

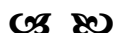
# EDUCATING MOTHERS FOR RAISING AND EDUCATING GOOD CHILDREN: PORTUGUESE PARENTING MAGAZINES AND THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENTIFIC MOTHERHOOD (1945-1958)

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## FORMAR BEM AS MÃES PARA CRIAR E EDUCAR BOAS CRIANÇAS: AS REVISTAS PORTUGUESAS DE EDUCAÇÃO FAMILIAR E A DIFUSÃO DA MATERNIDADE CIENTÍFICA (1945-1958)

### Abstract

Este artigo tem como principal objetivo contribuir para a compreensão do processo de construção da maternidade científica em Portugal. Neste sentido, foi analisado um conjunto de artigos (n=628), publicados em revistas de educação familiar, entre 1945 e 1958. A análise realizada permitiu compreender que as revistas analisadas contribuem para a difusão da maternidade científica, ou seja, da ideia de que a aquisição de conhecimento científico sobre a criação e educação das crianças é elemento indispensável ao adequado exercício da função maternal. Observou-se, ainda, a existência de diferentes estratégias de educação para a maternidade, às quais está subjacente um elemento de classe, assim como diferentes níveis de adesão, por parte das mulheres, à concepção de maternidade científica.

Palavras-chave: maternidade científica, educação para a maternidade, revistas de educação familiar, análise de discurso.

## EDUCATING MOTHERS FOR RAISING AND EDUCATING GOOD CHILDREN: PORTUGUESE PARENTING MAGAZINES AND THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENTIFIC MOTHERHOOD (1945-1958)

### Abstract

This article explores the construction of scientific motherhood in Portugal through the analysis of a set of texts on maternal education (n=628) published in Portuguese parenting magazines from

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1945 to 1958. Our findings show that the dissemination of a particular view of the ideal mother helped propagate a new ideology that stresses the importance of education for motherhood, the ideology of scientific motherhood. It also shows the emergence of different types of educational activities, shaped by women's social class, and provides some insight into the extent to which mothers adhere to scientific motherhood.

Keywords: scientific motherhood, maternal education, parenting magazines, discourse analysis.

**FORMAR BIEN LAS MADRES PARA CREAR Y EDUCAR NIÑOS BUENOS:  
LAS REVISTAS PORTUGUÉS PARA PADRES Y LA DIFUSIÓN  
DE LA MATERNIDAD CIENTÍFICA (1945-1958)**

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo principal contribuir a la comprensión de la construcción de la maternidad científica en Portugal. En este sentido, se analizó un conjunto de artículos (n=628), publicado en revistas para padres entre 1945 y 1958. El análisis permitió entender que las revistas analizadas contribuyen a la difusión de la maternidad científica, es decir, a la idea de que la adquisición de conocimientos científicos acerca de la formación y educación de los niños es imprescindible para el ejercicio adecuado de la función maternal. Igualmente se observó la existencia de distintas estrategias de educación, según la clase social, así como diferentes niveles de afiliación, para las mujeres, a la concepción de la maternidad científica.

Palabras-clave: maternidad científica, educación para la maternidad, revistas para padres, análisis del discurso.

**BIEN FORMER DES MÈRES POUR CRÉER ET EDUQUER BONS ENFANTS:  
MAGASINS PORTUGAIS POUR LES PARENTS ET LA DIFFUSION  
DE LA MATERNITÉ SCIENTIFIQUE (1945-1958)**

Résumé

Cet article a comme but de comprendre le processus de construction de la maternité scientifique au Portugal par le biais d'une analyse de 628 articles publiées dans magasins pour les parents entre 1945 et 1958. Les résultats démontrent que les magasins contribuent à la diffusion de la maternité scientifique, c'est l'idée que l'acquisition de connaissances scientifiques sur l'éducation et l'instruction des enfants sont indispensables pour le bon exercice de la fonction maternelle. Nous avons également observé l'existence de différentes stratégies éducatives pour la maternité, déterminée par la classe sociale, ainsi que différents niveaux d'adhésion, chez les femmes, à la conception de la maternité scientifique.

Mots-clé: maternité scientifique, l'éducation des mères, magasins pour les parents, analyse du discours.

## Introduction

The dominant family ethics in the 1950s, in the Western world, inserted women in the domestic space, particularly after becoming a mother (Allen, 2005; Cova; Pinto, 1997; Odland, 2009; Pimentel, 2011; Rocha; Ferreira, 2006). In Portugal, this ideology of *domesticity* is reinforced by State-driven barriers to women's access to jobs. It should be noted that the measures taken in this direction had some effect, since the female employment rate, which was at 17% in 1940, dropped to 13% in 1950 (Valério, 2001).

