Gender relations in the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context: a study with female drivers of urban mobility apps

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Abstract

This study analyzed how gender relations and the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context are perceived by female drivers of urban mobility apps in their professional performance and work environment. Using a qualitative-descriptive and interpretative approach, interviews were conducted with 11 women working as drivers of transport apps in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed considering Scott's gender conception (1995), the theoretical assumptions of male domination and symbolic violence by Bourdieu (2002), and the perception of women as subjects of transformation in the social and cultural field by Touraine (2007). The results showed an incipient movement of social and cultural acceptance perceived by the interviewees in their performance as drivers, mainly caused by a scenario of economic crisis and unemployment, but also as a consequence of female empowerment in a system where they do not recognize themselves as victims of an oppressive, persistent, and dominant patriarchal structure, but as transforming subjects of their own reality.

Keywords: Gender. Work. Female drivers.

As relações de gênero no contexto socioeconômico e cultural brasileiro: estudo com mulheres motoristas de a plicativos de mobilidade urbana

Resumo

Este estudo teve por objetivo analisar como as relações de gênero e o contexto socioeconômico e cultural brasileiro são percebidos por mulheres motoristas de aplicativos de mobilidade urbana em sua atuação profissional e no ambiente de trabalho. A metodologia adotada para o desenvolvimento desta pesquisa foi uma abordagem qualitativa-descritiva e interpretativa, tendo sido entrevistadas 11 mulheres atuantes como motoristas de aplicativos de transporte na região metropolitana de Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Os dados obtidos a partir das entrevistas com roteiro semiestruturado foram analisados considerando a concepção de gênero de Scott (1995), os pressupostos teóricos de dominação masculina e de violência simbólica de Bourdieu (2002) e a percepção da mulher como sujeito de transformação do campo social e cultural de Touraine (2007). Ao final do estudo, constatou-se um movimento incipiente de aceitação social e cultural percebido pelas entrevistadas em sua atuação como motoristas, impulsionado principalmente por um cenário de crise econômica e de desemprego, mas também como consequência do empoderamento da mulher que, não se reconhecendo vítima de uma estrutura patriarcal opressora, persistente e dominante, se percebe sujeito transformador de sua própria realidade.

Palavras-chave: Gênero. Trabalho. Mulheres motoristas.

Relaciones de género en el contexto socioeconómico y cultural brasileño: un estudio con mujeres conductoras de aplicaciones de movilidad urbana

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo por objeto analizar cómo las mujeres conductoras de aplicaciones de movilidad urbana perciben las relaciones de género y el contexto socioeconómico y cultural brasileño en su actuación profesional y ambiente laboral. La metodología que se adoptó para el desarrollo de esta investigación fue un enfoque cualitativo, descriptivo e interpretativo. Se entrevistó a 11 mujeres que actúan como conductoras de aplicaciones de transporte en la zona metropolitana de Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Los datos obtenidos en las entrevistas con guion semiestructurado se analizaron bajo la concepción de género de Scott (1995), de las premisas teóricas de dominación masculina y de violencia simbólica de Bourdieu (2002) y de la percepción de la mujer como sujeto de transformación del campo social y cultural de Touraine (2007). Al término del estudio, se pudo constatar un incipiente movimiento de aceptación social y cultural percibido por las entrevistadas en su actuación como conductoras, potenciado principalmente por un escenario de crisis económica y de desempleo, y también como consecuencia del empoderamiento de la mujer que, al no reconocerse como víctima de una estructura patriarcal opresora, persistente y dominante, se percibe como sujeto transformador de su propia realidad.

Palabras clave: Género. Trabajo. Mujeres conductoras.

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INTRODUCTION

Studies on gender relations and their inequalities cannot be understood if we disregard historical, cultural, social, economic, and political aspects. A broad vision is necessary, which not only encompasses the kinship system, but also the labor market, education, the political system, and the power relations that involve men and women (Louro, 2008; Scott, 1995; Silva, 2016).

Gender, perceived as an analytical category constituent of power relations and social and cultural constructions based on biological differences, allows a better understanding of hierarchical normative structures (Bogéa, 2017; Siqueira, 2016). Gender analysis also refers to structuring the world of work, supporting the development of social institutions, where the role that men and women play is delimited. In this perspective, task division is understood as a social construct, reflecting more a cultural definition than the biological needs themselves. The influence of society, culture, religion, family, politics, and ethnicity is also noticed in female and male behaviors at the workplace (Pinto, Nunes & Fazenda, 2014).

