Between the sacred and the profane: identities, paradoxes, and ambivalences of evangelical prostitutes from a red-light district of Belo Horizonte

Jefferson Rodrigues Pereira [1]
José Vitor Palhares dos Santos [1]
Alice Gerlane Cardoso da Silva [1]
Kely Cesar Martins de Paiva [1]
Alexandre de Pádua Carrieri [1]

[1] Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte – MG, Brazil

Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the construction of the identities of evangelical prostitutes who work in a red-light district (*zona do baixo meretrício*) of the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. It is an exploratory and qualitative study, using in-depth interviews with 17 evangelical prostitutes, analyzed through the theoretical-methodological proposal of the linguistic discourse analysis. Among the main results, we highlight a deep sense of guilt and, in some cases, pain and suffering of evangelical prostitutes, given the paradoxicality of commune personal values and beliefs intrinsically opposed to the practices of their work. However, more objective questions, such as support themselves and their family, led them to this reality.

Keywords: Prostitutes. Evangelicals. Identities. Stigma.

Entre o sagrado e o profano: identidades, paradoxos e ambivalências de prostitutas evangélicas do baixo meretrício de Belo Horizonte

Resumo

Análise da construção das identidades de prostitutas evangélicas que trabalham em uma zona do "baixo meretrício" da cidade de Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Para tanto, desenvolveu-se um estudo exploratório de abordagem qualitativa com entrevistas em profundidade com 17 prostitutas evangélicas, cujo *corpus* discursivo foi trabalhado mediante a proposta teórico-metodológica da Análise Linguística do Discurso. Dentre os principais resultados alcançados, destacam-se um profundo sentimento de culpa e, em alguns casos, dor e sofrimento das prostitutas evangélicas, dado o paradoxo de comungar de valores e crenças pessoais intrinsecamente opostas às práticas de seu ofício. Contudo, questões mais objetivas, como o sustento e a manutenção própria e da família, levaram-nas a se sujeitarem a esta realidade.

Palavras-chave: Prostitutas. Evangélicas. Identidades. Estigma.

Entre lo sagrado y lo profano: identidades, paradojas y ambivalencias de prostitutas evangélicas del bajo meretricio de Belo Horizonte

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es analizar la construcción de las identidades de prostitutas evangélicas que trabajan en una zona del "bajo meretricio" de la ciudad de Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Para ello, se desarrolló un estudio exploratorio de abordaje cualitativo con entrevistas en profundidad con 17 prostitutas evangélicas, en las que el corpus discursivo se trabajó mediante la propuesta teórico-metodológica del análisis lingüístico del discurso. Entre los principales resultados, destacamos un profundo sentimiento de culpa y, en algunos casos, dolor y sufrimiento de las prostitutas evangélicas, dada la paradoja de comulgar con valores y creencias personales intrínsecamente opuestas a las prácticas de su oficio. Sin embargo, cuestiones más objetivas, como el sustento y el mantenimiento propio y de la familia hizo que ellas se sujetaran a esta realidad.

Palabras clave: Prostitutas. Evangélicas. Identidades. Estigma.

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INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is a millenarian human activity popularly known as "the world's oldest profession" (BARRETO, 2013). The first accounts about this occupation were narrated in the Holy Bible: it is the story of Mary Magdalene, the world's most famous prostitute (BASSERMANN, 1994). It is reported that in the early Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, the figure of the prostitute was embedded with a sacred character, at times associated with deities and, therefore, bearer of great social influence on the economic, political, and religious spheres. This perception came to be challenged from the decline of the Roman Empire onwards, when the idea that prostitution was a morally reprehensible act that would corrupt the rest of society began to be disseminated (SACRAMENTO and RIBEIRO, 2014).

That historical moment was the prelude to the processes of demoralization and stigmatization of prostitutes and prostitution, which decayed from a place of divinity to become the scum of society. In other words, a sacred image was demonized. Moreover, sin has become associated with these "wandering beings", as they engage in an activity that is socially biased as unworthy, humiliating, dirty, and undeserved (FANGANIELLO, 2008). As a result, prostitution embodies the stigma of a "dirty work" (HUGHES, 1958; ASHFORTH and KREINER, 1999).

In the contemporary world, the imagery surrounding prostitution is multiple, as are its associated moral judgments and prejudices. "Worshiped, persecuted, stigmatized, and degraded, the prostitute has become a non-trivial being, permeated by the exoticism and sacredness of the sexual taboo encompassing her" (LOPES, 2017). Notably, prostitutes are associated with sexual depravity, after all "[...] the very definition of prostitution supports this view, as it is defined as unnatural and/or morally reprehensible sexual intercourse, such as adultery, concubinage, and polygamy" (BARRETO, 2013, p. 75). Therefore, the social identity of prostitutes is connected to the fact that they have sex with countless men, with no reproductive purposes, contrary to the socially established rules of honesty and morality, which, in the Brazilian culture, are strongly influenced by religious precepts (CUNHA, 2014). According to the religious view framed in this study, which is grounded on Christian-evangelical dogmas, the causes of prostitution would be childhood trauma and sexual abuse, and its "cure" would entail willpower, as occurs among drug addicts (MARIZ, 2016).

A form of religiousness is proclaimed to these individuals, based on the following premises: "the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit" and hence cannot be profaned by prostitution; they should value themselves as human beings and children of God; they could get any other "ordinary job" instead; they should repent and beg for God's forgiveness for having "sold their bodies" (a serious sin according to the evangelical doctrine). With the aim of deepening the religious and moral forms of conceiving prostitution, this study resorts to some biblical references. In Deuteronomy (23:17-18), prostitutes are referred to as "abominations to the Lord," and in Revelation (17:1-3) they are associated with the figure of a beast that led the world to perdition: "[...] I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication." Therefore, these teachings are used as support by (neo) Pentecostal religions to bestow upon converted prostitutes, those who are in the process of conversion, or even those who may be an eventual object of conversion.

