

ARTICLE

“One is not Born, but Rather Becomes, a Woman”: Impressions of Women on the Career in Agribusiness and its Spaces

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ABSTRACT

Studies on gender discrimination and women's careers in organizations reinforce how much women are silenced in their speech, undermined in their skills, and paid less than men. However, there is little research on this topic in the context of agribusiness. In this sense, the objective of this study was to understand how gender discrimination is seen by women graduating from agricultural sciences programs. As a methodology, a questionnaire was applied and 315 respondents answered, and a Factor Analysis and, later, a Cluster Analysis were carried out. Five factors were identified, and, from that, two clusters were defined, called “maintainers of the patriarchal system” and “aware of protagonism”. Both clusters demarcate tensions about how women see discrimination and experience the multiple unfoldings of sexist behaviors and attitudes that permeate their career pathways in agribusiness.

KEYWORDS

Agribusiness, Career, Discrimination, Gender, Women

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Raising awareness on women and the spaces they seek to take up or have already earned is a broad topic on research and organizational agendas, as well as the advancement (or not) of the so-called “achievements”. Studies from the perspective of gender in organizations show, for example, several contributions on the challenges experienced by women when building up their careers (Lemos et al., 2020). Aspects such as those addressing how much women are silenced in their speech, how much they need to continually demonstrate their skills and express that they are as competent as men are recurrent and persistent (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Calás et al., 2014). And gender inequality continues to be on the stage and poses one of the key issues in studies concerning women (Hooks, 2018). This inequality is recognized in terms of salary, career choice, field of work and so on.

By adding up the debates about the glass ceiling and the conflicts arising from the work-family relationship, it is once again evident that women are constantly in a conflicting situation regarding their professional careers (Santos et al., 2014). On the one hand, the echoes of feminism since the 1970s have opened many doors for women to have legitimate space in the job market, although, in this matter, it should be taken into account that only a very specific selection of women—middle-class, white, heterosexual and with higher education— have been successful. On the other hand, decades have passed, and women continue to earn lower wages than men, having to make choices between work and family, and often experiencing discriminatory situations (Souza et al., 2013).

While this panorama is given in the classic gender literature (Calás & Smircich, 2006) and continues to be revived in current debates, this research is focused on women who seek to build up careers in fields related to agricultural sciences. There are few studies that aim to understand the perspective of women who work in agribusiness (Menezes & Silva, 2016; Schwaab et al., 2019). Upon querying databases of papers in the area of management, both national and international, research on women’s careers outside the organizational mainstream is not usually found. There is some literature on women in family farming and in rural areas, but they are outside the scope of the field of administration and lack a closer look at this field.

This paper specifically aimed to look at women graduating from higher education in the field of agricultural sciences (agronomic engineering, forestry engineering, food sciences and others). In general, these courses are dedicated to enable professionals for the work in agribusiness. Agribusiness is understood here as any operation concerning “the manufacture and distribution of agricultural inputs, production operations on the farm and storage, processing and distribution of agricultural commodities” (Santos et al., 2021, p. 39).

According to IBGE (2021), only 36.7% of enrollments in higher education in the area of “agriculture” are occupied by women. In the area of “engineering and related professions”, the proportion of women is 21.6%. On the other hand, in the area of “wellness” the proportion is 88.3% of women in higher education. These proportions already raise concerns, especially when considering a literature that says that women are more inclined to work in fields related to care, while engineering is aimed at men, who are considered to be more “rational”. Thus, social representations of gender extend across careers (Antunes et al., 2018).

In this sense, the objective of this research was to understand how gender discrimination is seen by women graduating from agricultural sciences. Based on a quantitative investigation, this research seeks to contribute to broadening the debate on gender beyond the traditional boundaries of organizations and to emphasize that gender discrimination is quite evident in agribusiness careers.

2.1. WOMEN'S CAREER: CAREERS MARKED BY GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Several Brazilian studies have explored the career of women in organizations. Authors inspired by this topic argue that Brazilian society is fundamentally sexist and relegates a secondary role to women in all spheres of life, including organizational ones (Souza et al., 2013).

