

Affective dissonance as a methodological tool: transforming reproductive rights in reproductive justice

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Abstract: Reproductive justice broadens the understanding of sexual rights and reproductive rights and recognizes that economic, social, and structural conditions play an important role in women's experiences on pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum, often constituting barriers to healthcare services and adequate information. Given this, the objective of the present study is to understand how affective dissonance, a concept theorized by Clare Hemmings from the theory of affect, can serve as a methodological tool for academic research, expanding the understanding of reproductive rights beyond their individual dimension to a structural level, considering the operative social markers in play. As a result of this dissonance, we may see a paradigm shift from understanding reproductive rights to thinking about reproductive justice. To do this, we conducted bibliographical research and used the qualitative method of the information collected, using the theory of affect as an epistemic basis, combined with the concept of reproductive justice and intersectionality. In this light, we understand that affective dissonance can be a useful instrument in expanding the conception of reproductive rights, embracing the discomfort that the researcher may experience when faced with a reality different from that expected and, through research, seeking to understand the social aspect and relational nature of these rights.

Key-words: Reproductive justice, Affective dissonance; Intersectionality, Maternity

Dissonância afetiva como ferramenta metodológica: transformando direitos reprodutivos em justiça reprodutiva

Resumo: A justiça reprodutiva amplia a compreensão dos direitos sexuais e direitos reprodutivos e reconhece que condições econômicas, sociais e estruturais operam um papel importante na forma como as mulheres passam pela experiência da gestação, parto e pós-parto, muitas vezes constituindo barreiras ao acesso à saúde e à informação adequada. Diante disso, o objetivo do presente estudo é compreender como a dissonância afetiva, conceito teorizado por Clare Hemmings a partir da teoria do afeto, pode servir como ferramenta metodológica para a pesquisa acadêmica ampliando a compreensão dos direitos reprodutivos para além da sua dimensão individual, considerando aspectos estruturais e os marcadores sociais operantes. Essa dissonância poderia ser o catalisador da mudança

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de paradigma da compreensão dos direitos reprodutivos para a noção de justiça reprodutiva. Para isso, conduzimos pesquisa bibliográfica e utilizamos o método qualitativo das informações levantadas, utilizando a teoria do afeto como base epistêmica, aliada ao conceito de justiça reprodutiva e interseccionalidade. Nesse sentido, compreendemos que a dissonância afetiva pode ser um instrumento útil ao ampliar a concepção dos direitos reprodutivos, abraçando o desconforto que o pesquisador pode experimentar ao deparar-se com uma realidade diferente daquela esperada e, através da pesquisa, procurar compreender o aspecto social e relacional desses direitos.

Palavras-chave: Justiça reprodutiva; Dissonância afetiva; Interseccionalidade; Maternidades.

Sumário: 1. INTRODUCTION. 2. AFFECTIVE DISSONANCE: A TOOL FOR INTERSECTIONAL AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY 3. AFFECTIVE DISSONANCE ON BIRTHING EXPERIENCES: A MATTER OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

This article delves into the idea of “affective dissonance” put forth by Clare Hemmings (2012) within the sphere of affect theory; we propose its use as a methodological tool for promoting reproductive rights with the framework of reproductive justice. Hemmings’ work aimed to exploring the development of a feminist theory based on affects while considering the relationship between epistemology and ontology. She sought to shed light on the structural inequalities faced by individuals and suggested that the development of this theory should not solely rely on an individual's experience or group identity. Instead, Hemmings proposed that affective dissonance could be the catalyst for change.

For Hemmings, for this dissonance to occur, it is fundamental that the difference between an individual's perception of themselves and society's perception of them could lead to transformation. With this in mind, how affective dissonance could be applied as a methodological tool for feminist research, leading towards reproductive justice?

In light of this, we propose an approach based on Hemmings’ concept of affective solidarity that draws on a wider range of emotions such as anger, frustration, and the need for connection, which are essential for a sustainable feminist politics of transformation. However, we do not link these emotions to identity or other group characteristics, instead, affective solidarity is suggested as a means of focusing on modes of engagement that begin with the affect dissonance that underlies feminist politics (Hemmings, 2012).