According to the evangelical doctrine, sex outside marriage is a sin; therefore, it belongs to the domain of the diabolical seductions. The evangelical church attributes value and positively endorses the abandonment of this practice, regarded by this religion as abominable (LOPES, 2017), since, according to its preaching, the human being becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit after conversion. This is inspired by the perception that "God chooses his people to be holy and to be believers. [...] You may come to Christ as a sinner, but you may not come to Christ as an elect person until you can see your holiness" (SPURGEON, 1996, p. 25). Accordingly, the individual who abandons this degraded condition of being subjected to the forces of evil emerges as "someone who has been saved by the Gospel" (BIRMAN, 2009). Along these lines, the "ex-prostitute", the one who has converted or is in the process of conversion begins to resignify and reposition her, becoming a witness of God's blessing and of "how God acts upon people's lives" (BIRMAN, 2009; LOPES, 2017). With this regard, there is a contradiction in being a prostitute who has "converted to the Gospel" and still maintaining her previous lifestyle and "sinful" profession, so this clashes with religious principles.

Moreover, we must consider that, inseparable from a historical time, the proclaimed stigma of prostitution can be understood as a "[...] relational process, circumscribed in time and space, through which a group of actors projected certain attributes on another group of characters, conferring marginality and justifying their exile from the social fabric" (BASTOS, 1997, p. 14).

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Therefore, that attribute does not fit the social standards and norms regulating the identity construction processes (GOFFMAN, 1982). This divergence serves as an instrument to depreciate the prostitute's identity and tarnish their status as individuals, although their occupation is not criminally configured as illicit, as is the case of prostitution in Brazil. In other words, "the prostitute is stigmatized not for committing any legal infraction, but for her divergence from the prevailing values that regulate female sexuality and establish a moral idea of order" (SACRAMENTO and RIBEIRO, 2014, p. 200). The influence of religious standards and values dictates what is right or wrong or moral or immoral in today's society (LOPES, 2017).

Studies on prostitution in administration and specifically in organizational studies are not recent and have been usually associated with theoretical categories such as the meaning of work (SILVA and CAPPELLE, 2015, 2017a), careers (BREWIS and LINSTEAD, 2000), dirty work and stigmas (BLITHE and WOLFE, 2017), regulation and (de) criminalization of work activities (WEST, 2000; WAGENAAR, 2006), among others, which have guided, therefore, the development of this study. Furthermore, although the process of identity construction among prostitutes (which is the focus of this research) has gained prominence in the field in recent years (PEREIRA, PAIVA, SANTOS et al., 2018; SANDERS, 2005), it still needs novel theorizations, as it remains a marginal theme in organizational studies. This probably occurs because prostitution has yet to be socially recognized as a profession, so its market and all that surrounds it are removed from management studies (SILVA and CAPPELLE, 2017b).

Aiming to fill this research gap and considering the social stigmatization of that occupation, this article aims to analyze the identity construction of evangelical prostitutes working at a famous red-light district in the city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Identity construction is understood herein as a process of self-construction through processes of identification (ALVESSON and WILLMOTT, 2002) and (re) construction based on social relations established with others and the subjective meanings attributed to work.

Therefore, this study offers contributions in two scopes: the first concerns the deepening and advancement of theoretical discussions about the identity construction process of a specific professional group that has been marginalized in management studies (SILVA and CAPPELLE, 2017b), i.e., prostitutes. Added to that, this study features a different theoretical framework, as it adopts a novel bias through the issue of religiosity. Indeed, this theme has been scarcely explored and debated in the field of organizational studies (TRACEY, 2012; GUNDOLF and FILSER, 2013; CARNEIRO, SERAFIM and TEZZA, 2018), especially when it comes to evangelical prostitutes. Not less important, this paper also makes a social contribution by listening to stigmatized and marginalized subjects and making their voices and desires reach other instances while removing them from the condition of social invisibility in which they are inscribed.

Religion, morals and sex work

Although various sociologists such as Durkheim (1996) and Weber (1967) have discussed religion and its influence on individual ways of existence, only in recent decades this topic has been discussed in management studies (GUNDOLF and FILSER, 2013). Religion can be understood as a system of symbols that builds and is socially built, transcends and includes the human being, and is privileged by legitimation, preservation of order, and maintenance of the status quo (BERGER, 1985). The process of legitimation of religious institutions expresses the need to adopt instruments for a socially defined reality to be perpetuated and for an idea of what is real to be assimilated by its believers as given, or self-evident. Remarkably, throughout history, religious education has always been reproductive and conditioning of socially accepted standards and the religious language (the exhaustive repetition of dogmas) has been an important and necessary means for the strengthening and maintenance of its identity (CAMPOS and MARIANI, 2015).

Therefore, religion and morality are intrinsically related, since one of the functions of religion is to make a moral disposition sensitive through the idea of God. Christian morality, understood here as a set of socially shared Christian values, classifies human actions and ways of life as right or wrong and individuals as good or evil. For this reason, moral values can enable one's self-evaluation and their evaluation of others, allowing, in turn, the emergence of distinctive and hierarchical comparisons on how we behave in relation to ourselves and others (TAYLOR, 1997).

These moral evaluations also fall upon one's work, as each occupation is valued differently under the aegis of subtle and hierarchical moral agreements between mind and body: occupations and professions that rely on the body more than the mind are morally undervalued, and regarded as degrading or less worthy (HONNETH, 2008). In turn, religion can transcend

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the instrumental character of humans at work and increase the understanding of the complexity and individuality of subjects (SILVA and SIQUEIRA, 2009). In addition, religion would allow workers to establish a set of attitudes to cope with suffering at work (PAIVA, 1998), as well as represent a source of increased meaning, pleasure (SILVA and SIQUEIRA, 2009), satisfaction, efficiency, and creativity in the workplace (MITROFF and DENTON, 1999).