The inclusion of women in organizations reflects a path full of mishaps. Among the main barriers, we highlight the depreciation of individual skills, wage inequality, the incipient presence of women in high management positions, the presence of the glass ceiling and its consequences, problematization of attitudes and clothing, and a continuous need for probation (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2016; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018; Souza et al., 2013).

Most recent studies on women in organizations focus, particularly, on the characteristics of executive women (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Duarte & Gallon, 2021; Santos et al., 2014). The justification that motivates studies on this topic is the low presence of women in these circumstances, given that statistical data attest to the increasing inclusion of women in the labor market and the proportion of men and women at the top of the organizational hierarchy (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2016).

The literature highlights the existence of a movement of "masculinization" of women in the work environment as advances in the organizational structure occur (Duarte & Gallon, 2021). Women understand that values socially associated with the feminine, such as the expression of emotions, are not appreciated in organizations and, therefore, should be minimized or replaced (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Souza et al., 2013). Thus, women incorporate management roles associated with men and become more rational in their attitudes and behaviors, using a louder and more directive tone of voice, imposing themselves more and becoming less flexible (Henderson et al., 2016).

According to Souza et al. (2013), executive women or women in leadership positions are continually tested regarding their competences. Flaws are always associated with being women and, therefore, tend to justify the absence of women in top positions (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). In addition, the professional pathway of women in management positions is usually undervalued and invariably associated with positions achieved in exchange for sexual favors (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010).

The issues that women face in their professional careers motivated the discussion about the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon, which highlights invisible barriers preventing the vertical rise of women in organizations. Invisibility is understood through subtle and masked discriminatory practices that do not reveal prejudice against women. Thus, women are part of an organizational structure that contains inaccessible spaces – male strongholds – regardless of their individual attributes. Knowledge, skills, time in the company, achievement of goals, and production of results are no longer enough to enable career progress due to gender (Santos et al., 2014).

The presence of women in the labor market also incites discussions about pregnancy and motherhood. It is observed that the first years of women's professional development coincide with the period during which the woman is more biologically prepared for pregnancy. Thus, the pressure of the biological time is seen as a dilemma regarding the decision to have a child, which also considers social expectations, especially when the woman is married (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010).

Although, currently, gender disparities are considered smaller than they were a few decades ago, motherhood is still understood as a problem because it triggers a conflict between the public

domain where work is carried out and the private domain, where children are dedicated. The apparent indissoluble imbalance stems from the lack of support from organizations, society, and often the family itself. While motherhood is celebrated from a socially constructed reality, the woman who desires a career finds at that moment a problem for her professional development (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018).

For this reason, studies suggest that a woman's career is marked by instabilities and moments of regression. Women who decide to interrupt their work to dedicate themselves to motherhood find difficulty being able to re-enter the job market earning the same salary or having the same position as before (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010).

In addition to the theoretical debate, some statistical data also strengthen gender inequalities in Brazilian society. In Brazil, women have a higher level of education than men, but their presence in the labor market is still very different. While 73.7% of men over 15 are working, among women this proportion is 54.5%. And among employed women, 29.6% are in part-time jobs (up to 30 hours), versus 15.6% of men (IBGE, 2021). These indicators show that a significant number of women still have unpaid work as their main activity.

After all, women dedicate more than twice as many hours to activities related to household tasks and care, resulting in an average of 21.4 hours per week, when compared to men. On the other hand, men dedicate only 11 hours a week to unpaid family activities. This disparity in hours dedicated to the family is not associated with income, as even among women who make up the group of 20% with the highest incomes, this amount is 18.2 hours per week versus 10.8 hours for men (IBGE, 2021).

In terms of salary, the situation is not very different. According to the IBGE (2021), women earn, on average, 77.7% of the average income of men. As for the occupation of managerial positions, women occupy only 37.4% of the positions. Recent data on inequalities between men and women in Brazil highlight a scenario of timid changes, as identified in the literature.

The notorious phrase by Simone de Beauvoir (2012) "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", and highlighted in the title of this work, evokes the difficulties and barriers faced every day by women in their professional careers. A career marked by silencing, debasement, and permanent questioning. This becomes notorious in the classical literature, as well as in the national literature and in the most recent statistical data. Thus, "becoming a woman" represents a political act for women to conquer legitimate spaces in the work environment and, in the context of this research, also in agribusiness.