When conducting research on reproductive rights, the researcher may encounter a variety of emotions that can often be uncomfortable, particularly when examining these issues in the context of social markers of inequalities, such as race, class, and ethnicity,

which can greatly influence how they are perceived. The feeling of discomfort in research can serve as a feminist methodological tool. It can steer researchers towards productive directions in comprehending realities that would otherwise remain hidden, without relying on the argument of empathy to generate affective solidarity (Chadwick, 2021). We consider here affections as non-individual attributes, but products of the subject's construction, not stable depending on reality and experiences (Ahmed, 2004).

Considering that affections are not fixed but move, they are the result of discursive, relational, and material exchanges that permeate the reality of each individual and shape their perception (or affection) towards various subjects. In this way, we understand that affects also “do things in research praxis” by influencing actions and shaping interpretations in scientific production (Chadwick, 2021, p. 557). Scientific research is not neutral, as it is produced by individuals who are not “isolated islands” of knowledge.

With a reproductive justice approach, we recognize that the institutional, capitalist, and patriarchal forces often dominate women’s economic and social status, constituting barriers on access of quality care and information during pregnancy, delivering and post-partum experiences around the world (Sagrestano; Finerman, 2012). The objective of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the thought process behind the concept of ‘affective dissonance’ as presented by Hemmings and how this methodological tool can lead to the transformation of reproductive rights into reproductive justice.

In order to achieve this, we conducted a systematic literature review regarding the conceptual frameworks of reproductive justice and affect theory in virtual databases such as the Omni library platform³, and the Google Scholar both of which direct the researcher to articles and books based on the chosen Keywords (affect theory, reproductive justice, reproduction and Clare Hemmings). Regarding the study of intersectionality, inseparable from the perspective of reproductive justice, we used the concept of Patricia Hill Collins, as she is the one who theorizes and deepens intersectionality as a critical social theory.

With a bibliographical and qualitative research using the theory of affect as a theoretical framework from Hemmings’ perspective, we focused on the concept of reproductive justice, with the aim of delving into the theoretical underpinnings of this construct and the supporting evidence that has been put forth. To do this, we filtered articles that were related to the study and dialogued with affect theory as proposed by Hemmings’s in her piece “Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation”, which

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was the starting point for this research.

Furthermore, we investigate how this concept can be applied to the context of women who are pregnant and/or giving birth⁴. Specifically, we aim to scrutinize the role of emotions in shaping physical experience and how self-perception may diverge from societal norms during pregnancy. The understanding of this disparity through gender studies, could potentially serve as a catalyst for feminist enlightenment, and an action towards a broader understanding of reproductive rights that takes into consideration economic, structural, and social aspects of society, which can't work without social justice.

2. AFFECTIVE DISSONANCE: A TOOL FOR INTERSECTIONAL AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY

Clare Hemmings (2012) developed the theory of affective solidarity. The theory aims to unite epistemology and ontology based on a feminist reflexivity, emphasizing the affects that individuals may experience in their daily lives. In other words, Hemmings (2012) sought to shed light on the structural inequalities that individuals face. She suggests that the development of this theory was not based solely on the experience of a single individual or on identity theories.

Rather than relying on external factors, she proposed that a person's emotional discomfort or dissonance could be the driving force that motivates them to change. This dissonance arises from the disparity between the individual's perception of themselves and how they are perceived by society, as well as the contrast between their personal narrative and the social reality they find themselves in. Given this, Hemmings (2012, p. 150) explains her own experience of dissonance as a driver for her personal change:

It will come as no surprise that as time went on I discovered rather profound differences between my sense of self and the social expectations I occupied with respect to gender and sexuality, and the reflections on my experience of these differences also, I believe, helped me gain some feel for other onto-epistemological gaps with respect to e.g. race, ethnicity, disability or class. [...] What at one time was an affective impulse that made feminism repellent became an impulse that made me cling to it for dear life. Not all feminists come to feminism through self-interest as I did, of course, but nevertheless I want to insist that it is this question of affect

⁴ In this work, we chose to use the expression “women”, although we recognize that transgender and non-conforming people can also have children and need reproductive justice. Their experiences are protected by this framework as they also experience oppression related to the policies of power over bodies, often in a violent and invisible way in society.