Therefore, the inequalities and difficulties suffered by women in the labor market, and the submission to a double shift (domestic work and paid work) result in accepting informal and precarious activities, and in exercising professions considered feminine, according to cultural stereotypes (Abramo, 2016). Thus, women's choice of professions still marked by typically male characteristics, such as driver (Beigi, Nayyeri & Shirmohammadi, 2020; Scheller, 2009), has led to discussions and questionings on the configurations of work organization (Fontana & Costa, 2016).

In Brazil, the driver profession, previously associated with taxi, bus, and truck drivers, among others, has completely changed after the emergence of urban mobility applications. The idea of this business model appeared in 2009, in San Francisco, United States, with the creation of the company Uber.

Established in Brazil only in May 2014, the business model consists of making available, through an online platform, a private transportation service, with easy access and low prices, allowing anyone who registers on the platform to be a professional driver. Its differential stems from the ease of joining, flexible schedules, and the possibility of financial gains. Thus, it became attractive to men and women who are not part of the traditional labor market (Codagnone, Abadie & Biagi, 2016; Franco & Ferraz, 2019; Zanatta, De Paula & Kira, 2017), who were directly affected by the Brazilian economic crisis, or those seeking to complement their income (Peticca-Harris, Degama & Ravishankar, 2018; Valente, Patrus & Guimarães, 2019). Its rapid acceptance and expansion resulted in the creation of other similar companies (99POP, Cabify, Venuxx, Cruzeiro Go, Mobbi, Uai Move), and in deep economic and social changes.

Thus, by restructuring the concept of displacement, transport applications also fostered the growth of the profession and a redefinition of the driver's figure, strongly associated to the male gender (Beigi et al., 2020; Nogueira & Castelhano, 2012; Scheller, 2009), but in the process of feminization and adjustment to gender roles (Fallavena, 2017). However, this Brazilian work environment is still dominated by the male figure, since only 6% of the 600 thousand registered drivers are women (Uber, 2020). One of the factors that contributes to this scenario is culture, which not only reproduces, but also legitimizes hierarchical and unequal social structures, creating stereotypes and stigmatizing women in task segmentation, assignment, and exercise of positions and functions. Regarding the Brazilian culture, the aristocratic model of the patriarchal family, established in the colonial period, persists in contemporary political and social relationships, contributing to male domination and strengthening gender inequalities (Fenili, 2016; Pinto et al., 2014).

According to Bourdieu (2002), male domination and symbolic violence are legitimized through "habitus", whose definition refers to the individual's behaviors and actions, whether conscious or unconscious, formed by experiences lived in a given historical, economic, social, and family context. In this sense, woman is portrayed as a victim of social structures built objectively to oppress her, but also as a reproducer of behaviors that end up being natural. On the other hand, Touraine (2007) observes that women's situation is not limited to the domination they suffer, as they do not recognize themselves only as victims, but also as subjects of cultural and social changes, agents of their history, and responsible for their empowerment and emancipation.

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We adopted Scott's conception of gender (1995), Bourdieu's theoretical assumptions of male domination and symbolic violence (2002), and Touraine's (2007) idea of strengthening women's identity as a subject of change in the social and cultural field. Based on these assumptions, we analyzed how women drivers of urban mobility applications notice gender relations and the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context, in their professional activity and work environment. Thus, we carried out a descriptive research with a qualitative and interpretation approach, by conducting 11 interviews with women drivers of transport applications in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais.

Gender relations and inequalities in mostly male work environments have been object of studies that seek to understand how female subordination existent in different areas rebounds in the work environment, and how the historical context can promote not only asymmetries and domination, but also emancipation and empowerment (Amorim, 2015). Social, political, economic, and cultural changes play an important role in restructuring male domination (Silva, 2011), while feminist conquests, such as women's education and literacy (Gomes, 2019; Mészáros, 2008; Tozetti et al., 2016) represent greater female autonomy, participation in the labor market, financial independence, and rearticulation of power relations (Melo, 2012, 2018).

This study is relevant for deepening the issues on this topic, especially those that seek to establish connections between gender inequality and the socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and political context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender relations

The term 'gender' emerged in the 1970s, together with the contemporary feminist movement, to designate the social building of relationships between the sexes, as opposed to the biological criterion used to justify the differences and inequalities between men and women. Emphasis on the social, cultural, and relational aspects, as a way of dissociating from biological determinism, intended to change consolidated social paradigms and structures (Bogéa, 2017; Bourdieu, 2002; Prado, Di Giorgi & Ribeiro, 2015; Scott, 1995; Silva, 2016).