On the other hand, Bell Hooks (2018) reminds us that "becoming a woman" is not giving to all women in a clear and evident way. Men and women are socialized in all spaces, from childhood, to incorporate sexist beliefs that privilege the male stronghold. Structural *machismo* (male chauvinism) presents itself as a product of society for the "being". Thus, men and women can be equally sexist in their behavior, speech and attitudes, in such a way that the gender discrimination that permeates women's careers can be materialized not only by men, but also by women.

This scenario of denial of the figure of women in the workplace and in society reminds us of Acker's (1990) contribution, which reinforces how organizations are constituted from gender norms imposed by men. Although, for a long time, the management imagination has persisted that organizations are gender neutral, it has been increasingly unquestionable that organizations incorporate structures, bodies, and positions that privilege masculinity.

Thus, when it is portrayed that many women use strategies to incorporate masculine traits in their behaviors (Duarte & Gallon, 2022), or visualize masculine norms in force that silence and demean them (Henderson et al., 2016), this comes from a permanent tension with sexism.

2.2. THE PLACE OF WOMEN IS ALSO IN THE *AGRO*

Research on women in agribusiness-related environment is still quite scarce. Although there are some notes on the difficulties that women face in “*agro*” (Menezes & Silva, 2016; Schwaab et al., 2019), this is a topic that requires further investigation.

The agronomic area has developed over time, starting from the discovery of the role of the seed in the process of plant development, the determining factor for the human being to go from collection to planting, which was a significant cultural revolution initiated by women, according to the researchers in this area. Women’s main activity was to collect food, and with that they acquired knowledge about vegetables, flowers, and fruits, and about the process of sowing and germination of plants in a natural way, then starting to reproduce intentionally in nearby places (Koss, 2000).

Even with the invention of agriculture being attributed to women, the professions in this area are culturally attributed to men, justified by the need for physical conditioning necessary to carry out work in the field, which involves the use of large machinery and working under the action of climatic conditions, such as rain, cold, and sun (Brumer, 2004). Seeing and finding women working under the exposed challenges was an unlikely reality until recently, since the first woman to receive the title of agronomist and practice the profession was in the year 1940 (Feichtenberger et al., 2010).

There are few studies on the division of labor in agriculture, but even among those who have already addressed this discussion, there is an indication that women are placed in a subordinate position and the work they perform is generally considered only as help or support, even when they work or carry out the same activities as men do (Brumer, 2004).

Although little research has been conducted in the context of agriculture, and more broadly in agribusiness, the publication of the newsletter “Mulheres Rurais” (Rural Women) (Embrapa, 2020) brings some numbers that also reinforce inequality in the countryside based on data from the 2017 Agro Census (Brazilian publication about socioeconomic data in the agribusiness). Among the 5.07 million rural establishments registered in Brazil, only 947 thousand (19%) are managed by women. While in the Northeast region this proportion of establishments run by women reaches 57%, in the Center-West the proportion is 6%. This indicates that gender inequality in the country is also regionalized.

Women who manage rural establishments make up only 14.7% of establishments with vehicles, 5.7% of establishments with implements and machines, 5.6% of establishments with tractors, 1.4% of those with sowing machines, 1.2% of those that have fertilizer machines and only 0.6% of establishments that have harvesters (Embrapa, 2020). These numbers reveal that women not only manage a very small portion of rural establishments but are also ahead of those with the least use of technological resources.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Studies that use validated scales to address the issue of gender discrimination are scarce, given that there is still no consensus among researchers in the area regarding an instrument that is broad enough to address the different spaces in which women are inserted (Torre-Pérez et al.,

2022). As a result of this scenario, for this study, the development of a specific instrument for data collection was necessary.

The elaborated questionnaire consists of socioeconomic questions and a scale to assess the perception of women. The questionnaire was applied via Google Forms using closed questions and a seven-point Likert scale. The assertions to compose the scale were created from the literature discussed in the theoretical framework, focusing on the context of agribusiness.

For this study, the non-probabilistic or convenience type sampling was adopted (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire was distributed through social networks, aiming at the participation of women who had graduated from undergraduate programs within the area of agricultural sciences for a maximum of two years and who had professional experience in agribusiness (current or previous work). There was no geographic delimitation by region or state, since the questionnaire was applied online, allowing for an increase in the scope of collection. Overall, 315 valid questionnaires were collected.

