
IMAGES AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATION: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS CONTRIBUTIONS ¹

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ABSTRACT. The common sense knowledge formation is object of study of the Social Representation Theory, which highlights the role of communication in the production of comprehension by the subjects. The visual images favor the socialization of meanings and are active elements in the formation of social representations. Given the expressive role of the images in the formation of representational contents, this paper aims to present a semiotics analysis method for researches on social representations. The semiotic analysis of images was selected as a theoretical and methodological basis, for offering the means required for guidance for an effective research method to identify the social representations of socially shared iconic signs. The analysis method was explored by means of analytical procedures, employed for the apprehension of social representations of the feminine in posters for Brazilian Ministry of Health campaigns, which allowed access to the network of meanings associated with the analyzed visual image. It should be emphasized that the relevance of the use of semiotic analysis to analyze social representations, which presents itself as a fertile perspective for further studies expanding the possibilities of exploitation of visual content.

Keywords: Image analysis social; social representation; semiotics.

IMAGENS E REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA ANÁLISE SEMIÓTICA

RESUMO. A formação do conhecimento de senso comum é objeto de estudo da Teoria das Representações Sociais, que destaca o papel da comunicação na produção de sentidos pelos sujeitos. As imagens visuais favorecem a socialização de significados e são elementos ativos na formação das representações sociais. Frente ao expressivo papel das imagens na formação dos conteúdos representacionais, este relato visa apresentar um método de análise semiótica de imagens para a pesquisa em representações sociais. A análise semiótica de imagens foi selecionada como aporte teórico-metodológico, por oferecer os pressupostos necessários para o delineamento de um método de pesquisa eficaz para a identificação das representações sociais, a partir de signos icônicos, socialmente partilhados. O método de análise foi explorado por meio de procedimentos analíticos, empregados para a apreensão de representações sociais do feminino em cartazes de campanhas do Ministério da Saúde e que possibilitaram o acesso à rede de significados associados à imagem visual analisada. Destaca-se a pertinência do emprego da análise semiótica para a análise em representações sociais, que se apresenta como uma perspectiva fértil para novos estudos e que amplia as possibilidades de exploração dos conteúdos visuais.

Palavras-chave: Análise da imagem; representação social; semiótica.

IMÁGENES Y REPRESENTACIÓN SOCIAL: CONTRIBUCIONES DEL ANÁLISIS SEMIÓTICO

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RESUMEN. La formación del sentido común es el objeto de estudio de la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales, lo que pone de relieve es la función de la comunicación en la creación de sentido por los sujetos. Las imágenes visuales favorecen la socialización de significados y son elementos activos en la formación de las representaciones sociales. Con interés en el importante papel de las imágenes en la formación de las representaciones sociales, este estudio tiene como objetivo presentar un método de análisis semiótico de las imágenes para la investigación sobre las representaciones sociales. El análisis semiótico de las imágenes fue seleccionado como fundamento teórico y metodológico al propiciar las condiciones necesarias para el diseño de un método eficaz para la investigación de las representaciones sociales de signos icónicos socialmente compartidos. El método de análisis se exploró por intermedio de los procedimientos analíticos empleados para la detección de las representaciones sociales del femenino en los carteles de campañas del Ministerio de Sanidad, lo que permitió el acceso a la red significados de significaciones asociadas a las imágenes visuales analizadas. Se destaca la importancia de la utilización del análisis semiótico en la investigación de las representaciones sociales, que se presenta como una perspectiva fértil para nuevos estudios y que amplía las posibilidades de exploración de los contenidos visuales.

Palabras-clave: Análisis de imagen; representación social; semiótica.

Introduction

The Theory of Social Representations can be recognized as an important theoretical-conceptual framework for the study of the social phenomena, since it is dedicated to the understanding of the common sense and its influence on the conduct of the subjects. Published by Serge Moscovici in 1961, the theory provides the understanding of collective elaboration processes of a given social object, which is made possible through the exchange of information and the collective production of knowledge by the social groups (Moscovici, 2012).

Social representations attach meaning to the world, constituting themselves as a form of “practical knowledge” produced in the social interactions and that gives meaning to the behaviors adopted (Moscovici, 2012; Vala, 2004).

It is recognized the role of images in the formation and maintenance of social representations (De Rosa & Farr, 2001). The relationship between visual images and social representations is expressed by the structure of representation itself, which has an imagistic component (Moscovici, 2012). This demonstrates the role of images in the production of meanings by the subjects, since the construction of reality is not only defined by words, but by various means, including visual images (De Rosa & Farr, 2001; Medina Filho, 2013).

The term *image* can be used with different meanings in Social Sciences and Humanities and may correspond to a figure, a “mental image”, or even the set of opinions from a particular social group (Moscovici, 2012; Santaella & Noth, 2001). The understanding of the term as being the visual depiction of something, starts with the notion that image corresponds to the particular representation of an object in relation to another (Joly, 2012). In this sense, individuals and communities for communications of various kinds appropriate the images (Weller & Bassalo, 2011).