Religion can be understood as a way to assign meaning to life, an ability to respond to suffering, death and misery, and a form of support, refuge and psychological sustenance, by promising the faithful salvation and freedom from suffering (MARIANO, 1999). In this regard, "[...] only religious tradition promises salvation beyond all apocalypse and beyond all destruction of human things. Survivals, though, concern only the immanence of historical time: they have no redemptive value" (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, p. 84).

Therefore, religion permeates the transition between humanization and the precariousness of work (DAVEL and VERGARA, 2001), and enables people to reconnect to the world, the transcendent, society (MOORE, 2004), and consequently, to work. However, several religions, especially those of Christian faith, have coexisted with prostitution, which has been a paradox in their trajectories. While condemning sex work – even through the popular figure of Mary Magdalene, who found her redemption when she was forgiven by Christ (DABHOIWALA, 2013) –, the Catholic Church has always stressed the importance of preserving a woman's virginity until marriage by curbing any sexual desire that might arise before marriage, in a clear allusion to the Virgin Mary. Consequently, the way to remedy the male sexual desires – which in a patriarchal society are perceived as something belonging to the domain of physiological needs, as they could become seriously ill if kept in sexual abstinence (BOURDIEU, 1999) – was to attend "[...] the brothels where they could ease relieve their libido, curb their sexual 'madness' and safeguard the virginity of Mary's daughters for marriage" (MANAIA, 2011, p. 2681).

Human sexual conduct emerges as a symbolic centrality in various religions. In Christianity, for example, there is a notion that a total purification of an individual is still possible on earth, as long as the believer can achieve a sublime state of holiness through, among other things, a celibate life. Sexual abstinence is seen as a privileged sign of the believer's success over the flesh and a form of perfect self-control (CARRARA, 2000). Moreover, as paradigms or moral matrices, religions appear to guide sense-making, and the "heretic," "deviant," or "misconducting" individuals should be made aware and/or punished for presenting a risk to the preservation of the world order, and the security that religion offers to the faithful (CAMPOS and MARIANI, 2015). This is the context in which prostitutes are inserted, labeled as promiscuous females and having their labor activity and identities morally condemned (LOPES, 2017).

Objects of attempted conversion by various religious, the prostitutes who decide to convert to creeds such as the evangelical and become ex-prostitutes may find a different end compared to the other ones. Through "positive discrimination", the ex-prostitute will be able to attest how bad it is to be on the "other side", as she gives up a practice perceived as abominable among the faithful. Meanwhile, she can attribute value to her life story as she comes to "hold on to the word" (LOPES, 2017, p. 35). Therefore, some religions emerge as a source of moral salvation, resignification, and repositioning of these women's life trajectories, in view of the moral constitution of prostitution in the social imaginary.

On identifications and identities

Identity has been presented as an essential attribution or a crucial characteristic of individuals (CABANA and ICHIKAWA, 2017). It is a broad and complex concept, commonly used to refer to an individual's interaction with the world and their relationship with others (AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010). Given its importance, much has been discussed about identity and how it is formed (SOUZA and CARRIERI, 2012).

Berger and Luckmann (2011) define identity as a phenomenon emerging from the dialectical relationship between an individual and society. It is established as a process of internalization, in which subjects are inserted into the objective world of societies. Identity is "[...] the simultaneously stable and provisional, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographical and structural result of the various socialization processes that together construct individuals and define institutions" (DUBAR, 2005, p. 136). In other words, identity is a process understood as the definitions that individuals hold about themselves, established through relationships with others and subject to change depending on their everyday experiences. Consequently, personal and social perspectives must be considered when analyzing the process of identity construction (SOUZA and CARRIERI, 2012).

The perspective of identity, which is sometimes associated with something individual, singular, permanent, and uniform within the context of "being for oneself", has changed to become a dynamic perspective, in continuous construction and reconstruction (CAMPOS and OGUISSO, 2008; AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010), whose individual experiences of socialization compose its main element of formation (MACHADO, 2003; BERGER and LUCKMANN, 2011). Theories on the subject have acknowledged that identity is not fixed nor is it ever fully finalized; instead, it is a social process that undergoes life-long transformations and is subjected to the influence of various historical, social, regional and cultural contexts (BOULART and LANZA, 2007). The formation of one's own identity remains a permanent challenge for individuals, as they try to find out what they are and what others expect them to be. During this process, the others end up becoming a sort of social mirror that allows subjects to recognize, analyze, and approve themselves (WHETTEN and GODFREY, 1998). Along these lines, Boulart and Lanza (2007, p. 8) emphasize that "[...] the personal identity always strikes a balance between what a subject is and what others expect him to be".

Remarkably, that perspective gives rise to ambiguities and inaccuracies regarding the word identity, which is often used with a meaning analogous to "identification" (FERNANDES, 2009; ROQUETE, BRITO, MELO et al., 2012). Identity refers to the "[...] subject's self-concept in the interaction between the self and society, and what is inner and outer; identification, in turn, concerns the subject's attainment of the qualities of others in the sense of improving their self-esteem" (FERNANDES, 2009, p. 2). Identity is divided into "what I am" and "what they think I am"; into my self-perception and how others perceive myself (DUBAR, 2005), so when an individual is identified, he also identifies himself (SOUZA and CARRIERI, 2012). Hence, according to this perspective, identity refers to "who am I?", and identification to "[...] how do I know who I am in relation to you?" (FERNANDES, 2009).

