, which highlights the persistence of the hierarchization of power that privileges the masculine in social structures and institutions, since gender is one of the forms of power organization, based on the political perspective that refers to social institutions and forms of social organization (Scott, 2019). The data presented also refers us to Kimmel (2022), as according to this author, institutions are marked by gender, since they create normative gender patterns that reproduce inequalities.

Considering the massive presence of women in the management of Basic Education in the state education network of Santa Catarina (71%) and the reduced presence in the highest management positions in Education in the State (8%), it becomes evident how structures have gender and reproduce social hierarchies that privilege the male subject as the holder of rationality and, consequently, the one who has leadership power. The management of Basic Education is often seen as an inherent function of teaching, associated with the extension of women's work in educating and caring, which is undervalued in financial terms. While decision-making power positions are occupied by men, women, for the most part, exercise power at the local level, in schools, places where they will implement the decisions that come from the larger and predominantly male instances. This cultural process can be associated with the sexual division of labor which, according to Helena Hirata and Danièle Kergoat (2007), is historically and socially modulated, based on gender norms that permeate social institutions, creating power hierarchies, as Scott (2019) has stated.

Undoubtedly, the data we present reveal the prevalence of a sexist culture permeated by power relations that privilege the male subject in the most important instances of power in the field of education. According to Corrêa (2010), this stems from the male worldview, according to which it is believed that men are more competent, more capable of exercising power, and therefore more suited to lead. In this way, we corroborate Kimmel's (2022) ideas that there is no gender neutrality in structures, even when there may be an effort to reduce gender inequalities.

20- As it was an election year, she supposedly filled the vacancy of her predecessor, who left to run for legislative office in the political elections.

The data presented also allows us to confirm that the "glass ceiling" phenomenon is present in the educational context, because although women are the majority in school management, the highest positions are occupied by men. There are dynamics or artificial gender barriers that prevent women from advancing and occupying spaces of greater decision-making power, even if they are qualified by their experience and professional training.

Such reality highlights the urgency of overcoming the sexism that permeates social structures and hierarchizes gender social roles for men and women, considering the education and professional competence of a person for a specific role. This would be a way to break the "glass ceiling" of various organizations and, especially, in the educational system, as Corrêa (2010) rightly observes.

Challenges in the exercise of school leadership

Feminist studies have shown that the history experienced by women in society has culturally imposed limits and challenges that needed to be overcome, especially when they begin to occupy public space, taking on roles that were previously unintelligible to them. Society has always been governed by norms and values that have gendered and hierarchized social spaces, culturally constructing appropriate or inappropriate roles for men and women (Scott, 2019), so that this cultural imaginary continues to interfere in professional work.

Thus, these power and gender relations continue to materialize in different social institutions, such as in the school or domestic space. In this direction, when we ask the directors about the challenges or difficulties they faced while being in charge of a school, being a woman[21], it is striking that the greatest incidences appear in two points, as observed in the following chart.

Chart 1 – Challenges and difficulties that women face in school leadership

Challenges/difficulties	Quantity
Balancing household work with professional duties	33
Violent communication by some segment of the school community	14
Others (Racism, Lack of autonomy in decision-making, prejudice, bureaucracy, etc.)	8
Non-acceptance of male teachers	5
Non-acceptance of female teachers	5
Moral Harassment	4
Insecurity in nighttime school attendance	3
Non-acceptance by parents of students	2
Sexual Harassment	2

Source: Development of the authors based on the data from the field research (2022).

21- For this question, women were invited to mark the alternatives that best represented their situation

Educ. Pesqui., São Paulo, v. 51, e282406, 2025.

11

According to Chart 1, reconciling domestic work with professional functions had 33 occurrences, which represents a percentage of 45.2% of the research participants. This shows that in the cultural imagination, domestic work continues to be assigned to women and, often, they assimilate this cultural reality. Thus, when having to reconcile household tasks and professional work in managing a school, they end up working double or triple shifts, because, in addition to being directors, many are mothers and wives, roles that require additional activities. In this scenario, gender dynamics, which constitute social relations, still require women to "reconcile" between professional careers and family.