– misery, rage, passion, pleasure – that gives feminism its life.

The author acknowledges the relationship between ontology and epistemology as a potential source of dissonance and proposes the concept of affective solidarity as an alternative to the traditional method of understanding relationships based on identity (Hemmings, 2012). This approach emphasizes the importance of affective dissonance in shaping relationships, rather than relying solely on identity. Considering that we are talking about affection, is it possible to use empathy to unite diverse women against structural oppression through their emotions and affections?

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings and experiences of others. Empathy involves imagining what it would be like to be in that person's position. Ahmed (2004) explains that while emotions and feelings are often associated with the term, empathy is more closely related to affection — specifically, the impact that another person has on us and how we respond to that impact.

Hemmings (2012) explores the potential for developing a feminist political theory centered around the ideas of solidarity and affect that doesn't rely on group identity or empathy alone. She postulates that the relationship between ontology and epistemology could be viewed as a connection that could potentially create dissonance leading to action. According to the author, it is politics that drives us to act rather than merely confirming what we already know (Hemmings, 2012).

Several feminist theorists have argued about if it's possible to use empathy as a strategy to unite diverse women through their emotions to fight against structural oppression. Feminist theorists, such as Patricia Hill Collins from black feminism, often use empathy and emotions as potential drivers for social change. For her, the ability to empathize is relevant to feminists who are committed in accessing knowledge different from their own, especially for those in a position of privilege. Empathy is also a condition for these people to be trustworthy by women in vulnerable communities (Collins, 2000). Thus, empathy would be a requirement for white feminist women seeking to engage with other cultures, ethnicities and races.

However, Hemmings believes that current ideas of empathy are not sufficient for creating affective solidarity. She criticizes the concept's assumptions about reciprocity and the emphasis on the empathetic subject's reflexive capacities as the primary way of “resolving difficulties in intersubjectivity” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 152).

The main difference between both perspectives is that, while Collins (2000)

advocates the importance of empathy for social transformation, supported by sociocultural engagement between whites and blacks, Hemmings (2012) understands that assuming empathy underestimates the deep inequalities of race and class that cannot simply be transcended by the willingness of some feminists to connect.

Furthermore, the latter (2012) states that feelings of empathy and pity can be confused when we talk about a transnational feminist perspective moving from the global North to the global South. It can also come from the assumption that the empathizer's background or experiences make them better equipped to deal with difficult situations. However, this belief is often misguided and can lead to a condescending attitude towards the person being empathized with, perpetuating harmful stereotypes or attitudes towards others.

Pedwell and Whitehead's (2012) arguments align with those of Hemmings (2005; 2011; 2012) on the criticisms of empathy. According to the formers, many feminists considered personal bodily experiences more relevant than the structural conditions that surround them, and the epistemology of knowledge that could be used to apprehend this reality. The authors agree with Hemmings (2012) regarding the difficulty of empathizing as a primary form of feminist affect theory, since this feeling of empathy places the empathized other in a position of inferiority, as someone who would benefit greatly from “charitable assistance”.

It's crucial to realize that empathy can sometimes be misguided and create a false sense of superiority. In particular, when empathy is directed towards individuals who are associated with violent behavior or who are viewed as inferior due to their background, it can create a sense of superiority in the empathizer. This sense of superiority comes from the belief that the empathizer is in a better position to understand the struggles of the other person and offer them help or guidance.

It has been argued by Hemmings (2012) that relying on empathy to establish emotional solidarity can reinforce gender stereotypes that associate caring and affectionate traits with women. This can have detrimental effects as it may further propagate the idea that women are naturally submissive and nurturing.

This notion has historically been used to justify various forms of oppression against women in Western societies such as the expectation of mandatory motherhood and unpaid care work, which is predominantly performed by women, as explained by Federici (2019) and has been reinforced as a form of departing women from public/political life. It is essential to be mindful of these gender biases to prevent perpetuating harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality.

According to feminist theorists, affect, knowledge, and power are closely related, and the reason/emotion binary has excluded women from 'legitimate' knowledge production.