The systematic study of images, based on the social, political and philosophical aspects of their production, emerged in the late 19th century. The entitled *iconology* demonstrated that the study of an image requires analytical effort, unlike the spontaneous process, which is characteristic, from the point of view of an informal observer (Gervereau, 2004; Joly, 2012).

Currently, several fields of knowledge are dedicated to the analysis of images, and its use in social researches has allowed discoveries and important contributions to the study of social life (Gervereau, 2004; Joly, 2012, Reavey & Johnson, 2008).

There is a recent trend to include visual data in researches in social psychology, which seems to reflect the progressive consideration of the complexity of the communicative process. The inclusion of image analysis in researches on Social Representations, particularly, can provide access to the contents that are not expressed verbally and that are present in the structure of representation. Among the studies that consider the imagistic elements in the investigation of social representations, there is a highlight for the analysis of advertising images transmitted in the media, given its importance in shaping the meanings socially elaborated (Medina Filho, 2013).

In this study, we consider the possibility that the semiotic analysis of images, coupled with the processing of textual data, is a promising analytical tool for the understanding of the network of meanings involved in the construction of the social representations of a particular social object (Medina Filho, 2013). This theoretical-methodological perspective seeks the apprehension of meanings from a basic meaning to a projected meaning, proposing to surpass the functional aspects of the images and, reaching the interpretations that may arise from the visual data (Gervereau, 2004; Joly, 2009, 2012).

Thus, it is assumed that the observation of an image is a producer of meanings, once it mobilizes intellectual activities resulting from a natural learning process, mediated by historical and cultural aspects (Barthes, 1990; Joly, 2009, 2012). In this way, the observation of an image can drive the observer of a literal message to a symbolic message, in other words, starting from a level of *denotation* to a level of *connotation* (Barthes, 1990).

According to the Semiotics Theory, image is a sign, that is, a structure that is in place of another that is absent, evoking it. Thus, it is composed of a *signifier* (noticeable part of the sign) and *signified* (concept), which relates to a *referent* (source object) (Joly, 2009, 2012).

It is task of the semiotic analysis to decipher the interpretive path trodden by the subjects and the impact “naturally” caused by the images, without intending to elucidate the real intentions of their producers or provide a single and definitive interpretation, but to present the most likely direction, from the use of careful procedures (Joly, 2009, 2012).

Given the potential contribution of the semiotic analysis to the study of images and social representations, this report aims to present a method of semiotic analysis of images for the research on Social Representations. Therefore, it starts with the identification of the semiotic analysis as theoretical contribution relevant for the proposition of a methodological path aimed at understanding the network of meanings involved in the construction of social representations.

Method

For the presentation of this path, we will use an example extracted from research of documental and exploratory type, accomplished by Terra (2014), which sought to identify the social representations of female in 16 posters of advertising campaigns launched by the Ministry of Health in 2012. Such posters were available in electronic format on the official website of the Ministry of Health, on the internet.

The semiotic analysis of images was used for the apprehension of the social representations of the female present in the posters analyzed. Thus, posters that presented at least one image of female subject were selected. The choice of the “female” as object of analysis considered the relevance of the social trajectory and the roles assigned to women, as well as the emblematic expansion of the social focus in the field of women’s health.

The treatment of the images required the description of the elements viewed, transcribed for the verbal language. Thus, it was possible to approach the visual content present in the material, with a view to its literal description (Joly, 2012; Penn, 2006). The descriptive phase of this type of analysis must include an objective description, free of interests and with attention to the various components of the visual field. Thus, it is important to consider the different types of messages present in the material analyzed. In this way, it becomes possible to achieve a general understanding of the implicit messages, keeping in mind that the interpretation made by the viewer becomes effective by a working of associations mediated by the sociocultural knowledge (Joly, 2012).

The analysis of images also counted with the contributions from Gervereau (2004), who suggested two stages following the descriptive phase. Thus, it is emphasized the importance of considering the historical and social context of the production of images, to avoid contradictions and premature conclusions. Then, it is presented the interpretative task, which should be grounded on description and context, for raising aspects of the image, which go beyond what is clearly expressed.

Thus, the description in the denotative scope constitutes as an input to elucidate cultural inferences and relationships established between literal aspects and elements external to the image. The search

for meanings that are “hidden” in the visual image will be made possible by the range of the connotative message (Penn, 2006).

The Linguistic message present on the posters is also a relevant aspect, as image and text maintain close relationship in the attribution of meanings (Joly, 2012). However, in view of the delimitation of this report and the focus on the semiotic analysis of images, the textual analysis will not be presented.

Results

The analysis of each of the 16 posters studied began through the literal description of the figures present in the advertising materials. The methodological approach continued as detailed below, demonstrating the possible contribution of semiotic analysis to the studies of social representations.