According to Hirata and Kergoat (2007), the idea of reconciliation has a strongly gendered content, as "reconciling" work and family appears as a responsibility attributed to women and not to men, since for men, the career is always thought of in a more independent way. Undoubtedly, this sets up unequal gender relations and these directors, by reconciling domestic work with professional functions, are highlighting a social reality that is not only theirs but also impacts the lives of other women. If entering the job market was seen as an achievement for the female universe, to what extent can this represent social emancipation, as long as there is no fair distribution of domestic work?

Considering that one of the challenges, pointed out by a representative group of female directors, is to reconcile domestic work with professional functions, the chart below highlights how they harmonize the domestic world with the role of school manager[22].

Chart 2 – The reconciliation between domestic services/care and the role in school management

Profession X Domestic and Care	Incidences
I do housework during my free time and on weekends.	54
I am also the main person responsible for the household chores.	22
I hire someone for domestic services	21
In addition to domestic and professional work, I take care of children up to twelve years old.	21
I partially collaborate with domestic activities/services	15
I only make my time available for the School Administration	1

Source: Development of the authors based on the data from the field research (2022).

As observed, 54 incidents indicate that a significant number of women directors do domestic work during their free time and weekends. The overload becomes greater when these women have children under twelve years old and need to cope with the demands that come from motherhood, as pointed out by 21 women. Chart 2 also shows that, although some hire third parties, delegating domestic work, they are generally the main responsible for these activities, which means that when they do not perform such work, it is up to them to manage it. There were few instances of those who claim that they only collaborate with domestic activities, which one might think that they certainly rely on the

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22 - For this question, women marked the alternatives that best represent their situation.

participation of other family members. It is impressive that only one director indicated having full release for professional activity.

In an unequal society, when generally male teachers or even education managers can focus on their professional careers, women need to be "bionic," submitting themselves to a double or triple work shift, because the "sociocultural gender dynamics make them believe that they need to reconcile everything in order to continue exercising the profession they love" (Furlin, 2019, p. 286). In this sense, the report from Director 15 illustrates well the challenge that women face in reconciling professional life with domestic work:

> I don't have a maid, and I work a lot. I don't stop working, I always say that I stop working when I go to sleep. So, here I am, my head is here, but when I get home, even after five hours of work, the messages from the Regional Education Coordination come after hours. I do my things and then when I go to bed I read the messages. So, this is how it has to be done; I leave the food prepared. I have both children living with me now, and on weekends I work straight through, because during the week I get home late and in the winter it's already night, it's a struggle, sometimes I think. (Director 15).

The report shows the overload of activities imposed on women when the idea that they need to balance everything and still be good professionals is naturalized. Cristina Bruschini (2000) had already pointed out that the new responsibilities of women did not exempt them from family and maternal activities. On the contrary, regardless of their work situation, they still remain responsible for multiple tasks associated with the house, children, and family, performing what is referred to as "domestic work." It is possible to infer that this framework indicates that gender equality and equity in social relations in the public space is only possible when there is a transformation of gender relations in the domestic space. These women, even though they share a cultural imaginary that assigns distinct roles to men and women based on the biological reading of bodies, they are also telling stories of unequal structures, stories of what the daily life of thousands of women working in the professional field is like, whose reality needs to be problematized in light of gender social justice.

It is worth remembering that the attributions and meanings of gender are understood in culture (Furlin, 2021), which is why they can be deconstructed through a process of denaturalization of models and normative patterns that permeate the social and cultural structures and that, historically, placed women in a disadvantaged position, while gender subjects (Gomes; Renner; Meyer, 2023).

A second challenge that women face when they hold the position of school principal is the "violent communication from some segment of the school community", which appears with 14 incidences, as observed in Chart 1. Violent communication can be a reaction to social gender changes, which allowed women to occupy leadership positions, a matter that does not seem to be shared with all members of the school community, as evidenced in the report of Director 9:

[...] until this year [2023] it happened that a student's father said this: "Are you the director?" Yes, it's me the director. Are you the only one as the director? Isn't there any man for me to talk to man to man? I said: No, there isn't. You will have to talk to me, I can be the man of the school, if that's what you want. (Director 9).