That said, although each individual maintains a sense of individuality, the formation of self-concept is based on the perception of others, that is, it requires recognition and legitimation by the other subjects who integrate one's social reality (MACHADO, 2003; MONTEIRO, PEREIRA, OLIVEIRA et al., 2017). Identity presents itself as the result of various identifications (Miranda, 1998), so the study of identity involves several perspectives or levels of analysis, which, although distinct, complement each other (MACHADO, 2003; AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010). In general terms, the literature mentions two levels of analysis: the personal and the social (CASTELLS, 1999; HOWARD, 2000; MACHADO, 2003; AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010), and these are the most recurring classifications to specify the phenomenon in its levels of perception (MACHADO, 2003).

Personal identity comprises the individual construction of one's "self-concept" through social relations and occurs at all stages of an individual's life. In turn, social identity refers to the construction of the self through the individual's attachment to one or more social groups, so that he can target and legitimize it to reflect the collective action (AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010). This process happens through conforming to the different groups to which an individual belongs, but also through opposing to the groups to which they do not belong (MACHADO, 2003).

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to consider the impact of work on identity construction (MACHADO, 2003; DUBAR, 2005), since the socialization of the subjects in the work environment enables the formation of identity at work based on one's experiences in the productive universe. These, in turn, bring about power relations and collective behavior rules (MACHADO, 2003). Identity at work is understood as "[...] the formation of the self through the activity that an individual performs and those with whom he relates at work" (AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010, p. 1011).

Some jobs are socially marginalized, assuming the stigma of "dirty work," that is, "[...] tasks that are physically disgusting or symbolizes something degrading and humiliating" (HUGHES, 1958, p. 81). At times, these stigmatize and demean the individuals who perform them (BORGES and MOURÃO, 2013). The term "dirty work" is used to refer to this situation in various ways, that is, whenever it is physically, socially, or morally tainted (ASHFORTH and KREINER, 1999; SOUTHGATE and SHYING, 2014), hence influencing the identity construction of subjects (BROWN, 2015).

That said, it is relevant to emphasize the notions of stigma and morality, as well as their respective influences on the processes of identification and identity construction. Stigma reflects a relational process whereby certain groups carry derogatory "stains" because their behavioral and existential patterns oppose to what is socially perceived as correct. These, in turn, are referred to as "deviant behaviors" (BASTOS, 1997). It also refers to an attribute that does not fit the normative expectations that determine identity constructions and the definition of social actions (GOFFMAN, 1982). Therefore, all those who present

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singularities contrary to the dominant system of norms and values are symbolically declared as targets of impurity and social pollution (RIBEIRO, SILVA, SCHOUTEN et al., 2007). In turn, the notion of morality must be considered from the idea that "who we have been, are, or are becoming are fundamentally moral issues" (BROWN, 2015, p. 33). This is an important aspect to consider, especially as this study focuses on red-light district prostitutes following the evangelical religion.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

To achieve the proposed goal, we carried out qualitative research with an exploratory approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 17 prostitutes currently working at a red-light district in the city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, who follow the evangelical doctrine. It must be noted that the interviews were conducted on-site, according to the prostitutes' working hours, and they were selected through the accessibility criterion.

More specifically, the participants of this study work in the central region of Belo Horizonte, at the Rua Guaicurus red-light district, a nationally known prostitution are that has been immortalized by local writer Roberto Drummond in his novel *Hilda Furacão*, published in 1991. For the purposes of this study, we initially carried out three visits to the brothels to better understand the dynamics occurring in that space. In those visits, we used field diaries to record our observations and experiences in the environment, as recommended by the literature (ANGROSINO, 2009). This fact systematically contributed to the understanding of everyday aspects regarding the survey participants.

It is important to highlight that the interviews only began from the fourth visit onwards. Data collection was performed from May to December 2017, with an average of one to two visits per week. In the end, 18 different brothels in central Belo Horizonte were surveyed, and we provided the respondents with explanations about the purpose of the study and the proposal to participate in it. The interviews were conducted only after an Informed Consent Form (ICF) was signed by the respondents. Moreover, we must clarify that as this study fits the prerogatives of the items of the sole paragraph of Article 1 of Resolution No. 510/2016 (BRASIL, 2016), which rule the conduct of human research in social and human sciences, it has not been submitted to the appraisal of any research ethics committee. However, the recommendations provided for by the legislation have been wholly fulfilled (signing of ICF, storage and maintenance of data, etc.).

We opted for the in-depth interview technique, given its contributions to academic studies, such as facilitating acceptance by respondents, increasing comfort between respondents and interviewers, and improving overall research quality (DEVOTTA, WOODHALL-MELNIK, PEDERSEN et al., 2016).

It should also be noted that this particular study is part of a larger research project (currently in progress) to be carried out in the brothels of Rua Guaicurus. Until the elaboration of the framework presented herein, 36 women had been interviewed. Of these, 17 belonged to the evangelical religion and became part of the specific corpus of this study. As for field data production, we should highlight the issues concerning the physical space, as mugging and sale of stolen mobile phones are common in the halls of the prostitution hotels, even though these are disallowed by the hotels' managers. Indeed, during the data collection process, stolen mobile phones were offered to members of the research group on three occasions. This implies that such an environment challenges our interaction with prostitutes and our attempts to explain the study proposal, especially considering that entering the rooms is only possible with the approval of the sex workers themselves. A second aspect to be pointed out concerns the respondents, as many of the women were hesitating to participate in the survey. In the case of those who accepted, they were initially withdrawn, but as the interview progressed, their attitude changed considerably.