The term has come up with several definitions, based mainly on theories of a narrow and general character, or just describing the relationships between the sexes (Scott, 1995). Sometimes employed as a substitute for women, sometimes conceived as the study of both women and men, the term 'gender' also came to naming social relationships between the sexes, the cultural constructions of functions suitable for men and women, and even to differentiate the sexual practice of male and female social roles (Biroli, 2012; Gomes, 2019).

According to Scott (1995), the theories of patriarchy, of economic relationships of production, and of gender as an anti-historical category, when used separately, would be insufficient to explain the inequalities between men and women, thus making it necessary to approach gender as an analytical category inserted in a political and academic context. Hence, gender relations must also consider organizational (kinship relations), institutional (education), political (election), and market circumstances (Pinto et al., 2014; Scott, 1995), enabling temporal and spatial contextualization, and the formation of a female identity combined with historical investigation (Louro, 2004; Scott, 1995).

Likewise, gender inequalities arising from hierarchical normative and objective structures and resting on biological theories must be analyzed from a historical and political construction, capable of clarifying the power relations that produce these social differences and exclusions (Bogéa, 2017; Scott, 2005).

In order to understand gender relations, and the effect of Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context on the work environment of women drivers of transport applications, we adopted in this study the concept of gender as an analytical category of historical and cultural building of social and power relations (Antunes, 2010; Louro, 2004; Scott, 1995). These are legitimized by the structure of male domination, naturalized by the socialization of the biological (Bourdieu, 2002), paradoxically to the conception of women as subjects of social transformation and agents of their own lives (Touraine, 2007).

Therefore, the study of gender will only be possible if there is a redefinition and restructuring, in a context of political and social equality that comprises sex, class, and race (Scott, 1995).

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Gender relations in the perspective of Bourdieu's male domination

In Bourdieu's perspective (2002), gender relations are rooted in a social structure of male domination, naturalized and justified by biological determinism and the effectiveness of mechanisms resulting from this structure, which contribute to the replication and permanence of substantial differences between men and women. Thus, this arbitrary domination, whose roots originate from the biological distinction between the sexes, extends to all social spheres, including labor division (Alves & Castro, 2018). The patriarchal family, as one of the institutional factors responsible for gender inequalities, validates this division, making it natural (Mendes, 2005).

When carefully examining male domination and symbolic violence, produced and reproduced through *habitus* - incorporating perceptions and behaviors developed in the family, religious, school, and institutional environments - Bourdieu (2002) conceives the woman as a victim of an oppressive social structure, but to which she also contributes. At the same time, he recognizes the emergence of changes, considering the increase in women's access to education as one of the decisive factors in modifying labor division, women's economic independence, and in reorganizing family relationships.

Therefore, although access to education and entry in the labor market affect women's lives, they will remain the same victims of a male-dominated structure, where men continue to hold political and economic power. The rupture of this structure of symbolic domination that exists between men and women would only be possible through "a radical transformation of the social conditions that create the trends that lead the dominated to adopt, about the dominants and about themselves, the dominants' own point of view" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 54).

Gender relations in Alain Touraine's perception

According to Touraine (2007), gender is accepted as an analytical and relational category (Antunes, 2010; Louro, 2004; Scott, 1995), and as a mechanism for shifting social structures (Prado et al., 2015). However, although the author does not prioritize the specifics of cultural and historical issues and the established patriarchal structural models, he recognizes the deep changes achieved by feminist social movements, which allowed women to assume the current condition of subjects.

Based on this assumption, there is a distinction in the perception of the woman portrayed by Touraine (2007) and the woman described by Bourdieu (2002). While the woman, in Bourdieu's view, is a victim, unable to break the established social configurations, the woman in Touraine's perspective emerges as a subject of social transformation, capable of emancipating herself from socially determined gender inequalities, and achieving empowerment as a social author.

Although Touraine (2007) centralizes the role of women in fighting against gender inequality, he, as well as Bourdieu (2002), certifies the female contribution to strengthening and replicating the social structures that oppress them. The author recognizes the existence of a persistent male domination system, although not absolute, but warns that, despite the logic of domination, the new space that women seek to build "is defined by overcoming power relations and by a constant reference to themselves" (Touraine, 2007, p. 118).

Hence, the author highlights the importance of the socioeconomic and cultural context in women's performance, with cultural change being the most significant element of their actions. This is because women, by defining themselves at the cultural level, become the main subjects of a new model under development, characterized by a certain harmonization and search for equality between men and women, in opposition to a hierarchical and masculine superiority system (Touraine, 2007, p. 117).

Socioeconomic and cultural context

According to Bourdieu (2002), culture and economy are the most important criteria for building a social space for developed societies. Culture is responsible for the creation of social structures and behaviors that legitimize them, strengthened by the institutions 'school' and 'family', which reproduce the existing normative and hierarchical structures.