Fundamental in this regard have been their efforts to interrogate the gendered nature of the reason/emotion binary. Throughout the history of Western thought, language and ethics, this dualism has functioned to exclude women (and other bodies outside the white, masculine mainstream) from 'legitimate' knowledge production. As Moira Gatens (1996) argues, the concept of rationality (one of the key historical criteria for political participation and other citizenship rights) has been defined in opposition to the qualities typically thought to correlate with femininity and the female body. (Pedwell; Whitehead, 2012, p. 120).

In this context, Hemmings introduces 'affective solidarity' as a concept of moving away from the traditional understanding of relationships based on identity, and instead, understanding it based on emotional dissonance. This dissonance is caused by the difference between our self-narration and the social reality in which we exist. Hemmings draws inspiration from Probyn's (1993) reflection on the need for a 'feminist reflexivity', which highlights the gap between who we believe ourselves to be and how the world perceives us. This negotiation of difference through reflection can be a powerful tool to move individuals towards the desired change:

I want to argue that this affective dissonance is central to feminism and can be theorised as the basis of a connection to others and desire for transformation not rooted in identity, yet thoroughly cognisant of power and privilege. I start from the mechanisms of that impulse to change, from how it feels to experience the gaps between self-narration and social reality. This approach allows us to understand reflexivity as fundamental to feminism and also to see how it is that marginal subjects are so often not enraged at inequality – indeed may be heavily invested in sustaining fictions about present equality – without representing this simply as a failure of knowledge. One may experience affective dissonance in relation to gendering, but not develop or act on a political critique of inequalities (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154).

When developing a policy of affection focused on matter, Grosz (2005) converges with Hemmings (2012). Their discussion highlights the importance of paying attention to matter and bodily experience. Affect dissonance is the heart of affective solidarity, which is based on differences rather than similarities.

Using affect theories, such as affect solidarity proposed by Hemmings, we can analyze the sensations experienced by our body and mind without disregarding the underlying discourses that reinforce stereotypical gender roles. This helps us to examine the

social structure around us and understand the disparity between inner and outer knowledge. By connecting with our bodily experiences and recognizing the associated feelings, we can challenge the discourse that seeks to justify a reality that we may not identify with. This awakening can lead to feminist action.

It is important to highlight that values are sometimes attached to things and people even before the encounter (Ahmed, 2004). Although these valuations are not exactly the truth, contact with individuals brings to light stories and discourses that came before the meeting, which can perpetuate racist perceptions, taken by fear, anguish and disgust (Ahmed, 2004). It means that our emotions are shaped by the social structures in which we exist and interact with others. When two people meet, they are not only affected by that moment but also by their past experiences and knowledge gained from various sources such as the media, family, books, university, etc.

When we meet someone, our past experiences and stories shape how we see them which can sometimes create a sense of threat and influence our beliefs (Gonçalves et. al, 2024). That's why the theory of affect solidarity is so interesting, rather than focusing on the individual, it focuses on their experience and negotiates this reality (ontology) with a feminist reflexivity (epistemology).

Therefore, a feminist theory of affect must consider the complex interplay of past experiences, social structures, and individual differences that shape our emotions and affect our interactions with others.

Collins' concept of empathy, as mentioned, has been criticized by Hemmings (2012) for being limited to the way in which black feminism could expand its borders by relying on the empathy of white feminists. Currently, the emphasis is less on the use of the empathy mechanism itself and more on the concept of intersectionality that supports the diverse performance of feminisms, particularly black feminism (Collins, 2015; 2021).

It is important to notice that black women and women of color were often left out of the conversation in white feminism due to their race, and in the black movement due to their gender. In response, social movements led by these women introduced what would come to be conceptualized as “intersectionality”. This concept has been embraced by academia as a new way of understanding power dynamics (Collins; Bilge, 2016, p. 64). According to Collins' theory of intersectionality, individuals can be affected by multiple social markers that place them at different intersections of society's power structures (Collins; Bilge, 2016).

In other words, intersectionality requires the consideration of all forms of oppression individuals face to demonstrate that single-axis conceptions—e.g., solutions to reproductive

rights that only consider gender — will always be ineffective to a group that is obfuscated in the analysis — in this example, women of colour, as their gender experiences will necessarily be marked by race. This because single-axis considerations only account for the experience of the dominant or more powerful individuals in each group—white women.