Still regarding ethical research aspects such as the anonymity of the respondents, after accepting to participate, they were identified by what they call "nom de guerre," that is, the pseudonyms they use daily with their customers. In addition to the interviews, the research group relied on field diaries and systematic workplace observations (ANGROSINO, 2009). This material formed the analytical corpus of the research, which allowed a better understanding of the research subjects' occupation. This array of methods allowed us to grasp important elements about the context of the identities, life, work, and religion of the prostitutes surveyed.

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The material collected and produced in the field was subjected to systematic data treatment through the theoretical-methodological framework of Discourse Analysis (DA) – which is grounded on the articulations of Linguistics, Philosophy and Social Sciences (ORLANDI, 2009) – and focused on analyzing the symbolic elements that produce meanings and are invested with significance for and by subjects (PÊCHEUX, 2014). This analysis proposal allows the examination of the constitutive effects of language, processes of production, distribution, and consumption of texts, which, in turn, promote a reflexive and interpretive analysis aiming to understand the role of discourses in socially constructed realities (FAIRHURST and COOREN, 2018). In addition, DA has been widely used in Brazilian research in Organizational Studies (FARIA, 2015), as well as in foreign studies (ALVESSON and KÄRREMAN, 2011). Four semantic paths were identified in the identity construction of evangelical prostitutes, which guided the presentation and data analysis, namely: the discourse of the necessity and centrality of their work for their sustenance; the organization of multiple identities; the everyday dilemmas and contradictions; and the strategies of resistance developed due to the contradictions inherent in dirty work.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Initially, we must highlight that the study participants define themselves as Christian women following the evangelical doctrine. Among the respondents, six of them regularly attended the services of the Baptist church; four attended the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God; three attended the Assemblies of God; three attended God Is Love; and one attended the International Grace of God Church. As for the age group, they were aged between 19 and 63. Regarding the level of education, 13 finished High School, three, did not finish Elementary School, and one attended college.

Most of the women interviewed in this study have children (13 of them) and declared to be single, divorced or widowed. It is important to highlight that only three respondents came from cities in the state of Minas Gerais. The other 14 came from other Brazilian states and claimed to work at the Guaicurus red-light district because of its fame, and the possibility of providing sexual services for several customers a day (which compensates for the low price of the services) (PEREIRA, PAIVA, SANTOS et al., 2018). The average price of the standard sexual service (not featuring anal intercourse, toys, or fantasies) ranges from 10 to 25 Brazilian Reais, while the number of services provided daily ranges from 30 to 35, on regular weekdays. All respondents stated that on the days near the fifth business day of the month, the number of daily customers increases to an average of 55 and can reach 80 per day.

Work, religiosity, identities, and stigmas

When proposing a discussion on the relationships established between work, religiosity, identities, and stigmas among evangelical prostitutes, several paradoxes and ambivalences emerge. Endless clashes between the sacred and the profane, morals and work, spirituality and survival, the socially accepted and the deviant behavioral patterns, reveal the complexity of such relationships.

That said, it is important to ratify that a prostitute's identity is linked to the stigmas, moral and religious values in force in the Brazilian context, where prostitution is associated with promiscuity, and prostitutes are persecuted and labeled as wandering beings, as their bodies are not safeguarded to the Holy Spirit (LOPES, 2017). Indeed, some biblical passages corroborate this statement. In Ezekiel (16:32-34), for example, prostitutes are seen as harlots, and their "acts of prostitution" should be punished with stoning, as was the case with adulterous women. Therefore, the identities of evangelical prostitutes move between the sacred and the profane, as their religious beliefs and values clash with their occupational practices, which, in turn, highlights the importance of work and its meaning in the formation of subjects' identities (DUBAR, 2005).

All interviews touched on the centrality of work, associating it primarily with one's need to provide for themselves and their families. The purpose of labor is to guarantee personal and family survival, but it eventually becomes the object of condemnation or denial. Women workers seem to be contaminated by the same judgment, to the point where many of them silence or try to conceal any positive presentations that may add value to their work in ambiguities (CANHOLI, JÚNIOR, LIMA et al., 2016).

All interviewees claimed to be aware of the fact that their labor activity "is not pleasing to God's eyes." However, material issues such as supporting their fathers or grandchildren economically or bailing out their children from jail were mentioned

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as justifications for their deviant behavior (STARK and BAINBRIDGE, 2013). The fact that their job is not "pleasing in God's eyes" reveals one of the functions of religion, namely, to make a given moral disposition sensitive through the idea of God. Therefore, besides the fact that prostitution is regarded as inferior, unworthy, and morally devalued for it relies more on one's than mind (HONNETH, 2008), it is also the subject of distinctive and hierarchical comparisons concerning how we behave in relation to ourselves and others (TAYLOR, 1997), due to a set of socially shared Christian values that are classified as wandering and/or evil.

The identity construction process pervades a discursive and interactive gaze (DOWN and REVELEY, 2009), allowing the understanding of the fragmented and multifaceted identities of evangelical prostitutes, manifested through the self-awareness with which they transgress the religious norms that guide their beliefs. Associated with the stigma of the occupation, this gives rise to a process of fragmentation that creates a deteriorated identity (GOFFMAN, 1959), both from their own perspective, as from society as well.

> "I feel very bad, I'm even ashamed to look into my parents' eyes, even knowing that I am the one who supports my family because this thing here is not a job, it's shamelessness" (Samara).
>
> Society perceives Guaicurus as a taint, as the worst of all worlds, including the very people who go there (Michele).

We must emphasize the interdiscourse of prostitution as a work-related stain. According to the definition of "dirty work" (HUGHES, 1958), such activity can "taint" or "stain" individuals physically, socially, and morally. In turn, based on the typologies of dirty work stains (ASHFORTH and KREINER, 1999), prostitution is tainted from a social point of view, which makes them socially invisible, and a moral one, which demeans them as individuals. We notice that "[...] the rules forged on religious, moral, political, and philosophical foundations for centuries will hardly give way to the possibility of prostitution being understood as a work activity just like any other" (BARROS, 2005, p. 12). And as they have singularities opposing the prevailing system of norms and values, prostitutes are symbolically declared to be targets for impurity and social pollution (RIBEIRO, SILVA, SCHOUTEN et al., 2007).