The profile of this sample is composed of women, all of them with a college degree, 80.3% in the Agronomic Engineering program, 15.2% in the Agronomy program, and the rest in related courses. Regarding the age group, 43.8% are between 21 and 30 years old, 32.7% are between 31 and 41 years old and the remaining 23.5% are concentrated in the group over 42 years old. Regarding occupation, 80% are currently working and 20% are not (but have worked previously in the area). In addition to undergraduate degree, 62.2% hold a graduate degree and 37.8% do not, which already indicates a sample with a higher level of education. Finally, regarding family income, 22.6% receive up to R\$ 3,390.00 monthly and the other 77.4% receive values above this, which also indicates a sample with high relative income.

Therefore, to validate the questionnaire, an Exploratory Factor Analysis with the principal components approach, the VARIMAX rotation method and a minimum acceptable factor loading of 0.5, was applied. To adjust the model, 12 variables were excluded, leaving 27 variables distributed in six factors. From the analysis of Cronbach's Alpha, a factor composed of two variables was also eliminated, with the final model having 25 variables distributed in five factors (Table 1).

The factorial model found showed good statistical adjustment, according to parameters proposed by Hair et al. (2009), with a KMO of 0.895, rejection of the null hypothesis of the Bartlett test (χ^2 : 3710.5 and p-value: 0.000), MSA for all variables above 0.5, all commonalities above 0.5 and explained variance of 62.202%. The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis reinforced the consistency of the questionnaire developed. Also, the variables created for this study were formulated in Portuguese, thus all the parameters found reflects the Portuguese version of the scale, therefore, do not apply for the English version.

The designations presented for each factor reflect the total dimension and were used to facilitate the understanding of the use of the factors in the subsequent stages of the analysis. Regarding nomenclatures, Factor 1 "The agrarian area that discriminates" brings the notion of gender discrimination in the agrarian area as a whole, on how these women see the field of work in which they are inserted. Factor 2 "Perception of gender discrimination in the work environment" expresses how these women see situations of discrimination that involve them in their work environments. Subsequently, Factor 3 "Being a woman in the agrarian area" addresses the question of "being a woman" for these women, what this position means, its implications and what challenges derive from being a woman, with the context of the agrarian area. Factor 4 "Choice of career in the agrarian area" advances on the choices that led these women to choose this area. And Factor 5 "Choice of undergraduate degree" explores the elements that led these women to choose higher education in the agricultural area.

Table 1
Factors and factor loadings

	Component					Alpha	Designation
	1	2	3	4	5		
I believe that the agronomic area distinguishes between men and women	0.762					0.827	
The agronomic area is an environment with a predominance of men	0.719						
There are few women recognized as a reference in the agronomic area	0.712						The agrarian area that discriminates
I feel that women are discriminated against in selective processes in the agronomic area	0.678						
I feel that the agronomic area is male	0.654						
In the agronomic area men benefit more	0.642						
I perceive barriers in hiring women in the agronomic area	0.631						
I often hear sexist comments in my field of work		0.732				0.839	
I often need to prove that I am capable of carrying out my job		0.706					Perception of gender discrimination in the work environment
I get interrupted in my speech by men at my job		0.692					
I need to impose myself to be respected in my area of work		0.628					
I feel that it is more difficult for a woman to reach the level of management in my area		0.58					
I feel that the agronomic area masculinizes me			0.761			0.838	
I've thought about changing areas because I feel discriminated against for being a woman			0.736				Being a woman in the agrarian area
I've already doubted my skills in the agronomic area because I'm a woman			0.714				
I already felt insecure in my professional choices as a woman			0.585				
The agronomic profession has changed the way I see feminism			0.577				
I need to assume masculine behaviors to be respected in my area			0.56				
Holding a degree in agronomy has given me a better socioeconomic condition				0.809		0.768	Career choice in agriculture
Holding a degree in agronomy facilitated my entry into the job market				0.77			
I see advantages in pursuing a career in the agronomic area				0.755			
I feel valued in my work				0.634			

Table 1*Cont.*

	Component					Alpha	Designation
	1	2	3	4	5		
The area of work has influenced my choice for the course					0.81	0.719	
The title in a program in the agronomic area has influenced my choice for the course					0.795		Choice of undergraduate program
Opportunities to work in the agronomic career have influenced the choice of the course					0.704		

Source: prepared by the authors.