The concept of intersectionality considers not only the individuals involved but also the systems and structures that affect them. This approach has proven to be extremely effective in identifying the complexities of feminism and empowering black feminists with independent tools for their struggle. It eliminates the need for white feminists to empathize and directly rely on their support.

Despite the concept of intersectionality having been systematized in 1989 by the author Kimberly Crenshaw, due to the upheavals in the streets and the existing academic production at the time. But the work developed by Collins deepens the studies on intersectionality by allowing it to be used as an analytical tool, and later as a critical social theory. In 2019, Collins published "Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory," which provided a structured framework for comprehending how social markers intersect to create individual experiences. Her contribution to the field of intersectionality helped to deepen the understanding of social theory.

For intersectionality to reach its full potential, the author argues that its thinkers must critically reflect on its epistemology, methods, and ontology. As long as the problems concerned feminist theories continue to be treated as exclusive problems of gender, race, or class, the solution will be unlikely: the use of single-vision lenses to address social inequalities is ineffective for understanding the multiplicity of social problems faced by women (Collins; Bilge, 2021). Intersectionality is the close link between thinking and doing, theory and action, and is critical to achieving social justice.

In practice, intersectionality means that social justice work must be multifaceted and address the complex ways in which different systems of oppression intersect and reinforce each other. It requires a nuanced understanding of how different identities and experiences intersect and impact individuals and communities, and a commitment to addressing these intersections in all aspects of social justice work. By recognizing and addressing the interconnected nature of social categories, intersectionality as critical social theory provides a powerful framework for pursuing social justice.

The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities. (Collins, 2015, p. 2)

In this way, the construction of an intersectional policy of simultaneous identity categories allows non-white women (Latinas, black, indigenous) to develop a policy that encompasses the categories of gender, race and ethnicity. Intersectionality is a field of study that is in constant development, moving away from epistemologies that are often rigid in the academic environment and following social changes in society.

Affect theories in feminist movements need to find ways to negotiate ontology and epistemology, paying attention to reality and the knowledge applied to it. By analyzing affect theory from the perspective of intersectionality, we gain a broader view of how different forms of oppression affect women's understanding of themselves and the world around them.

To better understand this dynamic between affect theory and intersectionality, we seek to apply this conceptual exchange in the context of reproductive experiences, at the time of pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum. With this, we seek to analyze how this can move towards strengthening an epistemology of reproductive justice without losing sight of its applicability to the reality that surrounds us.

3. AFFECTIVE DISSONANCE ON BIRTHING EXPERIENCES: A MATTER OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Experiencing pregnancy can have both positive and negative emotional effects on the individual. During pregnancy and childbirth, medical professionals often assume control, leading to a loss of autonomy for women. This phenomenon can be explained by the concept of affect dissonance, as proposed by Hemmings.

The experience of emotional conflict can lead individuals to desire reproductive justice, which is a crucial aspect of feminist theory. Hemmings' work can aid in the development of a feminist theory of emotion that takes into account the societal structures that impact an individual and the discourse used to legitimize these structures.

Pregnancy is a complex phase in a women's lives that involves significant physical, emotional, and psychological changes. Healthcare systems often fails to recognize the multiple challenges that pregnant women face during this period. The medical perception of pregnancy assumes a paternalistic approach, where the healthcare provider takes the lead

role, and the pregnant woman is seen as a passive recipient for a bigger purpose, the birthing of a child (Martin, 2006). This approach not only undermines the woman's agency but also perpetuates the existing power imbalance between the healthcare provider and the patient.

The concept of autonomy in the context of reproductive justice recognizes the importance of empowering the woman to make informed decisions about her reproductive health. It involves providing the patient with comprehensive information about their health care options and respecting their decision-making process. This approach allows the patient to exercise their agency and make choices among existing models and their providers that align with their values, beliefs, and preferences (Sagrestano; Finerman, 2012).