This ideology was disseminated using various apparatus and organisations that characterized a period of organised modernity (Wagner, 1998), since they “envisage the cognitive or behavioural modelling” (Candeias, 2005, p. 480) of individuals, that is, behaviour modification and the subsequent compliance of women with their roles as wives, mothers and housewives. This end was achieved through education, regarded by the elites as one of the privileged mechanisms for social intervention.

In Portugal, the elites of the *Estado Novo* clearly understood the potential of education as a socialisation tool. Not only schools were used as a means of ideological inculcation, but also the reinforcement of institutions designed to control families (Nóvoa, 1992; Rosas, 2001), which were created in the 1930s and 40s, examples of which were the *Obra das mães para a educação nacional*, the *Instituto Maternal* or the *Instituto de Assistência à Família*, whose common purpose was to regulate and standardise the behaviour of women and, through them, that of other household members, used education as one of their privileged strategies for the inculcation of dominant ideologies regarding the role of women in society.

However, the focus on educating women was not only the concern with the inculcation of a certain family ethic, but was based on the view that this was the most effective way of addressing the main problems affecting children, more specifically child mortality and morbidity. In a context where there was a greater concern about the population, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, high child mortality and morbidity rates, which had been made quantifiable by applying statistics to demographics, were regarded, by Portuguese elite as one of the most serious issues afflicting childhood (Ferreira, 2003; Ferreira, 2012; Ferreira, M. M. 2000; Pessoa, 2005; Pimentel, 1999).

In spite of the awareness that phenomena such as poverty, malnutrition or poor living conditions can contribute to this problem, these were often ignored in the public discourses about childhood. Mothers were considered responsible for the death of small children, or more particularly their ignorance with regard to the scientific facts of parenting (Adão; Remédios, 2005; Apple, 2006; Arnup, 1994; Litt, 2000; Martins, 2011).

Paradoxically, the enhancement of the mothers' role in their children's upbringing, and their responsibility for the development of future citizens, was accompanied by criticism directed at the mothers' educational capacity. While focusing - in the first two decades of the 20th century - on the mothers of the working classes, such criticism rapidly expanded, becoming universal in the 1940s, extending to women from all social classes (Vilhena, 2002). Such criticism was the product of an emerging ideology of scientific

motherhood (Apple, 2006), based on the belief that in order to effectively exercise their maternal duty, mothers needed to know and comply with the rules drawn from childhood sciences, resorting to the advice of experts.

As several authors have shown (Apple, 2006; Armstrong, 1995; Ferreira, M. M. 2000; Rose, 1999; Stearns, 2003), maternal ignorance was the argument experts used to legitimise intervention with women, thus paving the way for action by childhood professionals - doctors, educators, psychologists and psychiatrists - on behalf of the child's physical and mental health. Therefore, several strategies and initiatives of education for motherhood were developed, whose main goal was the dissemination among mothers of the scientific standards for raising and educating children, and, ensuring this way the development of healthy and socially integrated citizens.

It should be noted that the strategies used for educating mothers, which were, as stated by Maria Manuela Ferreira (2000, p. 132), aimed at “enlightening and raising mothers' awareness to their maternal duties”, included a class component. While working class women were more directly targeted through procedures such as the social survey or house visits (Apple, 2006; Boltanski, 1977; Ferreira, M. M. 2000), the behaviour of middle and middle-high class women was regulated more indirectly, using childcare manuals, women's or parenting magazines and other media, which published parenting guidelines, together with their scientific grounds, and addressed the impact on the child's current and future development resulting from the failure to comply with such guidelines (Apple, 2006; Cahan, 2006; Grant, 1998; Hulbert, 2004; Martins, 2011; Moura; Boarini, 2012; Rose, 1999; Stearns, 2003).

During a period when Portuguese society was undergoing modernisation, publications addressed to mothers were used as tools for regulating and standardising the behaviour of mothers, by disseminating the dominant discourse on motherhood, i.e., that of scientific motherhood (Apple, 2006).

We have chosen herein to focus our analysis on the messages conveyed through a specific medium, parenting magazines, with the purpose of contributing to understanding the process of building a scientific motherhood in Portugal. In this regard, we have looked into the arguments used to invoke the need to educate mothers, the type of initiatives disseminated and, lastly, the adherence of mothers to this process.