Based on the factors found, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed, using Ward's method and quadratic Euclidean distance. The motivation for using cluster analysis at this stage of the research emerged from the understanding of feminist theory that recognizes the plurality of manifestations of "being" and "becoming" a woman, rejecting a stable and universal figure of the "woman" (Hollanda, 2019). Thus, it is recognized that it is not appropriate to take the perception of women graduating from the agricultural sciences as a single vision, therefore enabling the identification of different perceptions.

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Based on the literature used and the relative size of the sample, we opted for the solution with two clusters, despite having evaluated the combinations for one, two, three, and four. The solution with two clusters was the one that most evidenced the different perceptions between all of them. Table 2 presents the results of the factors for each of the selected clusters. It is important to indicate that the results between 1 and 3 are answers that tend to disagree with the statements that make up each factor, 4 represents the middle of the scale and is considered neutral here, since there is no clear position between agreement and disagreement, and the results from 5 to 7 are answers that tend to agree with the statements that make up each factor. These results come from the seven-point Likert scale used in the applied questionnaire.

Table 2*Clustering with solution for two clusters*

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Comparison	
Factor 1 – The agrarian area that discriminates	4.05	5.76	N	C
Factor 2 – Perception of gender discrimination in the work environment	3.48	5.56	D	C
Factor 3 – Being a woman in the agrarian area	2.01	4.52	D	N
Factor 4 – Career choice in agriculture	5.26	5.05	C	C
Factor 5 – Choice of undergraduate program	3.68	4.3	D	N
Number of women per cluster	139	176		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Key: D is equivalent to "Disagree", C is equivalent to "Agree" and N is equivalent to "Neutral".

To help the characterization of the clusters, crossings were carried out between the socioeconomic variables collected and the groups, with the application of the Chi-Square Test for comparisons of non-metric variables. It was found that, for the monthly family income variable (χ^2 : 13.269 and p-value: 0.039) and age group (χ^2 : 11.938 and p-value: 0.018), there was a statistically significant difference between the clusters. In the case of the first variable, cluster 1 was more associated with incomes above R\$ 6,780.00 and cluster 2 was more associated with incomes below R\$ 6,780.00. In the case of the second variable, cluster 2 was more associated with the age group from 21 to 41 years old and cluster 1 to the age group from 42 to 63 years old. Next, each cluster and its characterization will be presented.

4.1. CLUSTER 01 – MAINTAINERS OF THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

The first cluster is composed of 139 women and represents 44.1% of the sample. This cluster was called “maintainers of the patriarchal system” because it represents a group of women who do not see gender discrimination. For the three initial factors, these women assume a position of disagreement or passivity in relation to discrimination.

In the first factor (The agrarian area that discriminates), this cluster shows indifference to the various statements that seek to understand the perception of gender discrimination (Santos et al., 2014), specifically in the agronomic area. As observed in the literature, agriculture is an area of activity that historically privileges the figure of men to the detriment of women (Brumer, 2004). However, this does not seem to be sustained in this cluster.

It is noted that there is not even a position of absolute agreement, but there is also not a great deal of disagreement regarding the first factor. This may indicate that these women have some level of discernment about the issue of gender in their professional trajectories, but this does not cause discomfort or harm. In other words, gender discrimination is not an important issue for women.

Factor 02 (Perception of gender discrimination in the work environment) highlights this positioning, since this cluster was against situations of discrimination at work, contradicting an extensive literature that reinforces the existence of several discriminatory practices against women (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2016; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018; Souza et al., 2013). In this sense, these women disagree with statements such as “I often need to prove that I am able to perform my job”, “I often hear sexist comments in my field of work” and “I need to impose myself to be respected”.

This first cluster opposes the literature on gender discrimination that has historically reinforced women’s struggle against stereotypes and social roles that continually subjugate women. It is a cluster that does not support the existence of discrimination. Quite the contrary, this cluster may even indicate an interface of structural *machismo* that makes women themselves incorporate and reproduce sexist behaviors (Hooks, 2018). That is, the results associated with this group for the first three factors may indicate that these women do not believe that there is gender discrimination in the agronomic area.