The anthropologist Emily Martin (2006) describes pregnancy as a moment when the body and speech separate causing the feeling of lack of control over the pregnancy experience. During delivery, pregnant women may feel disconnected from their bodily experiences and lose their autonomy to medical expertise. This can result in objectification and remove the woman's agency as the central subject in the delivery process.

Martin argues that labor and care work, often associated with femininity, are undervalued in a capitalist society, leading to the disregard of women's active role in the process. Despite the self-awareness that pregnant women may develop during pregnancy, medical expectations often override their autonomy, resulting in events happening "to" them instead of "by" or "with" them.

The author examines how cultural norms have influenced women's perception of their bodies and discusses how the process of global industrialization has impacted reproduction. She acknowledges that the reproductive process has been equated with capitalist production and that women are not the ones who hold power in this system (Martin, 2006).

In the field of biology, data have been used to place women in a lower hierarchical position than men. Beauvoir (2016 [1949]) pointed out that the naturalization of motherhood relegated women to second place and undervalued their work. Even in periods of time when motherhood was highly valued, such as when a greater number of births were needed to fill the workforce, women's social mobility was still limited (Federici, 2019)

Since the XIX century, Western medicine, justice, and civil society defined motherhood as the main purpose of women (Pedro, 2022). Even before that, women's bodies were monitored by the State, religious institutions, and the family. It is no coincidence that the medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth in the West coincides with the devaluation of midwifery work in the XIX century, which has moved the center of reproductive control

of female bodies from the sphere of women to the sphere of professional medicine, which was a male sphere at that time (Sagrestano; Finerman, 2012).

Martin (2006, p. 158) uses the metaphor of a doctor as a "supervisor," a woman as a "worker," and the uterus as a "machine" to bring to light the power dynamics involved in the reproductive process. It is worth noting that the term "labor" has been used for centuries to describe both childbirth and production. This irony highlights the undervaluing of reproductive work, which is just as vital to society as other forms of labor.

It is common for anthropologists to neglect the work that women carried out in pre-industrial societies as well as in the present. They tend to only acknowledge the productive work that was traditionally held by men in Western society, as noted by Martin (2006). Similarly, doctors may focus on the use of technology and machines during childbirth rather than acknowledging the work of the person who is giving birth.

Unfortunately, in both cases, women are at a disadvantage. In the first instance, their opinions are disregarded and, in the second, the complex process of childbirth is reduced to a mere production process. This trivializes women's physical, emotional, and mental experiences. Furthermore, since the baby is the "final product", doctors prioritize the medical outcome over any other consideration, even the woman's body.⁵ This often results in the tragic loss of many women's lives during childbirth.⁶

The dualistic approach that currently dominates the Western health system, separates body and mind, assuming that psychological and behavioral processes are independent of the body's illness, encouraging the medicalization of pregnancy as a form of "tame nature and transform life cycle events (e.g., birth, menstruation, menopause, aging, death) into disease states that require medical management" (Sagrestano; Finerman, 2012, p. 202).

This does not mean that modernity and reproductive technologies are harmful, but that the management of these choices must consider the opinion of the pregnant woman, who

⁵ An example of this was the case MC 43-10 decided by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in 2010, known as *Medida Cautelar Amélia*. In Nicaragua, a woman who was fighting cancer requested treatment for the disease, which was denied because chemical and radiotherapy treatment could harm the development of the fetus, which could lead to an abortion. In this case, it was clear that between the woman's life and the fetus's, the second was prioritized, causing Amélia to seek out the Inter-American System of Human Rights to obtain medical treatment, which had already been denied to her by the court of her country of origin. The case is available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/mujeres/proteccion/cautelares.asp#inicio>.

⁶ In Brazil, about 92% of maternal deaths are preventable, which are mostly due to the lack of adequate medical care for pregnant and parturient women, as indicated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2022). In the pandemic, the national maternal mortality ratio, which is the indicator of the number of maternal deaths versus the number of live births, increased by 94%, retreating to the levels of two decades ago, as indicated by the Fund. Likewise, between 2019 and 2021 the total number of maternal deaths increased by 77% in Brazil (UNFPA, 2022).

must be fully informed so that she can give her free and informed consent. This agency from the perspective of reproductive justice refers to the individual's ability to autonomously exercise reproductive choice among existing models and their providers (Sagrestano; Finerman, 2012), and this process is strongly influenced by social markers in which women can be included, such as race, class and ethnicity.