The report from Director 9, in a way, indicates that in the sociocultural imagination of some parents, leadership is still marked by gender, because in social representation, the exercise of power has historically been a male attribute. However, by positioning herself as needing to be heard because the leadership role was occupied by a woman, Director 9 resists the gender standards reproduced in social imaginaries, asserting her legitimacy, since this position was earned through her professionalism and competence, legitimized by an election process. Your positioning is that of a reflective subject who questions androcentric power and enables the constitution of the subjectivity of a female director in resistance to sociocultural norms (Furlin, 2012). We can interpret this attitude as an ethical and political resistance, in the Foucaultian sense.

It is, then, about constituting and recognizing oneself as the subject of one's own actions, not through a system of signs marking power over others, but through a relationship as independent as possible from the status and its external forces, since it is realized in the sovereignty exercised over oneself. (Foucault, 2007, p. 92).

By resisting normative standards, the positioning also operates symbolically for the deconstruction of gender representations that prevail in the structures of society.

The report from Director 9 is similar to statements found in the study by Oliveira (2019, p. 73), when one of the interviewees reported, "[...] some parents 'want to crow' because the school principal is a woman." This shows that women always need to resist in the face of the persistence of gender and power dynamics that still associate leadership, in social institutions, as a place for the male subject. In this sense, the report from Director 4 seems to be illustrative:

I say frankly that in these four years at the head of the school, I have gone through some very difficult situations, I have faced the husbands of teachers who came to threaten me inside the school, and I have always faced and continue to face it with my head held high. For this research, I want to confide that I even experienced this situation of machismo and disregard for my role as a director in 2019, the year I took over the direction, with a colleague who at the time was a Coordinator in another Regional Education Coordination to which we belonged.

This account, even if it seems to be a specific issue, allows us to visualize the persistence of micro-gender and power relations that constitute social relations, as Scott (2019) has rightly stated. Women not only exercise power through the positions they occupy, but they themselves also suffer the action of power (Foucault, 2004), in this case, from the normative discourses that permeate the structures of social relations, which still privilege certain attributes and values of the male norm.

They exert power because their presence in these microspaces of leadership is a form of resistance to gender norms, destabilizing social conventions. By having to "face head-on" the challenges imposed in the role, Director 4 also produces new meanings of gender, that is, that women have the capacity for power and leadership. The account of this director also highlights that she, like so many other women, has a reflective awareness that the challenges they face result from a patriarchal institutional structure that privileges the male subject and, consequently, disqualifies women. Thus, overcoming such challenges in the exercise of school management, can produce new meanings, new action logics that destabilize the gender structures of social institutions (Kimmel, 2022).

We observed that, in Chart 1, there were few incidences regarding other challenges, such as the non-acceptance of female leadership by male teachers, the existence of situations of moral and/or sexual harassment. However, this signals that, in school culture, there are still situations of sexism that can disqualify female leadership.

The issues highlighted here, in a way, align with the theoretical conceptions of Kimmel (2022), according to which institutions are marked by gender, where specific normative patterns are created and, when women occupy certain gender-marked positions, they still need to resist and assert themselves to break through the gender-defined boundaries, as can be read in the account of the Director 36: "[...] we are still very much pressured, having to work harder to prove our capability in the face of challenges and demonstrate that we have a firm grip to deliver results, make our ideas count, and thus be accepted and respected and show that we can perform the role."

This report from Director 36 takes a collective perspective, pointing out that social structures are still androcentric, imposing greater demands on women in leadership roles, requiring from them a greater investment of energy and resilience to "show that they can hold the position." And this investment, even if burdensome to women, ends up being a political strategy to force processes of cultural change.

On the other hand, such a report shows that, although basic education has undergone a process of feminization, in a qualitative sense, as pointed out by Yannoulas (2011), the place of leadership is still gendered in the masculine. In this sense, studies conducted from the perspectives of feminist and gender theories have shown that women, when occupying public spaces historically considered masculine, need to overcome challenges and barriers to find professional legitimacy (Furlin, 2021).