Recognition of gender discrimination is not a premise for a woman simply because she is a woman. According to Hooks (2018), individuals are socialized from childhood to incorporate sexist beliefs that privilege men. That’s why women can be just as sexist as men. From the characterization of cluster 01 in the first three factors, it can be inferred that these women maintain a system of repression against women themselves.

The most striking socioeconomic variables for cluster 01 were income, specifically in the income stratum above R\$ 6,780.00, and age, as this is a cluster composed of women between

42 and 63 years old. Thus, it is noted that this cluster is mainly represented by older and high-income women. Although it is not possible to infer absolutely, this cluster may be portrayed by a group of women who have been working for a longer time in the agronomic area and who face the privileged position of men quite naturally. They deny the phenomenon of the glass ceiling, and do not recognize the degrading faces of *machismo* (Santos et al., 2014).

The results found by Duarte and Gallon (2022) corroborate the findings of this research for cluster 01, since the executives interviewed by the researchers are mostly in this same age group and with a high-income stratum. Duarte and Gallon (2022) show that executive women tend to deny the difficulties experienced by women in their career paths and reproduce sexist behaviors associated with the preservation of masculinity in the workplace.

The third factor (Being a woman in the agrarian area) is the one with the highest level of disagreement for the cluster. This factor will mark a position that these women do not feel insecure in their professional choices, they have not thought about changing areas and they do not doubt their abilities because they are women. In this factor, there is also disagreement for the statement that the profession in the agronomic area has changed the way this woman sees feminism.

Based on the statements of the third factor, it would be possible to consider the hypothesis that these women are very sure of themselves and do not see the fact of “being a woman” as an impediment to working in agribusiness. However, there is a mismatch between this hypothesis in relation to the other two initial factors that reinforce the invisibility of discrimination.

Therefore, these women with higher incomes and older age can more clearly admit that the scenario indicated in the literature on gender discrimination in organizations and in the agribusiness context (Brumer, 2004; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018) is not preventing them from building careers in this sector. These women already have greater maturity associated with their professional choices and their careers. But this path developed in agribusiness also did not break with gender stereotypes, nor did it even generate a recognition that discrimination exists in organizational spaces (Acker, 1990). The statement “the agronomic area *does* not masculinize me” also points to disagreement with the literature (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Souza et al., 2013). After all, for women, “the agronomic profession has changed the way I see feminism”.

Factor 04 (Choice of career in the agrarian area) is the only factor that has a high level of agreement for the first cluster. Given that this cluster was characterized as having higher income, the statement “holding a degree in the agronomic area provided me with a better socioeconomic condition” is evident. This cluster also supports the position that a degree in agronomy facilitated entry into the job market and that there are advantages to pursuing this area. In addition, these women feel valued in their work.

However, factor 05 (Choice of undergraduate degree) presents disagreement for the cluster. This factor reinforces that the undergraduate program in the area of agricultural sciences was not a result of interest in the area, the title in the area or a previous performance in agribusiness. Although these women show an interest and see advantages in continuing in the agronomic area, the sector was not a premise for choosing the undergraduate course. It is not possible to ascertain from the answers what motivated this cluster specially to choose agricultural sciences, but it is plausible to infer that these women are satisfied with their careers.

From the identification of the level of agreement of the women who make up cluster 01 for the five factors, the nomenclature “maintainers of the patriarchal system” was used to reinforce the presence of a cluster that was able to gain space in a context that has a strong dialog with gender discrimination (Brumer, 2004), but at the same time does not visualize this discrimination in the area and in their work environment. Again, corroborating Hooks (2018), this is a group of

women socialized in the patriarchal system, which possibly sustains sexist attitudes and behaviors, without the awareness that there is a scenario of repressive discrimination against women. For these women, gender discrimination is not an issue.