However, focusing only on autonomy from a reproductive justice perspective is insufficient. The reproductive rights movements often center around the language of choice, but this can inadvertently leave a critical aspect of the issue in the background: the need for economic and social resources that most women require. These resources may include access to healthcare services, comprehensive sex education, affordable childcare, and more. Indeed, giving women “choices” has eroded the argument for state support, because women without sufficient resources are simply held responsible for making “bad choices” (Oliveira, 2021, p. 9). Failing to address these needs can perpetuate systemic inequalities strongly marked by racist processes that ultimately undermine the movement's goal of achieving true reproductive justice for all women.

Patriarchal and racist structures that surrounded women affect them in ways that raises important questions about both academic research and the wider world. This impact can be captured through the concept of affective dissonance, which enabled a critical examination of structures and practices that had been considered natural and unchallenged, entrenched in the social imaginary. This dissonance helped to bring into question the crystallized norms in our social imaginary.

When we focus on transforming politics, it's important to consider the entire reproductive process and the healthcare that women receive before giving birth. The moment of childbirth reflects a culture that often ignores women's opinions and perspectives. It's not surprising that this process culminates during childbirth, a time when women are even more vulnerable than usual.

In this sense, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has already warned of the need for States to guarantee appropriate obstetric services for pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum, free of charge when necessary. Several human rights treaties have established that preventable maternal mortality is a violation of women's right to life. The CEDAW Committee has further determined that the absence of adequate maternal health services infringes upon the right to health and non-discrimination (OEA, 2019).

Obstetric violence is still one of the most common practices at the time of birth,

which refers to actions or omissions committed by health care agents in public or private health services, that characterize discrimination, disrespect, neglect, and dehumanization of women, causing physical, moral, or psychological harm to them (WHO, 2015; ONU, 1979).

According to data from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), obstetric violence includes: (1) leaving pregnant women waiting for many hours unnecessarily; (2) immobilizing their bodies; (3) delivering births without anesthesia when this is not requested, or the abuse of unjustified medication; (4) invasive practices; (5) psychological offenses such as humiliation, omission of information, infantilization; (6) carrying out non-urgent procedures without the woman's authorization, such as forced sterilization and (7) sexual violence during this period of most vulnerability (OEA, 2019).

Obstetric violence is a prevalent but often invisible practice in most countries in the American continent, as per the Commission's report. It stems from the unequal power dynamic between doctors and women, which is further compounded by the vulnerable state of women during childbirth (CIDH, 2015). Due to the private nature of the practice, it is challenging to quantify and measure obstetric violence. Moreover, it is often challenging to prove, given that the victims are frequently unconscious.

In 2016, a quarter of pregnant women in Mexico reported experiencing obstetric violence during childbirth or the postpartum period. Similarly, one in four women in Brazil experienced this violence in the same year. In 2017, there were 89 reported cases of obstetric violence in Argentina (OEA, 2019).

To prevent these harmful practices from being continued in society, it is necessary to address them before pregnancy through preconception health.⁷ This means that attention must be given to women's health before conception, as it is a crucial factor in ensuring safe, desired pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum experiences. Women should be able to exercise their right to make informed decisions regarding their reproductive process.

Preconception health includes recommendations for periodic and preventive medical consultations, intervention for identified risks, government public health programs, investment in research and monitoring of results, addressing chronic diseases, assessment of hereditary health problems, nutrition care, preventive action against abuse of alcohol and

⁷ We emphasize that this article was written from a Brazilian perspective, a country in which there is a free public health system, the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde* - SUS). In the absence of a comprehensive public care system like the SUS, even though it presents several problems, preconception health is a burden in the lives of poor women who do not have the financial means to cover medical expenses. Furthermore, in the absence of a public system, there is a risk of blaming women for not seeking prenatal care.

substances, and programs to prevent unwanted pregnancy (CDC, 2006).