As a constituent part of the social relationships that legitimize gender, culture contributes significantly to the formation of behaviors, attitudes, and stereotypes responsible for the established differences and inequalities, and for justifying the inferiority or submission of one subject to another (Scott, 1995). Hence, society standardizes excluding and misogynistic speeches, based on a cultural significance that rests only on biological aspects (Silva, 2016).

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For that matter, education proves to be an important element of culture, capable of fostering the emancipation of women subjected to a patriarchal society, ensuring greater autonomy and reducing gender inequalities. Hence, it becomes an instrument for enabling social changes and breaking dominant structures (Gomes, 2019; Melo, 2018; Telles, 2013; Tozetti et al., 2016).

The cultural characteristics and historical context of each society should be taken into account for studying gender relations (Fontana & Costa, 2016; Scott, 1995). Regarding the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context, its particularities were essential for the country's social organization, structured on an aristocratic model of the patriarchal family and a slavocrat system. Therefore, the distinct treatment given to men and women by this unequal and male chauvinist system has an impact on power relations and on the political, labor, economic, and social spheres (Fenili, 2016; Pinto et al., 2014).

Despite the growing participation of women in the labor market and for family's economic support, discrimination and inequalities persist, especially regarding gender (Ávila & Ferreira, 2014). Although issues involving women's work have progressed, De Souza, Baldwin and Rosa (2000) emphasize that here is also stagnation, due to the definition of gender roles reproduced according to the culture of a Brazilian male chauvinist society. In this context, women occupy only the leadership positions given by men, based on stereotyped female images, commonly linked to raising and teaching.

The work model of urban mobility applications

The sharing economy emerged in the 1990s in the United States, enabling the emergence and expansion of new business models. It consists of a specific type of consumption's collaborative economy, by which people and organizations share resources, intermediated by an online platform (Botsman, 2013; Franco & Ferraz, 2019). It is also known as collaborative economy, crowd employment (crowdworking), gig economy, on-demand economy, and mobile labor markets (MLMs), among others (Codagnone et al., 2016).

Despite disagreements in considering urban mobility applications as part of the sharing economy, the business model operates through the registration of the duly qualified driver, with a car of his/her own or not, on an online platform. He/she must adhere to the company's rules and policies, and is monitored based on users' reviews and comments, in order to keep a satisfactory performance standard defined for customer service (De Stefano, 2016; Franco & Ferraz, 2019).

The first urban mobility application, the Uber company, appeared in 2009, in the United States, with the proposal of allowing the freelance work of drivers in serving potential passengers. This business model became a global phenomenon, with high market value and worldwide responsiveness (Zanatta et al., 2017).

In Brazil, the Uber company was established in 2014, and other transportation platforms were later created (99POP, Cruzeiro Go, Mobbi, Uai Move etc.), some of which are exclusive for the female audience (Venuxx). The work model is attractive and feasible in a context of economic crisis, especially for those with difficulty of participating in the formal labor market (Franco & Ferraz, 2019; Peticca-Harris et al., 2018; Zanatta et al., 2017). This is the case of women, whose entry in the labor market has always been more difficult, especially due to social and cultural obstacles, such as moral and sexual harassment, disqualification, and wage gap (Gomes, 2019). Thus, in this context of gender inequality, the innovative and simple model of urban mobility applications becomes a useful tool that facilitates women to practice the profession of driver, considered typically male (Beigi et al., 2020; Scheller, 2009).

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The profession of transport applications' driver

The profession of transport application driver, although recent, has also become attractive to women, particularly by the ease of joining the online platform and the proposal of flexibility, freedom, and financial gains (Beigi et al., 2020; Franco & Ferraz, 2019). Another factor to be considered is women's double workday, which makes the profession's flexibility a way to do domestic work and paid work (Siqueira, 2016), and still meet the financial need and the wish for economic independence (Ávila & Ferreira, 2014).

Paid work increases the voice and self-esteem capacity of women, who now have greater freedom and motivation to advance (Kabeer, 2013; Melo, 2018). However, although all these factors have contributed to an increase in female presence in the sector, the performance is still timid, given the existence of female stereotypes linked to the exercise of the driver profession and to the very act of driving (Yeung & Von Hippel, 2008), but mainly for safety reasons (Wright, 2014). Hence, the fear of harassment and physical and psychological violence results in the drivers' preference for attending female passengers, as well as the choice to work during the day and in less dangerous neighborhoods (Beigi et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study consisted of a descriptive research (Gil, 2008), with a qualitative (Godoy, 1995) and interpretative approach (Crotty, 1998), according to the defined objectives.