A recurring theme in the interviews refers to the role that prostitutes take on in a patriarchal society grounded on moral and religious values. Some passages assert the importance of prostitutes complying with male desires, while at their homes they should safeguard the figure of an untouchable and chaste woman, with an unblemished reputation.

> We usually hear from the men who come here: "My wife is a churchgoer, she is sacred, and so am I. My wife can't even get down on all fours, because it goes against the principles of our church" [...] as if I weren't [a member of church] too (Malu).

These accounts shed light on significant contradictions in Brazilian society, especially the dichotomy between purity and impurity, wherein the former is associated with sexual abstinence and divides women into two broad categories, namely the wives – the mothers, the foundations of families, to whom sex constitutes a sin if not performed for reproductive purposes – and the "deviant" women who serve the purpose of preserving the virginity of future mothers while fulfilling the "sexual appetite" of the "honest" married gentlemen, the so-called "family men" (LEITE, 1986). This is how the discussion about the "necessary evil," emerges, as prostitutes would serve the sexual freedom of men (LOPES, 2017) while preserving the chastity of "family women", "the daughters of Mary" (MANAIA, 2011).

Regarding the semantic path on the dilemmas and contradictions experienced daily by evangelical prostitutes, we emphasize the confrontation between religious values and occupational practices in the scope of the various dilemmas reflecting the paradox between the sacred and the profane. Indeed, on the one hand, they condemn their job because of the stigma that it is a sin.

> "I know I'm wrong, it's a mortal sin, God doesn't approve of it" (Ana).

On the other hand, they underscore the importance of such activity to provide for themselves and their families, while appealing to faith to attract more clients.

> I know that prostitution is wrong, that it doesn't please my Lord, but every day in my prayers, I beg Him to forgive me and bless my day of work and bring me more customers. [...] I need to get my son out of jail, it's a very important thing for me. I know I'm signing my condemnation, but I'm also saving my son. Even in hell, I think I'd be more comfortable knowing that (Gi).

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Another dilemma emerging from the analysis of identity construction concerns the interdiscourse regarding the "dirtiness" of the money earned in this occupation. There is a widespread idea among most respondents that money earned from prostitution is not honest or fair because it does not derive from an "ordinary," well-accepted job. The money earned by prostitutes is dirty and cursed because men renounce spending it on their families to spend it on them (LOPES, 2017). This perspective is reinforced in biblical passages, as in Deuteronomy (23:18): "[...] thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of Jehovah thy God for any vow: for even both these are an abomination unto Jehovah thy God." To refute this argument, one of the respondents questions the reasons for devaluing her money by denying the existence of a contradiction in donating her earnings to the church (in the form of tithing or offering) because of her occupation.

Why is my money dirtier than that of my pastor, who comes here to fuck me? (Patrícia).

This discursive passage widely manifests the hypocrisy present in our society. Moralistic discourses grounded in religious dogma (i.e., religious discourse condemning prostitution) coexist with veiled practices that oppose it (pastors who lustfully go to bed with the very "abominations to the Lord"). The paradox implies the androcentrism and chauvinism existing in society, which humiliates women for the sake of the pleasure of their very tormentors.

Another common dilemma among evangelical prostitutes refers to the importance of the Holy Scriptures and the Bible's placement during the provision of their services. In one of the respondents' bedroom, the Bible stands out from her other working tools – the book remains open on the top of a nightstand by her bed, while vibrators and dildos are kept at the bottom part. According to another respondent, even if she keeps the Bible in her bedroom, she only provides her services if the book is closed, otherwise the sexual act would constitute a sin in her view.

In turn, the semantic path of the strategies used by prostitutes to deal with the dilemmas and contradictions of dirty work reveals several alternatives created by these workers in their everyday routine, so as to reduce the immorality and guilt that afflict them. Some have reserved rooms, and nothing related to prostitution happens in such spaces, which are reserved for daily penance and prayer. In this sense, religion allows prostitutes to create a set of behaviors and strategies to cope with the suffering derived from their occupation (PAIVA, 1998). Others claim to be striving to treat prostitution as a business like all others, characterizing the change of a stigmatized individual's self, so as to conform to the social norms (GOFFMAN, 1959). In more extreme cases, some women feel they must take antidepressant medication, while others mutilate themselves motivated by existential crises and guilt (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Mutilations

Source: Photograph taken by the authors.

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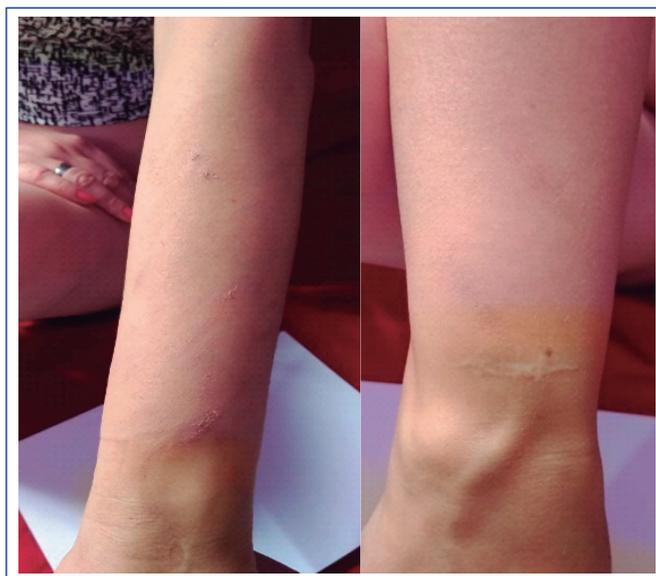
The mutilations seem to operate as maintainers of identities questioned by the women themselves, who feel they must be injured and have visible scars on their bodies. Therefore, they periodically punish themselves, as if to purge or wash away their sins, or to find purification even temporarily. Or in other words, for as long as they can justify themselves and their occupation while continuing to perform it.