Political action should focus on promoting access to education and eliminating social inequality. This way, women can have the freedom to choose from a variety of options that fit their reality best. While factors such as ethnicity, class, age, religion, and education can affect healthcare preferences, broader structural forces like poverty, racism, patriarchy, and xenophobia can create significant barriers to the exercise of reproductive rights (Sagrestano; Finerman, 2012). Therefore, recognizing the need to address reproductive rights in a broader way, so that women know what their rights are and, more than that, have the capacity and structural conditions to exercise them, it is necessary a perspective that starts from reproductive justice.

To ensure that mobilization happens towards improving women's health: (1) it's essential to ensure that women's healthcare is made available fully and widely even before conception, covering health beyond the reproductive system, including for those who don't intend to have children, offering methods for its prevention; (2) during pregnancy and childbirth, all women should be given the freedom to choose from available options, taking into account factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and geographic location; (3) women should be equipped with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions that best suit their individual reality.

In addition to the dissonance that a woman may feel when going through an embodied experience, affect theory can also be useful for scientific research, without the need for only women (or women who have already had a pregnancy and gone through a traumatic experience) to be able to use it. Questions raised by many women over the years, whether inside or outside the academic environment, were important for a gradual change in society.

For Åhäll, an academic interested in changing the status quo of global politics would benefit from a feminist methodology based on the discourse of an affect theory that provides tools to think beyond what is already known and assumed, that “what-goes-without-saying” (Åhäll, 2018, p. 43). What we propose here is the use of affective dissonance as a methodological tool to be used in the field of social and applied social sciences in the analysis of data collected in the field of reproductive rights.

Consider the following scenario: a researcher is studying the effectiveness of a public policy related to pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care. The policy seems to make sense and shows signs of being efficient based on the researcher's subjective experience, but when the researcher looks at the data with a critical epistemology, they

realize that there is a higher incidence of maternal deaths among poor and racialized women. Furthermore, the policy implementation has had little to no effect on these women. This realization can create discomfort as the researcher realizes that their subjective experience of the policy's effectiveness is vastly different from what the data and studies reveal.

The affective dissonance may arise from there, and with a feminist epistemology it can serve as a methodological tool. This tool helps us to better comprehend reproductive rights and the importance of analyzing them in an intersectional manner that considers the social and structural aspects that shape how these rights are experienced. This realization can lead us towards reproductive justice.

4. CONCLUSION

During pregnancy and childbirth, women often experience a loss of autonomy as medical professionals take over, this can cause emotional conflict and lead to a desire for reproductive justice, a key aspect of feminist theory. Hemmings' work helps develop a feminist theory of emotion that considers the social structures impacting the individual, as well as the discourse used to justify these structures.

It is interesting to start thinking about an affect theory using intersectionality as a critical social theory, privileging the effective change that arises from affective dissonance and encompasses the complex and diverse social conjunctures of women's lives. Intersectionality looks at these forms of oppression that are marked on bodies, such as gender, race, class, nationality, and disability, and embraces these bodily sensations, which leads to affect dissonance. Those diverse conjunctures work in ways that should be taken into account in birthing experiences.

The healthcare system's impact on women during delivery is not uniform across diverse backgrounds, races, and ethnicities. These factors, along with other inequalities, contribute to varied experiences and outcomes, with many encountering some level of affective dissonance that could potentially lead to affective solidarity. On the other hand, these shared experiences of dissonance can also lead to affective solidarity among women, providing a foundation for mutual support and advocacy.

In the context of researching reproductive rights, examining social variables can elicit uncomfortable emotions. The feeling of discomfort in research can be used as a feminist methodological tool to comprehend hidden realities without relying on empathy for affective solidarity (Chadwick, 2021).

Our goal with this study was to explore the ways in which affect theory, through the concept of affective dissonance, can be a methodology to reveal structural inequality in relation to reproductive rights during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. By applying this approach, we aimed to shift the focus of reproductive rights towards the framework of reproductive justice.

In order to take action for reproductive justice, it's important to recognize and address the discomfort that academics may experience when confronted with social issues. The academic environment isn't exempt from preconception and biases, therefore, it's necessary to use a methodology that allows a broader understanding of reproductive rights. To mobilize scientific research in the field of reproductive rights in favor of reproductive justice, we can use the concept of affective dissonance towards the social and relational aspects of those rights.

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