The unit of analysis was the perception of women drivers of transport applications regarding gender relations and the specifics of Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context in their daily work. The observation unit was the interviewees' work as drivers of an urban mobility application.

The research subjects were 11 women drivers of urban mobility applications, working on at least one platform (Uber, 99POP, Venuxx, Cruzeiro Go, Mobbi, Uai Move), in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Research participants were named by the letter "E", (Portuguese abbreviation of interviewee) and numbered sequentially, from E1 to E11.

Women, interviewed at the end of 2019, were aged between 23 and 56 years old. Regarding marital status, four were single, three were married, two were divorced, one was a widow, and one had a stable relationship. As to the level of education, eight completed higher education, two had specialization/MBA, two had incomplete higher education, and one finished high school. With regard to the length of professional experience, they had been registered for at least six months on transport application platforms; the driver with the longest experience had been working for three years and four months at Uber, as summarized in Box 1.

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Box 1
Sociodemographic profile of the studied group

Interviewees	Age	Marital status	Education degree	Online platform of work	Time on platform
E1	46	Divorced	Higher Education Incomplete	Uber, 99Pop	7 months
E2	39	Married	Higher Education – Pedagogy	99 Pop, Uber, Vapt	9 months
E3	33	Married	Higher Education – Administration Specialization in Agribusiness (in progress)	Uber, 99Pop	1 year
E4	56	Divorced	Higher Education – Mathematics and Interior Design	Uber	3 years and 4 months
E5	52	Single	Higher Education	Uber, 99Pop	2 years
E6	50	Single	Higher Education Incomplete	Uber, 99Pop, Venuxx, Mobbi	2 years
E7	45	Single	Higher Education – Advertising	Uber, 99 Pop	1 year
E8	40	Widow	Higher Education – Physical Education; MBA in Commercial and Sales Management	Uber	1 year
E9	23	Single	Higher Education- Civil Engineering (in progress)	Uber, 99Pop	7 months
E10	31	Stable relationship	Higher Education – Tourism	Uber, 99Pop, Venuxx, Cruzeiro Go, Uai Move	2 years
E11	29	Married	High School	Uber, 99Pop	6 months

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

We selected interviewees by the criterion of accessibility and through the indication of other participants, using the technique named "snowball", which employs reference chains (Vinuto, 2014). As to the number of interviewees, we adopted the criterion of saturation, created by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to describe the moment when collected data no longer provide new information, or just add little data to help or deepen the research (Fontanella et al., 2011; Minayo, 2017), which happened in the eleventh interview. Based on this definition, we interviewed 11 women, a number that also fits the quantitative criterion of participants adopted by Atran, Medin and Ross (2005).

We conducted the interviews based on a semi-structured script developed according to the research objective. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the content was grouped and ranked through a qualitative tabulation, which comprised the creation of tables with the topics of the questions on the script.

We treated the collected data by the content analysis technique (Franco, 2008), adding Melo's (2012, 2018) contributions. The tabulated questions emerged from the group's speeches, and were distributed for analysis considering Scott's (1995) gender conception, Bourdieu's (2002) perspective of the woman victim of male domination and symbolic violence, and Touraine's (2007) perception of the woman subject of social change.

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RESULTS AND ANALYSES

We carried out data analysis considering gender relations and the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context in the work environment, male domination and symbolic violence in the professional performance of interviewees, and their perception as subjects of social change.

Gender relations in the work environment and the socioeconomic and cultural Brazilian context

For Scott (1995), gender is a way of articulating power and an element of historically and culturally built social relationships. In this perspective, the socioeconomic and cultural context contributes to the replication and permanence of stereotypes that promote inequalities between men and women, both in the private and public spheres. The division of labor in male and female activities ends up incorporated in social structures, which, in Brazil, occurred through the restructuring of the aristocratic model of the patriarchal family outlined in the colonial period (Alves & Castro, 2018; Fenili, 2016; Pinto et al., 2014). Thus, most of the interviewees considered the driver profession as predominantly male, confirming Beigi et al. (2020) and Scheller's (2009) understanding. However, some of them have noticed an increase in the presence of women working in urban mobility applications.

> It is mostly masculine, although there was a high membership of women to the market [...] (E1).

> I still find it mostly masculine [...]. But it's improving, the number of women is increasing (E6).

> [...] culturally it is a male profession, thus people still resist [...] (E7).