Our choice to focus on parenting magazines, instead of any other source, has to do with the fact, on the one hand, that they were developed with the double mission of educating parents and regulating parenting practices and, on the other, with a set of particular characteristics that, in our view, make them privileged sources for the analysis of the narratives of parenthood: (1) they were easier to obtain compared to the childcare manuals, due to price and the fact that they were available in several points of sale, thus covering a larger audience; (2) they included a variety of texts, which unveiled at the macro level the conceptions about motherhood, in other words, the narratives produced by experts and a symbolic elite, and at the micro level the real experiences of women who wrote in these magazines, hereby granting access to voices which would otherwise not be heard in the public arena (Nóvoa, 1997; Pessoa, 2005).

These sources were selected from the *Repertório analítico da imprensa de educação e ensino* (Nóvoa, 1993), based on the following criteria: (1) belonging to the subcategory *parenting*; and (2) having been published during the time frame of our study. Consequently, the following magazines were chosen: *Os nossos filhos* (1942-1964) and *Saúde e lar* (1944-1987). The analysis of the issues selected yielded 628 texts (*Os nossos filhos*, n=475; *Saúde e lar*, n=153) that were submitted to a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004). This analysis focused on the following categories: 1) arguments used to invoke the need to educate mothers; 2) maternal education strategies; 3) adherence to the scientific motherhood ideology. These categories were established *a priori*, according to the aforementioned objectives.

### **Educating mothers under the guidance of science**

Parenting magazines published in Portugal after the Second World War provided the medium for the dissemination of the discourses of various actors - doctors, educators, journalists, writers, literate women - whose common goal was to protect childhood. Supporters of a traditional conception of family, in which women are consigned to the home, and strong believers in the role that science, namely Medicine, could play in solving the problems affecting Portuguese children, the contributors of the magazines we analysed disseminated a message, in which the traditional conception of family intersected with a modern view of education, based on the idea that childhood education should be founded on scientific knowledge of the child.

A unanimous belief among the authors in those magazines, which revealed a traditional view of the woman's role in the household, was that childrearing was a female responsibility, that of mothers in particular. This conception is outlined in the writings about bearing, raising and educating children or, in particular, in the underlying profile of the *good mother*, underpinned by the belief that mothers should personally take care of everything which had to do with their children. More specifically, the general belief at the time was that *good mothers* were the ones who “weigh their children, measure them, check for catarrh and regular bowel movements, pay attention to the colour of their cheeks” (Mira, 1945, p. 6), who monitor their health, act as nurses when their children fall ill, take care of their clothes, hygiene and food, guide them in their everyday tasks, prepare them for primary school; in other words, those who commit body and soul to raising and educating their children. In this context, the role of the mother is valued and the part she can play in ensuring her children's physical and mental health is underscored.

However, while mothers were held responsible for raising their children, paradoxically they were found incapable of that responsibility. It should be noted in the discourses about the inability of mothers, the universalisation of this idea, a phenomenon previously identified by Vilhena (2002) in the analysis of a set of periodicals on education and teaching published in the 1940s in Portugal, i.e., maternal ignorance is presented as an overarching problem of women of all social classes, as highlighted in the text below:

Since both innocent children who have no home, no bread, no mother- and those born with silver spoons, who are abandoned by frivolous and unconscious mothers and left to be raised by ignorant maids - require protection; or are poorly brought up by their own mothers. (*Conselhos*, 1947, p. 24)

Although most mothers are deemed incapable of raising their children, the authors in the magazines analysed discuss different types of incapacity, according to the social class of these women. While working class mothers are referred to as being ignorant (Carvalho, 1946; D'Almada, 1951b; Esteves, 1946), the mothers of the upper classes, although often also described as ignorant, are particularly accused of neglect (Mães, 1946; Paço, 1946), i.e. of abandoning their children, of handing them over to the maids, lower class women who lacked adequate knowledge for rearing and educating children.

A common feature of these discourses, whether focusing on the mothers' ignorance or their neglect, is their accountability for the problems that afflict children. As doctor Guido Cabral (1948, p. 20) puts it, referring to child mortality, one of the major problems which worried elites at the time,

child mortality has three major causes: enteritis (40%), congenital weakness (20%) and broncopulmonary disorders (20%) [...]. Most cases of child mortality are due to the ignorance of mothers and of other people taking care of these children, since children do not have the capacity to seek what is in their best interest.