The exercise of leadership, even at the local level, as is the case with the role of school management which, in the State of Santa Catarina, is predominantly represented by the female presence, remains marked by the masculine norm, whose issue appears in the account of the Principal 1: "Credit is always greater for men." This director can be talking about her experience on the school floor as well as something that is culturally shared.

Finally, the reports about the challenges that female directors experience while performing management roles, whether due to facing situations that manifest in violent communication or because they need to balance their profession with domestic activities, undertaking double or even triple work shifts, point to a reality of inequality in gender relations. Women are reporting facts about their experiences in school management, which signal gender dynamics that are not always so visible. Your reports indicate that

Educ. Pesqui., São Paulo, v. 51, e282406, 2025.

15

the fact that women are a significant majority in school management does not yet mean that there is gender equality and justice, especially when they perform certain roles, such as in leadership.

Final considerations

The objective of this article was to analyze the dynamics of gender and power in school management within the state education system of the State of Santa Catarina. To this end, we prioritize two empirical categories of analysis, namely, the representation of women in management and the challenges they face when taking on school leadership.

Based on the data collected, it is possible to affirm that in the instances of greater power over the decisions of the educational system, women are practically absent. On the other hand, in the school direction of basic education in Santa Catarina, they represent 71%, whose rates are close to those of the 2021 School Census, in which women accounted for 80.7% of the percentage of teachers managing basic education.

These data show that the greater representation of women in school management in basic education directly reflects the phenomenon of the feminization of teaching and can be considered an inherent function of the teaching profession. Your almost absence in the higher echelons of power reveals that the hierarchical structure in the educational field is permeated by sociocultural gender conventions, so that for them there is a "glass ceiling" that prevents them from assuming positions of greater power in the field of educational management. Thus, taking on the school leadership, which is a place of local power associated with teaching, where educational policies are implemented, does not seem to destabilize the power hierarchies, since the major decisions occur in higher instances that are marked by gender, that is, they remain masculine, as is the case with the State Department of Education and the Ministry of Education. From this perspective, some of the research participants considered that school leadership is not a "space of power," but of work, care, and dedication, which confirms that leadership at the local level is one of the activities of teaching work.

When analyzing the challenges that school unit directors face in exercising their role, based on data obtained from the questionnaire, which involved the participation of 73 directors, it was possible to identify that, in the social imagination of people who are part of the school community, there is a persistence of stereotypes that leadership is still a role associated with masculinity, since women's decisions are not always accepted by their male peers, because there is still a lack of recognition of female leadership. At other times, these dynamics are expressed through the materialization of violent communication, which some directors have experienced in the exercise of their function. However, in the face of such imaginary and violent practices, it is possible to identify, in the reports of the directors, that they are aware of the persistence of machismo that permeates cultural imaginaries and social structures, so they need to produce reflective strategies of resistance, such as asserting their right to speak and act and putting "to the test their capacity" to legitimize their leadership and professionalism, as an ethical-political positioning of a subject who has the right to exercise leadership. As much as

your presence in school leadership is a direct consequence of the feminization of teaching, it also symbolically operates to destabilize social gender conventions that associate leadership with a masculine role.

The study also exposes another challenge for women who are managing a school, a problem that has been pointed out by other feminist studies that interface between gender, work, and care, which is the fact that they continue to be the main responsible for domestic and care work. This shows that the cultural dynamics of gender that constitute social relations continue to require women to reconcile their profession and work in the reproductive sphere, so that they end up taking on dual or even triple work shifts. The "reconcile" work and family continues to be a responsibility attributed to women and not to men, since for them the career is always thought of in a more independent way. This points to a reality of inequality in gender relations in the professional field, which impacts not only public school principals but many other professional women. Thus, as long as there are no cultural changes regarding a fair distribution of domestic work, it cannot be said that women's participation in the labor market represents a process of social emancipation.

Ultimately, we believe that highlighting the dynamics of gender and power that permeate the exercise of school leadership is important for building more humane and just social relations. In this way, conducting research from the perspective of gender studies is essential to deconstruct social and cultural processes and to advance in the construction of equitable relationships.

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