Although considered mostly male, this factor was not an obstacle for these women to exercise the profession, whose choice occurred mainly due to the Brazilian economic crisis and the difficulty of entering the formal labor market, thus confirming Beigi et al. (2020), Franco and Ferraz (2019), and Peticca-Harris et al. (2018).

> Given the crisis in our country, unemployment is very high, the unemployment rate is very high, and I am part of this.... index. Therefore, being an application's driver is a way out, not an option or a choice. It's just a way out (E7).

> I think that, with this growing unemployment in the country, the number of women drivers will grow (E8).

In addition, the profession also proved attractive due to its flexibility, which allows women to do paid work together with domestic work and care for the family (Beigi et al., 2020; Franco & Ferraz, 2019; Peticca-Harris et al., 2018; Siqueira, 2016).

> By being closer to my family, ... I can make my schedule (E2).

> [...] is to have flexibility for working in the hours that I can, that I want, of course, according to my daily financial goals [...], means an even higher financial independence, freedom [...] (E11).

Another element commonly mentioned was the need to support the family or to complement income, given the low wages in the formal market (Gomes, 2019; Valente et al., 2019). Most of them said that exercising this profession was not a personal achievement, but a source of revenue, as shown in the excerpts of their interviews, which confirm the findings of Peticca-Harris et al. (2018).

> It is not a personal achievement. But I consider it a job that gives me an income as long as I work, and that gives me freedom of schedule (E6).

> [...] Being an application driver is not a professional achievement. It is really for complementing income, or for people who are unemployed not to stay idle at home, and have a source of revenue [...] (E9).

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Regarding the economic situation of the interviewees (Melo, 2012, 2018), working as an application driver allowed most of them to become financially independent, acting exclusively in this role. Thus, we can see how financial independence contributes to women achieving space and autonomy, being partially or totally responsible for the payment of domestic and personal expenses (Ávila & Ferreira, 2014; Melo, 2012, 2018).

The cultural context, as well as the economic, plays an important role in strengthening social structures and in replicating acts and behaviors, contributing to the differences between men and women, and to the organization of power relations (Bourdieu, 2002; Scott, 1995). In Brazil, as gender relations were based on a patriarchal and unequal system, we notice their reproduction in the spheres of labor, politics, and economy (Fenili, 2016; Pinto et al., 2014). Interviewees disclosed the presence of a male chauvinist Brazilian culture, where the figure of the female driver is still rejected, viewed with suspicion, and considered less competent than men (Yeung & Von Hippel, 2008). However, they highlight some changes, such as the increase of the number of women in the profession and greater social acceptance:

> Mainly due to male chauvinism in society, right? Where people think that a woman drives badly, right? The expression is … "a woman behind the steering wheel, constant danger" […] (E3).

> […] I think society's head is opening. People are accepting. Times are changing. […] things become more accessible and people are accepting better the changes that are taking place (E7).

> I think the Brazilian culture is like that. Only men should work as drivers, right, this comes from years and years ago. But I think that, for a while now … they have changed this perception a bit […] (E11).

Despite being part of a male chauvinist and unequal cultural context (Bourdieu, 2002), interviewees recognize their professional competence, and are confident and able to exercise the profession (Touraine, 2007), which validates the results of Beigi et al. (2020).

> I think I am a good driver. I work well; I drive well […] (E6).

> That I am a good driver, I am attentive, I am respectful in traffic (E9).

Moreover, the greater confidence and autonomy of the participants in professional work may relate to the fact that they have a higher level of education, since education is a means of emancipation, reduction of differences, and promotion of social and cultural changes (Gomes, 2019; Melo, 2018; Telles, 2013; Tozetti et al., 2016).

Male domination and symbolic violence in interviewees' professional performance

According to Bourdieu (2002), the social order, built under an androcentric view and naturally justified by the biological differences between sexes, imposes a sexual division of labor, separating the spaces reserved for men and women, and legitimizing male domination. For the author, the structures of domination would be created and replicated to the point of being perceived as natural by the dominated; although barriers have been overcome by female conquests, women would remain victims of an arbitrary system that oppresses them, even if invisibly and silently. We observed the prejudice against female drivers and the naturalization of domination in some interviews' excerpts.

> […] It's natural that more men drive than women (E3).

> What hinders our work is the fact that we are women, other drivers discriminate against us, you know. Whether they like it or not, they are not happy to know that we are taking their place. They think the place is theirs. […] What always makes it difficult is prejudice […] (E4).

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However, although they notice a certain degree of prejudice, only two interviewees said that they had suffered, directly, some kind of discrimination, which strengthens the idea of a symbolic, invisible, and sometimes veiled violence (Bourdieu, 2002).