Doctors, who saw mothers and their children every day in their offices or in their clinics, were the main authors of the discourses linking mothers' ignorance and childhood problems, a situation not unrelated to the fact that they considered themselves as the “only professional body having received training to take clinical action on behalf of the child” (Ferreira, 2003, p. 14). Aware that many of the problems they had to deal with daily were avoidable, these doctors were shocked by the high child mortality and morbidity rates that placed the country at the tail of Europe, in spite of the lowering rates after the Second World War. It should be noted, however, that reference was rarely made to the social conditions in which most Portuguese women and children lived at the time, and the ignorance of mothers was highlighted as the main cause of childhood problems. Consequently, education for motherhood emerged quite naturally as the best strategy for child protection:

Much more than the gaps in care, much more than poverty or even misery, maternal ignorance is what causes greatest harm to babies and children in general. Educating mothers is, therefore, the most powerful and safest means of ensuring child protection. (*As mães*, 1954, p. 17)

Education for motherhood was part of a broader strategy to change the ways children were brought up, based on the belief that science could play a part in solving the problems afflicting children. Of course Medicine had a long tradition and doctors felt they were destined to lead the contributions to the well-being of children and the progress in society:

Medicine has managed to win over many diseases which were the cause of high child mortality rate both among newborns and in early childhood. Similarly, considering what we know today about the possible impact on child development of trauma endured by the mother, this matter has been addressed with the appropriate attention by protecting the working mother, which has brought huge benefits to the last generations. (*Conselhos*, 1956, p. 2)

More specifically, there was the intention of disseminating a maternity model founded on scientific rationale. The goal, in the view of Maria Manuela Ferreira (2000), was to transform the traditional mother, whose educational practices were conducted haphazardly or following tradition, in the modern mother, who made a daily effort to apply the latest scientific knowledge to the child's physical and psychological development, on behalf of the child's present and future well-being, contributing therefore to the development and modernisation of the Nation. As doctor Gilberto Vasco (1945, p. 3) puts it,

prejudice, superstition, and other mistakes [...] as well as the motives for the damages they cause must disappear from the language of our people, with everyone's help and, in particular, with the help of those who understand me. Above all, mothers must focus on the health and well-being of their children, and on all the care that will help them grow to be responsible and efficient citizens.

The magazines contributors participated actively in this process of constructing scientific motherhood, not only by publishing the scientific principles of child rearing and education, in the form of advice, but also by disseminating other educational initiatives and strategies designed to disseminate this concept of *modern mother*. Furthermore, we should note that in this campaign for the dissemination of scientific motherhood, men and women from all political and social spectra, experts and non-experts, belonging to a literate urban elite whose common denominator was child protection, used these parenting magazines as tools to disseminate their ideas, and collaborate towards the same end of educating mothers, in the name of progress and the modernisation of Portuguese society.

### **Constructing mothers**

While the discourse of the need of education for motherhood was addressed to all women, despite their social class, there was a clear element of class in the educational strategies developed to educate mothers, as several authors have shown (Apple, 2006; Grant, 1998; Ferreira, M. M. 2000). Whereas mothers in the lower classes were targeted by direct action, like conferences delivered at the institutions providing care to children and mothers, the behaviour of middle and upper-class mothers was regulated in a more indirect manner.

Literate women belonging to the middle or upper classes, who were a minority of the Portuguese female population at the time, were encouraged to teach themselves, i.e., to voluntarily acquire scientific knowledge about child rearing and education by taking courses, reading or listening to experts. Although the use of childrearing manuals by literate mothers was not a new phenomenon, as António Gomes Ferreira (2000) highlights in his work on parenting in the Old Regime, what is new in the 50's is the diversification of educational strategies - maternal education courses, radio broadcasts and, later, television

programmes about parenting - accompanied by strong criticism directed at the seeking of informal advice, raising awareness to the risk underlying traditional educational practices and, at the same time, highlighting the benefits of adopting reason-based practices. Concomitant with this global criticism of informal advice, reference was made to safe sources of advice - health professionals, doctors and nurses, books and magazines -, whose knowledge was based on science, namely medicine and child psychology, sciences that played a key role in developing scientific motherhood.

Books and magazines on parenting were deemed to be essential materials for the self-taught modern mother, since mothers could easily access them to look up any information needed: “This baby has just woken up in the pink crib. She's a healthy child, well taken care of - happy. [...] the Mother, who has not received any special training, had the good sense to buy and read the best books on childcare, whose advice she follows every day” (*O menino*, 1945, p. 15).