4.2. CLUSTER 02 – AWARE OF PROTAGONISM

The second cluster, composed of 176 women (representing 55.9% of the sample), received the name of “aware of protagonism”, for being a cluster that showed to observe more factors related to gender discrimination. For the factors “The agrarian area that discriminates” and “Perception of gender discrimination in the work environment”, this cluster showed agreement, with the level of agreement for the first factor being higher than the level of agreement for the second factor. For the factor “Being a woman in the agrarian area” this cluster presented neutral results (but it is worth mentioning that it was higher than the other cluster). For the factor “Choice of career in the agrarian area” there was again agreement, and, for the factor “Choice of undergraduate program”, they also remained neutral.

In summary, this cluster was characterized as: (1) women recognize that the agrarian area has many elements that are consistent with gender discrimination and at the same time indicate that they feel this discrimination in their own skin; (2) these women are neutral regarding being a woman in the agrarian area; and (3) these women have no doubts about their career choices in the agrarian area, but, at the same time, they are neutral in relation to the choice of their undergraduate courses in this area.

Regarding the statement that women recognize, in the agrarian area, elements that foster gender discrimination (Brumer, 2004; Menezes & Silva, 2016; Schwaab et al., 2019), certain propositions stand out. First, that greater insight can come from a greater understanding of the world around them. In addition, these women may be in less egalitarian environments or organizations and, as a result, be more aware of discrimination. Also, due to the class and age selections, the fact that these women are younger and from lower income strata, this characterization can influence the way they see and feel gender discrimination.

The first assumption brings the discussion about how gender discrimination is currently treated and how women saw it in the past. This is because, currently, debates on this topic are more present, including in organizations, which leads to the belief that these women may be part of the portion that has more access to gender discussions, which could lead to the fact that they are more aware of their role, or protagonism, in relation to their placement as women in the labor market.

However, instead of these women having more access to gender discussion, in fact they may be experiencing discrimination more intensely on a daily basis, as they are inserted in hostile environments for them. This situation is evidenced in the literature on women’s careers (Carvalho Neto et al., 2010; Santos et al., 2014). And this discussion is also plausible, as there is not enough information about the workplace of each of these women.

Regarding the third assumption, the literature brings the strong relationship that can exist between intersections of social categories, such as gender, class, and age (generational). Here, the generational factor is pointed out as a strong indicator of how these women may differ from the first group, because they are in a younger age group, or because they are considered younger. And this relationship is pointed out because, as indicated by the literature, the way women see gender inequality in the world and with themselves has a great influence on the way they were raised, since it is the parents who socialize and influence the way their children see the world (Hooks, 2018).

Even though these older daughters can change their perception of the world, this root is still present and can affect the way these women even classify what would be gender discrimination for them, given that many sexist behaviors are normalized and, therefore, this, they are not problematized by women. And what happens in this cluster may be an influence of the new generation, who were born with greater access to information than their parents, were influenced by digital media and had more access to discussions of topics such as gender.

For the income selection, several questions arise, as if the influential class position would be in the way these women experience discrimination. In addition, it would be possible to question whether these women are paid less, as they are in more discriminatory environments, corroborating data from the IBGE (2021) that indicate that women earn less than men on average.

Then, regarding the second characteristic pointed out for this group, the indication that these women are neutral in the factor regarding “being a woman” can indicate two possible situations. The first is that they feel secure about their place in the world and the fact that they are women, but at the same time they perceive that the structure in which they are inserted makes their own notion of security more difficult, and therefore they appear as neutral with in relation to that context. And second, as a counterpoint, they feel insecure about their position, but there are certain moments that mitigate discrimination because they are women, and as these are moments, they are neutral in relation to this.

Finally, regarding the third characteristic, as well as the first group, these women were certain about their career choices in the agronomic area, which suggests that their perception of this area as discriminatory apparently did not affect their choice process. This may indicate that they were not aware of this scenario before entering the agribusiness context or just that they did not see this context as an impediment. And the fact that they are neutral in relation to the choice of course may indicate a few things, such as the contribution of the undergraduate program being low for their current occupation, or even a possible desire to have chosen a different path at the beginning of their journey.

From the identification of the level of agreement of the women who make up cluster 02 for the five factors, the nomenclature “aware of protagonism” was used to reinforce the presence of a group that recognizes gender discrimination, which experiences the different faces of structural *machismo*, as well as experiencing the multiple unfolding of sexist behaviors and attitudes that permeate the professional careers of women.