As to the functioning of urban mobility platforms, although more than half of the interviewees recognize male domination (Bourdieu, 2002) in the profession of transport application driver, they all consider that access to urban mobility platforms is equal for men and women, with equal opportunities for both sexes. However, when asked about the existence of a hierarchy on the platform, seven answered that there is a hierarchy, according to the number of runs made. Thus, the higher the number of runs made by the driver and the good ratings received from users, the higher the financial gains and privileges granted by the company.

Based on the analysis of the transport application model's operation, the professional growth of the driver depends on the number of runs performed at certain times, and on the passengers' subjective assessment (Franco & Ferraz, 2019; Peticca-Harris et al., 2018). In this scenario, women are harmed for the following reasons: difficulty to carry out more runs, restricted by the double workday; by the fear of driving in certain places and at certain times, due to the lack of security (Beigi et al., 2020; Wright, 2014); and by the risk of getting low/bad grades solely for being women. We extracted these parts from interviewees' statements:

> [...] My wish was to work at night, but I am afraid; when I started, I did that [...] then I stopped and began again working during the day; but I would rather, if I felt safe, work at night (E4).

> [...] What makes it difficult is not having the courage to work at peak hours, where I could earn even more, in less time, because of fear, and the risks of assault, violence, and the like (E11).

In the case of gender discrimination, the application's evaluation system is incapable of restraining expressions of prejudice from some users, who reproduce thoughts and behaviors typical of social structures marked by male domination. Here, we identified again the presence of the so-called symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2002), since female drivers, although imperceptibly, are victims of a work platform that, "invisibly", reflects the patriarchal and male chauvinist structure of Brazilian society.

When addressing family's influence, Bourdieu (2002) observes how the institution 'family' plays an important role in incorporating behaviors, values, and perceptions. The aristocratic model of the Brazilian family, by replicating concepts of gender inequality, strengthens the idea of the existence of male and female professions. In this perspective, the driver profession, traditionally male (Beigi et al., 2020; Scheller, 2009), would not be an activity encouraged for female practice. This is what we observed when eight interviewees said that they received no family support for exercising this profession.

Based on the analysis of Bourdieu's (2002) assumptions, we noticed that the insertion of women in an environment of mostly male activity still brings disadvantages, even if subtle. Hence, despite barriers being broken and an increase in the female presence as drivers of transport applications, women remain victims of a system of symbolic domination and of the socioeconomic and cultural context where they are embedded.

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Interviewees as subject of social change

According to Touraine (2007), the woman subject of social change exists to the extent that she does not perceive herself as a victim of a hierarchical and unequal society, but as an agent of her own history, capable of promoting significant structural changes. Interviewees, despite recognizing the difficulties imposed by the male chauvinist Brazilian culture and the lack of security to exercise their professional activity, do not recognize themselves as victims of this social structure. On the contrary, they recognize themselves as competent professionals, good drivers (Beigi et al., 2020), brave, performing a job like any other, as we see in the following excerpts.

> [...] To tell the truth, I do not fear anything, ... I hold on faith and go on. I am strong, I am not intimidated by those who enter, who do not enter [...] (E4).

> I think I am a good driver. I think I work well; I drive well, even more because I have qualification for that, as I explained before (E6).

> Well, my perception is the following: I am, I consider myself a good driver [...] (E7).

The woman subject of change (Touraine, 2007) was also present in the interviewees' speech, when they claimed to have attributes that bring a positive differential to the profession.

> [...] we are more relaxed in traffic, we are more careful, pay more attention, treat passengers with more education, we are more sensitive (E9).

> Yes, I think that women bring a differential to the profession. [...] In my opinion, we, women, are more patient, we observe more [...] We are more cautious in traffic, more careful, we drive in a more caring way (E11).

It is interesting to note that the same characteristics sometimes used to make women inferior (kindness, attention, sensitivity, care, education), take on a new meaning and become attributes that make them better professionals.

Likewise, the fact that the majority of the interviewees did not change their behavior in order to be respected professionally shows autonomy and confidence, against the findings of Beigi et al. (2020), who observed the adoption of behaviors considered masculine by female drivers, to protect themselves and be respected. Again, data may relate to their academic background, since education is an important means of women's emancipation and empowerment (Melo, 2012, 2018).

> No, I did not change anything to be respected. Nothing (E6).

> No, I did not change, because I already am a person with a well-defined attitude (E7).

It is possible to extract from the interviews, and based on Touraine's (2007) perception on women, that from the moment they recognize themselves as the building subjects of their own identity, they do not consider themselves as victims, instead fully capable of achieving their financial autonomy, without the need to adapt to pre-established social structures, organized to downgrade them.