The articles in the magazines we analysed often refer readers to books written by doctors and pedagogues, some of whom write for these periodicals, articles that often include excerpts taken from those books, for example: *O guia das mães*, written by Dr. Branca Rumina; *Mãe e filho*, by dr. Ferreira de Mira; or *Eu quero conhecer o meu filho*, by dr. António Correia. These books also provide a clear indication of the audience that those magazines targeted: educated women, belonging to an urban elite, who were not only concerned about ensuring the survival of their children, but their education as well. An article called *Bibliografia*, from which we have taken the following excerpt, is a clear illustration of this, particularly if we take into account the books recommended to mothered:

Many mothers aspire at having sound pedagogical knowledge to be able to guide their little ones. Some try to have their children meet with friends to thus make up for the shortage of nursery schools in their towns and neighbourhoods. “Os Nossos Filhos” provides good reading for these mothers, where they will find material for self-education and guidance. Today we will provide you with a list of publications which will be of use to you. To understand child education one must understand the Montessori Method, and the Froebel method from which it derives. We advise you to read: *A criança* - by Montessori, translated into Portuguese. *Education Montessori* - by Fisher, adapted to French by Jacqueline André. *Montessori en action* - Nathan Editions, Paris. *Froebel en action* - Nathan Editions, Paris. (Bibliografia, 1952, p. 9)

These titles not only suggest there were other concerns beyond the survival of children, such as those which had to do with their intellectual development, but they also reveal what Apple (2006) and Hulbert (2004) called the professionalization of motherhood, a concept related to the advent of scientific motherhood, which involves addressing women, namely those belonging to the upper classes, as childhood experts, who should know and implement scientific methods of parenting on a daily basis, some of which had been developed in early child education settings, such as Montessori's or Froebel's methods.

Besides suggesting books for mothers to read, magazines' editors included excerpts from them and even short reviews were published. Of particular interest is the one in which is presented the book *A higiene, a criança e o conforto do lar* by doctor Custódia do Vale



(Untitled, 1945, p. 4), since it suggests a set of educational strategies for a specific social group, working-class women:

“Hygiene, the child and comfort of the home” (*A Higiene, a Criança e o conforto do lar*) is a work that will appeal most to country women, but which all women, even those with some education, will find useful and pleasant reading. The author writes both as a physician and a woman; i.e. she explains, advises, teaches in a clear and simple language that seems to flow more from the heart than from the head. Alas, there is one caveat – one which is not inherent to it: that is, it can not be read by all working women for the simple and sad reason that most cannot read. Therefore, we strongly recommend that village teachers and ladies read it and explain it to their pupils' mothers, to their housekeepers and other village women they know. (do Vale, 1945, p. 4)

This was the typical discourse produced by women writing in parenting magazines, particularly in *Os nossos Filhos*. Belonging to an intellectual urban elite, their goal was to persuade their readers to join them in the campaign for child protection. More specifically, their main aim was the dissemination of modern child rearing and education principles to women who, due to their ignorance, were held liable for childhood tragedies and who, because they lived in rural areas, could not easily access doctors, the main disseminators of scientific parenting practices at the time.

We are dealing here with a strategy which was defined as maternalism (Koven; Michael, 1993); that is a trend led by a female elite, on behalf of the well-being of the child and society, seeking to include all mothers in a new rationality, a new model of motherhood. That transforms a specific group of women, those adhering to the concept of scientific motherhood, into drivers of the modernisation of motherhood and the Portuguese society.

Institutions providing child care and assistance to mothers (Grant, 1998; Litt, 2000) - dispensaries, childcare facilities and Medical Centres - publicised in parenting magazines (e.g. *Atenção*, 1952; *Uma iniciativa*, 1955; D'Almada, 1951a; Rumina, 1948) were other apparatus used to disseminate scientific motherhood. In a context where the model of surveillance medicine (Armstrong, 1995) was expanding and healthcare underwent a paradigm shift, in which the focus moved from treatment to disease prevention (Ferreira, 2012), the idea was to raise the visibility of the work conducted in those institutions, namely by advertising the positive outcomes achieved through these institutions' activities:

Despite everything, we feel satisfied when we see that we have come a long way and note that participation has steadily improved. Statistics show that child mortality from diarrhoea decreased in the urban area of Funchal in less than one year, where there is a dispensary in operation, and that children from the more protected classes go to the doctor for check-ups, even if there is no suspected illness. (Gouvêa, 1951, July, p. 16)

This kind of argument can also be seen as a persuasive strategy, utilized to convince mothers of the importance of surveillance medicine, that is, the regular check-up of their children by doctors, one of the main opportunities for maternal education.