Interestingly, unlike most of the prostitutes who remained naked in their service rooms, the prostitutes interviewed in this study did not present themselves like that, to withdraw from the promiscuous harlot stigma. The socialization of prostitutes in the professional world enables the formation of a work identity based on their experiences in the productive universe, which, in turn, leads to power relations and collective behavior rules (MACHADO, 2003). These references reaffirm the close relationship between identity formation and the possibility of concealing one's stigma, as exposed by Goffman (1959), a fact that tends to increase the psychological pressure on the worker and may lead to physical, psychological and socialization problems.

All things considered, it is pertinent to note that in the case of the Brazilian evangelical prostitutes, the stigma of immorality associated with their occupation directly impacts their self-representation (BROWN, 2015). The prostitutes' speeches reveal a deep sense of emptiness and loss. They feel ashamed, guilty, and inadequate, so when they lose their confidence and self-esteem, their moral integrity collapses as well (BROWN, 2015).

Teary eyes, "lumps in the throat", weeping, and manifestations of guilt and shame were recurring during the interviews, especially as the respondents discussed their self-perception, their families and, the paradoxes and ambivalences of their occupation, their values, their personal beliefs, and their relationship with God. These topics reflect the fragmented and multifaceted process through which the identity of evangelical prostitutes arises. Considering that the representation of work is built in a collective environment, fissures and contradictions emerge concerning the importance that a given job acquires for the respondents. If, on the one hand, it is a means of sustenance (this being of crucial importance, according to them), on the other hand, it takes on the role of a source of suffering and shame, particularly due to the stigma surrounding the activity. The stigmas perpetuated in everyday social life reinforce symbolic mutilations at various levels and the (re) construction of the "acceptable" place of these women in society.

The silencing of pleasure in the speeches of all respondents reveals an interesting aspect. A strong dimension of suffering emerges, which is associated with prostitution as an occupation and contradictory when we consider that these women work with the pleasure of others on a daily basis. This fact corroborates and legitimizes the forced economic representation of labor, which overlaps the "sorrowful human condition" (Malu). Therefore, they are not as "wandering" as they seem. In fact, the respondents' attempt to form their identities, attribute meaning to their self-image, and mitigate the stain of their "dirty work" in favor of purity, dignity, and morality, is evident. Finally, it is important to emphasize the unshakable belief of all prostitutes interviewed in God's mercy and in the fact that redemption and salvation on the "day of judgment" are still possible for them. Indeed, this sense of hope is confirmed by some biblical passages:

> "Look, my biggest hope is that Jesus was constantly criticized for hanging out with drunks, prostitutes and homosexuals... And He always said, 'I came to [call] these' (Gi).

While religion emerges as an instrument to rank which jobs are dignified or unworthy, right or wrong, morally reprehensible or not (TAYLOR, 1997), it also proves to be meaningful to life, as it constitutes a way to respond to suffering, death, and misery, serving as a refuge and a form of psychological support that promises salvation and freedom from suffering for its believers (MARIANO, 1999). This aspect reinforces the arguments of Didi-Huberman (2011, p. 84): as the author states that "[...] only religious tradition promises salvation beyond all apocalypse and beyond all destruction of human things." The idea of salvation is found in various details in the prostitution spaces, such as a door to the room of one of the respondents, which reads "In the end, Jesus saves," framed by the figure of a heart, and written in red lipstick (Figure 2).

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Figure 2
"In the end, Jesus saves"
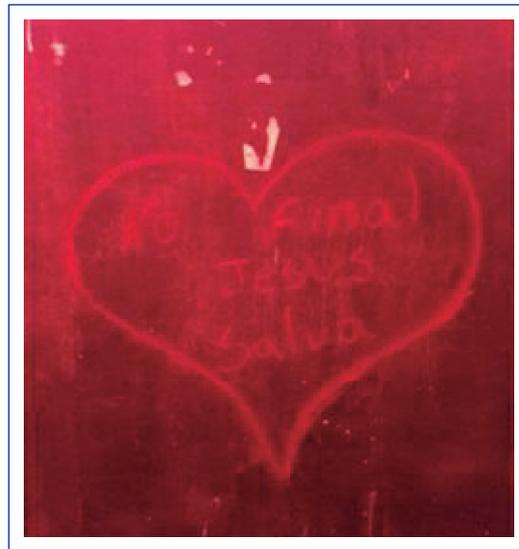
Source: Photograph taken by the authors.

It seems that the ending expressed by the lipstick scribblings and expected by the sinner in question delineates the possibility of a fragmented identity at the present time, or at least for as long as the evangelical prostitute has this occupation. In the future, everything is going to be fine; she will be redeemed and be able to exist in her entirety, without shame or contempt for herself or others. Yet, the message must be ostensibly present so as to intermediate the timespan between stigma and "salvation."

We noticed that prostitutes are frequently stigmatized "[...] not for committing any legal infraction, but for their divergence from the prevailing values that regulate female sexuality and establish a moral idea of order" (SACRAMENTO and RIBEIRO, 2015, p. 200). They are represented as harlots and easy-living women who often perceive themselves as the scum of society (RIBEIRO, SILVA, SCHOUTEN et al., 2007) or the people who perform the dirty work. They are professionals who allow themselves to be subjected to concealment, ignorance, rejection, and denial, which, in turn, often led to a gap of invisibility and oblivion, constituting what society conventionally labels as "marginal occupations" (CANHOLI JÚNIOR, LIMA et al., 2016). As their processes of identification and identity construction are structured in a marginalized and demoralized scenario, their stigma can be understood as a form of identity (GOFFMAN, 1959).