> To me, being an application driver is an opportunity, a challenge [...]. It means my support, keeps me busy, focused. It also means leisure, ok? In addition, it is also a way of keeping my self-love and self-esteem up to date (E1).

> Being an application driver is my financial independence, my stress relief. [...] I like to be an application driver, oddly enough, got it? I like it, I don't know... there are good and bad sides, it's everything to me (laughs) (E10).

> To me, being an application driver is a sensation of freedom, a sensation of power to be in several places, each moment, each time in a different place. It's good to know new people, each day facing a type of situation, knowing people's stories. [...] (E11).

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Melo (2012, 2018) confirms this understanding by showing how the cognitive-analytical (educational background and professional competence), subjective (self-esteem and self-confidence), economic (financial independence), social (family), and political and cultural (power relations in society) dimensions favor the process of women's empowering as a subject and as a professional, considering the specifics of each context.

FINAL REMARKS

This study addressed how women drivers of urban mobility applications notice gender relations and the Brazilian socioeconomic and cultural context in their professional activity. For that purpose, we used Scott's (1995) gender conception, Bourdieu's (2002) theoretical assumptions of male domination and symbolic violence, and Touraine's (2007) perception of women as subjects of transformation of the social and cultural field.

Through thee research we saw how gender, which is a constituent of social relationships and a reflex of power relations, should be understood, considering the social, economic, historical, and cultural contexts. When analyzing the particularities of Brazilian society, women drivers recognize the existence of a masculine work environment and a patriarchal and male chauvinist culture, which, in a way, proved to be an obstacle to their professional activity.

However, the participating drivers did not see or describe themselves as victims of a hegemonic model of male domination, but instead as confident women, good drivers, in search of financial independence. Thus, even with the difficulties of the profession, these women can be seen as subjects of social and cultural change, agents of their lives, and builders of their own reality. Therefore, paid work is an instrument capable of increasing women's voice and self-esteem, who now have greater freedom and motivation to achieve their autonomy.

Considering the Brazilian context of economic crisis and financial insecurity, there is a convergence of women from different fields of qualification and distinct personal and social circumstances for using urban mobility platforms as a way to ensure, keep, or even achieve financial independence. Although the unfavorable economic scenario is the main motivation for their professional choice, the ease of joining this work model, the flexibility of schedules, and the fact that the activity is highly individual also favored this choice.

Regarding schedule flexibility, mentioned by most of the interviewees, they developed safety strategies and less exposure to risk situations, for fear of violence and harassment. Some drivers have limited their professional activities to certain hours of the day, preferring safer regions and providing exclusive or preferential service to female passengers. This finding shows how gender affects the activity' exercise, by creating structural barriers to higher financial gains (more working hours) and to career progress.

We also observed that interviewees' level of education can be an element of emancipation, since education gives women greater freedom of decision and of acting in different social fields.

Regarding access to transport application platforms and to opportunities for men and women at the workplace, although all respondents believed in equal access and opportunities, the subjective system of applications' evaluation is not capable to filter or restrain any low grades given to drivers just for being women. Thus, being in a mostly male environment, women drivers, even if imperceptibly or invisibly, remain victims of symbolic domination and violence. It is the perpetuation, although invisible, of gender stereotypes and inequalities through structures legitimized as natural, in a world where women still are defined by the masculine look. Hence, it is necessary to adjust urban mobility applications to the country's socioeconomic and cultural context, in order to ensure greater protection and support mechanisms to groups that are commonly disadvantaged by this context, such as women drivers.

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Finally, we found that women exercising the driver profession of a transport application is a way of female empowerment within the social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Interviewees proved to be agents capable of breaking prejudices and social structures to achieve recognition, autonomy, and financial independence, even when they acknowledge obstacles arising from a Brazilian society that, despite being male chauvinist and historically aristocratic, patriarchal, and slavocrat, is in a process of change and greater acceptance of women working as drivers.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the observation that gender relations, with emphasis on women's insertion in the labor and professional market, cannot be placed in a linear position of exclusion, characterized by male domination - symbolic violence – glass ceiling - empowerment, which we observe in most studies on the topic.

Theoretical looks point to new directions: despite affected by inequalities and violence, women think they are freer than dependent, and more responsible than submissive. The interviewees' attitudes have a more cultural than social perspective; therefore, they define themselves in relation to themselves, with the aim of building themselves.

Among the study's limitations, we mention the only participation of female drivers of transport applications that operate in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte; we suggest its replication in other Brazilian regions. Since it involved complex variables, we also suggest a deeper research, to achieve a more solid theoretical structure, based on our evidence.

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