Moreover, institutions providing childcare and assistance to mothers are mentioned in the magazines analysed because, as Pessoa (2005) stated regarding the periodical *Os nossos filhos*, care and maternal education were regarded as two sides of the same coin, i.e., they were complementary strategies in the great enterprise of protecting the Portuguese child. Therefore, the aim was not only to publicise the work carried out by these institutions and persuade mothers to adhere to surveillance medicine, but also to convince civil society of their social importance and encourage private individuals to participate actively in their foundation, as is highlighted in the first paragraph of the text introducing the *Centro de Enfermagem Assistência à Maternidade e à Infância*, a private institution providing mother and child nursing care, founded by the pedagogue Sofia Abecassis:

In Lisbon there is a mother and child care organisation which deserves to be known by the entire country, in particular by those men with great fortunes, who can and should use their surplus in favour of their brothers who have nothing. We are not saying that all organisations must be organised in the same way, but they should be conducted with the same intelligence and understanding (Braga, 1947, p. 14)

Besides the aforementioned institution, others were advertised, among which were the *Centro de Saúde de Lisboa* and the *Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso*, institutions of renown in Portugal in the 1950s. Like the *Centro de Enfermagem Assistência à Maternidade e à Infância*, they were managed by nurses with a background in Public Health, “trained to take care not only of sick patients, but to teach the principles of a good hygiene” (Ferreira, 2012, p. 16). The activities conducted in these institutions were mostly aimed at preventing disease and improving the health of the population by delivering health education to its users, namely mothers who would be taught the modern rules of raising and educating small children:

Health education is intended to highlight the importance of normal living conditions, including the family environment, stability, rest, food, exercise, open air, distractions, health conditions. It seeks to sustain the importance of taking healthy children to the doctor for regular medical check-ups, vaccines, listening to instructions for preventing the propagation of epidemics, disease prevention, early screening of defects and anomalies for rehabilitation, what to do in case of disease, the correct interpretation of medical prescriptions, teaching about the child's normal physical and mental development, and variations thereof, etc. (*Atenção*, 1952, p. 15)

Therefore, a set of prophylactic measures, such as vaccination and the regular medical monitoring of the child's health - “At the Centre [Centro de Enfermagem Assistência à Maternidade e Infância] two sets of appointments are held weekly, for monitoring healthy children and vaccinating against preventable diseases (smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid, whooping cough)” (Braga, 1947, p. 14) - to ensure, as much as possible, the child's well-being, and to monitor mothers, were accompanied by a variety of educational activities:

The work that will be carried out in the future by the Centre will be along the same lines as the ones followed until now; but we also intend to hold free childcare courses for the mothers and fathers of the children monitored by our Centre, and other courses for ladies wishing to learn about such useful subjects, who will pay a fee for the continuation of the Centre's activities. (Braga, 1947, p. 14)

While these courses were first created for the lower classes, during the period in question a clear effort was made to attract new audiences, by designing more formal courses - possibly influenced by the aforementioned process of universalization of the idea of maternal ignorance (Vilhena, 2002) - based not only on the belief in the positive impact that the mothers from upper class could have on lower class women - "this way of working brought people with a higher standard of living closer to people who are less well off, thus promoting education and raising the standard of living" (*Atenção*, 1952, p. 14) -, but also on the growing concern about disease prevention and the improvement in the physical and mental well-being of children:

This programme [Public Health Nursing] for disease prevention, health preservation and higher standards of child health was, definitely, one of the breakthroughs of the modern era, directly linked with the expectation of living a fuller, happier and healthier life. (*O papel*, 1953, p. 10)

Such initiatives were intended to cover a part of the population that normally did not go to these institutions, while helping to disseminate the concept of scientific motherhood. Besides the aforementioned course, the opening of which was later announced in *Os nossos filhos (Uma iniciativa*, 1955), there is also mention of a "6-lesson course for future mothers" (*O Centro*, 1945, p. 12) at the Lisbon Medical Centre, and a School for Parents founded by doctor Vítor Fontes, at the António Aurélio da Costa Ferreira Institute, mostly for promoting mental health (*Escola*, 1957).

The announcement of these courses and the publication of recommended readings for women were essentially addressed to a specific social group of women: middle class, literate women who read magazines and, for that reason, considered it their duty to educate themselves and, furthermore, to actively help publicise the concept of scientific motherhood.

However, adherence to this maternity model was neither peaceful nor easy, as one may conclude from the testimonies of staff and from mothers' views expressed in the letters they wrote to the magazines, which we will analyse in the following section.