While these women are aware of discrimination, they are reluctant to assume a clear agreement regarding the safety of being a woman in agribusiness, or an evident disagreement that demonstrates the risks of being a woman as an impediment to working in the agrarian area. Thus, these women also recognize that there are pitfalls that can jeopardize their positions at any time. The women who make up the second cluster, unlike the first, reverberate that gender discrimination is a problem that exists in agribusiness and that needs to be challenged.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Borrowing the phrase that gives part of the title to this research “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 2012), the main desire of this text was to bring elements that can signal how the professional careers of women in areas still reified by the presence majority of men is perceived by them. The results obtained here revealed aspects that touch on social constructions that support structures. These structures are in the archetype of human actions and denounce how different understandings are, among women, in the relationship of equity between genders and the faces of discrimination.

Thus, based on the research objective that sought to understand how gender discrimination is perceived by women graduating from the agricultural sciences and, having in hand a sample of 315 women, two clusters were formed that, in their analyses, revealed antagonistic results. With emphasis on the fact that the age of the respondents and income were major influencers for the research findings.

The clusters were named as follows: “maintainers of the patriarchal system” and “aware of protagonism”. It is understood with this nomenclature that, although there is a strong discourse of inclusive practices and advances in policies for women, barriers and perceptions about an “apart” remain in force in the consciousness of many women. This raises a warning sign and deserves a close look at the possible silence that still permeates the discussion about women, their work and their areas of activity.

The cluster “maintainers of the patriarchal system” represents women who do not see gender discrimination in their professional careers in agribusiness. This result differs significantly from the vast literature on the subject and from indicators on gender balance that constantly bring data that still place women in a secondary condition when compared to men. In this sense, the non-recognition or invisibility that this group attributes to the disparate conditions between genders endorses the reproduction of a model that still sustains men in their condition of privilege. It is understood that carrying out qualitative research *a posteriori* is very opportune, as it can allow a greater understanding of which elements contribute to the formation of these women’s opinion. It is noteworthy that the non-perception of individual difficulty in the career path should not mark out the numerous collective difficulties of women, present in organizational and social structures.

The cluster “aware of protagonism” represents women who are more alert about their conditions in organizational spaces related to agribusiness, in addition to realizing more clearly how gender discrimination affects them because they are women. In this case, regardless of the reasons that led them to have this greater “awareness”, the counterpoint between the two groups is something that emerges in the debate about the (non) advances in the agendas that talk about and for women.

The results indicate that even considering a profile with similar professional formations and who work notoriously in environments with a majority of men, there is a contrast of understanding existing within the structure of agribusiness itself. On the one hand, women who seem to recognize more clearly how they are affected by this structure, and on the other hand, women who assimilate and tend to normalize historical inheritances, which support the patriarchal model.

The stimuli generated by these results and that echo the provocation brought by Beauvoir, show that the presence of women in agribusiness should move towards a process of emancipation in the face of a “world” that is more prepared for men. Thus, recognizing that there is still no convergence even among women themselves on structures that discriminate or not, shows how much insipience there is still on the issue of equality, women, and professional choices. The field of research should be alerted to the adjustments of its lenses in the investigation of the movements that support the results mentioned above.

It is understood as a contribution of this research the characterization of the profile of the professional woman in the agrarian area, little explored in the context of agribusiness within the perspective of organizational studies. Such results can be considered as important inputs for theoretical and applied advances, because, given the numerous studies carried out with women, observing dichotomies in the understanding of discrimination from a generational perspective can indicate that there are paths and/or actions that are being more assertive and others not when it comes to concepts of equality and marginalization.

As suggestions for future research, in addition to the imminent nature of qualitative research, it is necessary to understand how these disparate perceptions of women in agribusiness can be reflected in other areas related to this context, such as rural spaces and family farming, as well as in teaching and research environments. The replication of the elaborated scale is also proposed as a way of supporting its validation and contribution as an instrument. Finally, it is hoped to awaken future research aimed at looking at the contrasts in the perceptions of women in their professional trajectories regarding gender discrimination in other organizational spaces.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

HB – project administrator, conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing, review and editing of the manuscript. DA – support in project administration, investigation, formal analysis, writing, review and editing of the manuscript. TF – data refinement, methodology, formal analysis, writing, review and editing of the manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors of the present study declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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