The analysis allowed us to verify that evangelical prostitutes, who are the focus of this study, face the dynamic challenge of building and rebuilding their personal identities every day (CAMPOS and OGUISSO, 2008; AVELAR and PAIVA, 2010) through religion, in the sense of finding out who they are and what others expect them to be (WHETTEN and GODFREY, 1998; BOULART and LANZA, 2007). Paradoxically, in the process of recognizing, analyzing, and approving oneself, religion and morality enable distinctive and hierarchical comparisons concerning the way we behave in relation to ourselves and others (TAYLOR, 1997), by evaluating what is right and wrong, or morally acceptable or not. Broadly speaking, in addition to permeating the transition between humanization and the precariousness of work (DAVEL and VERGARA, 2001), religion operates as a device for evangelical prostitutes to escape the underworld of prostitution and reconnect with the "worthy" world, that is, the transcendent, the society (MOORE, 2004). Therefore, even though they are fervent evangelicals, these sex workers have yet to be converted into "ex-prostitutes". According to them, only such identification will enable the moral salvation, resignification, and repositioning of their identities. Therefore, to have a different end than the prostitutes mentioned in the biblical passages, one must convert and move to "the other side" (LOPES, 2017), although prostitution is their main occupational activity, which provides for themselves and their families.

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FINAL REMARKS

In Brazil, prostitution brings together various stigmas, which are motivated by certain understandings present in the social imaginary. Furthermore, as prostitution may be performed by evangelical women, the stigmas and paradoxes seem to accentuate, for in the eyes of the so-called "ordinary" Brazilian society, that is an unacceptable, blasphemous and strongly repudiated subject. In this sense, there is an intense clash between principles, values, and identities that are socially perceived as antagonistic.

As a result of this, this study has allowed us to identify, in the first instance, a severe feeling of guilt and, in some cases, pain and suffering among evangelical prostitutes, in view of the contradiction of sharing personal values and beliefs that are intrinsically opposed to their occupational practices. However, more objective issues such as providing for themselves and their families have forced them to submit to this reality. In this respect, the ambivalence is characterized by the difficulty that respondents face to organize and attribute meaning to their own world while revealing contradictions, self-stigmatizations, as well as complex and dubious feelings regarding how their self-perception is formed. These paradoxes expressed in ambivalent situations give evidence that they accentuate the process of identity fragmentation and deterioration among evangelical prostitutes.

In order to deal with such stigmas, the respondents rely on strongly ambivalent strategies to find support on an "unreal" reality amid the "stains" imprinted on them. It is interesting to note how their speeches simultaneously condemn and redeem themselves based on biblical teachings, for the same "instrument" is used for symbolic self-mutilation and self-forgiveness. In other words, while religion intensifies the pains of immorality, it lightens the burden of sin imposed on these women by virtue of their occupation.

This study has aimed to contribute and advance the field of organizational studies, in the context of the identity construction process of a professional category that has been scarcely explored, in view of the stigma and marginalization surrounding their occupation. The empirical findings and the originality of the research object (evangelical prostitutes) have revealed specificities concerning these women's identities. Therefore, the aim was to problematize and invite readers to reflect on the role that prostitutes, especially evangelical ones, take on in a moralistic society based on religious dogmas. In addition, we sought to contribute to the empowerment of these professionals by listening to them and enabling their voices and wishes to be read and debated in other instances. Although this empowerment is not so expressive, we believe that the process of academic reflection on the reality of prostitutes is a significant step to render them socially visible and transform the stigmatization and naturalization of their corresponding stereotypes.

Finally, the findings of this study have raised further questions: are religious morality and sexual freedom intrinsically opposed? According to Lhuilier (2010), all professions have "dirty work" aspects, although some in greater proportion and representativeness than others. That said, how do the contradictions discussed herein differ from other professional contexts, whether socially marginalized or not? Along these lines, we suggest that future studies analyze the relationship between religiosity and other categories of work considered morally dirty; the relationship between prostitution and other religions, such as Catholicism and African creeds; and the identity construction process of "dirty workers" that comprise the so-called "imperial professions", that is, those enjoying great representation and social prestige, such as coroner, criminal lawyer, among other individuals who must perform the "dirty work" of a "clean" occupation on a daily basis.

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Between the sacred and the profane: identities, paradoxes, and ambivalences of evangelical prostitutes from a red-light district of Belo Horizonte

Jefferson Rodrigues Pereira | José Vitor Palhares dos Santos
Alice Gerlane Cardoso da Silva | Kely Cesar Martins de Paiva
Alexandre de Pádua Carrieri

Jefferson Rodrigues Pereira

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4837-4063

Doctorate in Business Administration at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte- MG, Brazil. E-mail: jeffersonrodrigues@live.com

José Vitor Palhares dos Santos

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9190-3875

PhD student in Administration at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Substitute Professor at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Minas Gerais (IFMG), Ribeirão das Neves- MG, Brazil. E-mail: titopalhares@hotmail.com

Alice Gerlane Cardoso da Silva

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8084-6019

Doctoral student in Administration at Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte- MG, Brazil. E-mail: alicegerlane@hotmail.com

Kely Cesar Martins de Paiva

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5185-9072

PhD in Business Administration from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Associate Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte- MG, Brazil. E-mail: kelypaiva@face.ufmg.br

Alexandre de Pádua Carrieri

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8552-8717

PhD in Business Administration from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG); Full Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte- MG, Brazil. E-mail: alexandre@face.ufmg.br