### **Mothers and maternal education**

Analysing the letters that mothers wrote to the magazines, along with the testimonies of those they dealt with every day, one is able to assay, albeit only partially, to what extent women adhered to scientific motherhood. More specifically, in these testimonies one can detect resistance, as well as the strong faith that a minority of educated women, belonging to the more affluent social classes, had in science and its role in ensuring the survival and the physical and mental health of their children, who, therefore, sought expert advice freely and willingly, as Apple (2006) have shown with regard to American women. We can therefore assume that social class plays an important role in the mothers' adherence to

scientific motherhood that seems especially appealing to literate, middle class women, as Apple (2006), Grant (1998) and Litt (2000) described.

The testimonies of those dealing with mothers on a daily basis reveal a resistance to the concept of scientific motherhood on the part lower class women. Júlio Esmeraldo Gouvêa (1951, p. 16), director of the *Dispensário de Higiene Infantil do Funchal*, the child dispensary of Funchal, described the challenges faced during the process of implementation of surveillance medicine. His words acknowledge the lack of understanding about the concept of preventive health, which women do not seem to understand the need for. Thus he states:

The greatest difficulty that we have met is that of convincing mothers to bring their children to the Dispensary on the day of the appointment for their regular check-up. Today still many do not show up, with the excuse that the children were not ill on the scheduled day, since less enlightened mothers do not realise that they should take their children to the Dispensary when they are healthy to prevent them from becoming sick. (Gouvêa, 1951, p.16)

Doctors and other experts believed that those who did not follow their guidance were ignorant or careless. Generally speaking, their views revealed a lack of awareness of the problems that affected most people, particularly due to their difficult economic situation. Many mothers belonging to that universe of women that doctors accused of being ignorant made the survival of their dependents the focal point of their lives. This situation, compounded by the low level of education of Portuguese women during the period in question and difficulties in accessing health care quite naturally hindered adherence to the ideas and practices underpinning the concept of scientific motherhood.

Therefore, adherence to practices based on medical and psychological knowledge did not depend only on the will of mothers, contrary to suggestions made by experts or those who spouted their knowledge. Clearly, those who wrote in these magazines did not understand the problems faced by this sector of the population who did not engage in their ideas and guidance. However, this does not mean that there were not some authors reporting barriers which impeded the dissemination of practices aligned with modern scientific thought.

Difficult access to doctors and healthcare is one barrier mentioned by authors - “there are indeed many centres delivering childcare in the city [Lisbon] and in the country, but their number is still inadequate, and there are too few vacancies compared to the child population” (Braga, 1947, p. 14) -, and by mothers who wrote to the magazines, specially those living in the countryside - “I live on a farm and doctor and pharmacy are miles away” (Untitled, 1950, p. 10). The difficulty of reaching doctors, privileged points of access to scientific knowledge, may have been one cause for resistance, as well as an explanation for the unawareness of the concept of scientific motherhood, namely among lower class women who, not having magazines or books readily available to them, could hardly embrace this new rationale.

This is not, however, the only explanation for the resistance of some women to this ideal of scientific motherhood. According to doctor Constantino Esteves (1946, p. 10),

contact with experts did not guarantee compliance with their prescriptions. He found that there was clearly “ignorance - to put it nicely - when day in, day out there are mothers who do not comply with doctors' prescriptions and replace them with something they think is more appropriate”. In other words, access to scientific knowledge about child rearing and education was, by no means, sufficient to ensure that women adhere to the ideology of scientific motherhood: The frequent mention of the use of informal advice, and the strong criticism thereof, suggest that this was quite common practice, i.e. many women still resorted to and relied on traditional knowledge conveyed by relatives, neighbours and friends. This can be explained by the fact that most of these lower-class women were illiterate, and they had not been taught to respect technical knowledge, which is mostly learnt through formal education (Boltanski, 1977; Giddens, 2005).

As for upper class mothers, two trends can be observed: while some mothers, often criticised, dismissed themselves from their maternal functions, leaving their children to be taken care of by the maids (“For most, their children only deserve their attention from the age of seven onwards; until then it is the maid's task to take care of them” (Correia, 1949, p. 6), thus not complying with the image of the good mother laid down by experts, others adhered to the concept of scientific motherhood, thus seeking to learn and, moreover, to actively participate in the campaign for child protection, helping to re-educate other women.

Describing themselves as ignorant, i.e. embracing the authors' narratives, mothers writing to the magazines expressed their wish to learn and to comply with the model of motherhood proposed. Which is why, for example, they would ask for guidelines on the best approach to all sorts of situations: “I have heard people say that children's nails should not be cut. What is your opinion?” (Lídia, 1947, p. 24); “My daughter, who has just turned 3, has a mind of her own and is stubborn. How can I control her?” (Untitled, 1953, p. 7); “I'm expecting my first child. Please suggest some books on childcare so that I may learn” (Untitled, 1947, p. 24). Requests for advice like the latter suggest there is more than mere superficial adherence to scientific motherhood. They highlight a pedagogical concern, the will to seek the information appropriate for a modern and enlightened mother. This is the case of a mother who writes in a letter the following: “My son is well-built and healthy, but I find him to be quite small, which causes me a great deal of sorrow. Could you be so kind as to publish a height chart, and provide advice about when and how should we measure our children” (Untitled, 1948, p. 11).

These women believed in the role that science could play in promoting health and ensuring that their children grew up normally. So they actively sought information about what they believed to be parenting best practices.

As we have seen, the parenting magazines tried to mobilised people. They clearly intended to have readers expand the information published in them. One way of achieving this was by letting mothers play an active part, making them the conveyors of the underlying principles of scientific motherhood. This can be seen, for example, in the campaign sponsored by the magazine *Os nossos filhos*, called *Dear lady, please help us!*, in which mothers were called upon to teach those whose paths they crossed everyday:

“Don't be ashamed of teaching those who do not know. On the street, on the train and on the tram, anywhere, every time you see someone behaving inappropriately towards a child [...] why not approach them and intrude politely?” (*Minha senhora*, 1950, p. 11).

The readers of these magazines, educated, anonymous women, were thus encouraged to become leading actors (and not just extras) in the dissemination of the concept of scientific motherhood actively collaborating with experts in the push for child protection and the modernisation of Portuguese society.

### Conclusion

The present study has found that one of the main goals of the publishers and contributors of the parenting magazines analysed was the dissemination of the concept of scientific motherhood (Apple, 2006).

The idea that motherhood was a function requiring special preparation, by undergoing an educational process founded on reason and science, was conveyed together with the image of the traditional family. This was in line with the dominant family ethics of the period under review (Cova; Pinto, 1997; Pimentel, 2011; Rocha; Ferreira, 2006), which believed that the mother should be primarily responsible for raising and teaching her children.

However, there were two apparently contradictory approaches taken in making mothers accountable for child rearing. While on the one hand the function of the mother was valued, on the other, mothers were characterised as being ignorant or negligent and, consequently, incapable of fulfilling on their own what at the time was held to be their central role in society. As several authors mention (Apple, 2006; Armstrong, 1995, Ferreira, M. M. 2000; Rose, 1999; Stearns, 2003), the emphasis on the inability of mothers was an argument to justify the intervention of experts in regulating maternal behaviour, being used to convince mothers that in order to raise their children well, they would have to educate themselves, they would need to learn the scientific principles of parenting, with the help of these parenting magazines and of other devices, such as childcare manuals, mother and child care organisations, maternal education courses - all of which were advertised in these periodicals.

Believing in the important part that maternal education, a core element of scientific motherhood, could play in resolving the main problems afflicting children in Portugal in the 1950s, the magazines contributors - physicians, nurses, educators, journalists, writers -, as well as some of their readers, sought to actively participate on the campaign on the behalf of child protection and the modernisation of Portuguese society, through the dissemination of the concept of scientific motherhood (Apple, 2006); they did so by criticising educational practices founded on tradition, including informal advice, and suggesting sources that women should use to make up for their ignorance and develop the scientific knowledge needed for bringing up their children well.

An analysis of the messages conveyed by parenting magazines reveals an element of class, which was quite visible in the strategies for educating mothers, differentiated according to the social class of these women. This has been highlighted in earlier studies

on the subject (Apple, 2006; Grant, 1998; Ferreira, M. M. 2000). The strategies disseminated by these periodicals included reading these same magazines, using manuals on childcare or attending courses for mothers, which fostered readers' self-learning. Then, when knowledgeable about the scientific principles of parenting, these mothers could become active disseminators of the concept of scientific motherhood.

Due to the high illiteracy rate of Portuguese women at that time, and the poor conditions in which they lived, one may infer that these strategies targeted a very specific population group, literate, middle or upper-class women, or, as Pessoa (2005) puts it, the intellectual women. It is precisely this group of women who were the first to adhere to the concept of scientific motherhood, that actively looked for the information that would help them rear their children in the best possible way.

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