Initially, the posters were superimposed by delimitations of the area occupied by each figure observed, such as characters, scenarios or illustrative figures. Through this delimitation, the images constituents of the posters were identified, numbered and described in detail, enabling the presentation of the denotative aspects, which may also be referred to as *iconic signifier*, according to Joly (2012).

The material of the campaign of encouragement of breastfeeding will be used to illustrate this process, initiated by the delimitation of the figures of the poster (Figure 1). Eight elements were identified; one corresponding to the scenario (element 1) and seven to characters (elements 2-7).

Figure 1. Breastfeeding Campaign Poster, 2012. Copyright © 2012 Health Portal – Ministry of Health – www.saude.gov.br.



Then, each of the eight elements identified generated a literal description of the aspects visualized, which characterizes the denotative message. Table 1 presents the denotative message relating to the elements 1, 2 and 3 of the poster exemplified.

In turn, at every denotative aspect identified, connotative elements were associated that, according to the recommendations of Joly (2012), correspond to the social conventions of the images visualized. Thus, from the denotation it was possible to access first-level meanings, resulting from the visual message of each of the figures delimited. The use of a light-blue jumpsuit by the baby pictured in the foreground, for instance, suggests that he is a boy.

Table 1.

Description of the figures from 1 to 3, present in the poster of the Breastfeeding Campaign, 2012

<i>Figure</i>	<i>Description (denotation)</i>	<i>Aspects suggested (Conotation - 1st level)</i>
1	External environment clean, illuminated by sunlight, and suggestive of a park. Blue sky with few clouds and presented in a wide extension. Presence of a lake and trees in the background. Highlight to a flowering tree, medium-sized, on the left side of the picture. Large grassy area in front, which is placed a wooden chair with blue fabric and a cloth spread on the ground. On the cloth, there are pillows, a small toy, a picnic basket and fruits.	<i>The image suggests pleasant area, a natural and propitious environment for leisure.</i>
2	Adult woman, white, full view of the trunk and partial view of the lower limbs. Smooth and long dark-brown hair. They are slightly loose, only with the fringe tied, in order to frame the face, covering the ears. She is at the foreground in the picture, occupying the lower left corner of the poster. She is smiling, positioned in front, staring at the camera. She is sitting on a hidden support and nursing a baby, who is resting on her legs, wrapping him with the right arm and holding his hand with her left hand. Clothes typical for middle-class, consisting of white pants and a light-pink blouse of lightweight fabric, which is open and revealing her lap, leaving the right breast partially exposed. She is with discreet makeup, medium-pink nail polish and the only adornments used are the rings in both hands, without the clear viewing of an alliance.	<i>The figure suggests joy and purity.</i>
3	Baby of white skin, positioned on the lap of a woman and nursing. He occupies the foreground of the picture, in the lower left corner of the poster. He is with the face positioned with his back to the camera, and with hip, back and left arm resting on the woman's lap. His right hand is gently raised by the woman's hand. Presence of dark-brown thin hair. He uses a light-blue jumpsuit.	<i>The figure suggests a child, probably male, quiet, loved and in breastfeeding.</i>

Although fundamental for the analysis, the first-level connotative elements do not exhaust the meanings proposed by the image. The first level corresponds to the meanings accessed first, by social convention. The second level of connotation, in turn, relates to what Barthes (1990) calls "symbolic message", derived from the interpretation of signs and permeated by the set of values maintained by the social practices (Joly, 2012).

For this purpose, it was previously described the context of the production of the poster. Based on aspects relating to the policies of incentive to breastfeeding, it was found that the exclusive

breastfeeding is still a practice of short duration, since until the fourth month of life, the indexes are below approximately 51.8% , according to data from the National Survey on Prevalence of Breastfeeding - 2008 (Ministério da Saúde, 2012). According to data of the Pan American Health Organization (2014), 67% of Brazilian children are initiated early in the breastfeeding and only 41% remain with exclusive breastfeeding until the sixth month of life.

From such data, it was initiated the exploration of the connotation of second level. It was sought to identify, in the visual elements of each poster, elements of the system of connotation circulating in the Brazilian society in general.

The reconstruction of the production of meanings allowed by the images was possible through the elaboration of a *synopsis* for each poster, composed of general connotative elements, taking into account the theme of the advertising material and its relationship with the context of production of the poster (Table 2).

Tabela 2. Description of the figures present in the poster 6
Interpretative synopsis of the poster of the Breastfeeding Campaign, 2012

Poster	Synopsis
<i>Incentive to breastfeeding</i>	The image counts exclusively on the presence of women and children, totaling 7 characters, located in an environment that resembles a quiet and well-maintained park. Three children are breastfed and loved in the lap of their mothers, being the children, one female, one male and one of unidentified sex. They present different ages by two years of age, which reinforces the recommended period of breastfeeding on the infant nutrition. The presentation of children at different ages, also meets the need of strengthening the practice of breastfeeding, considering that the data reveal that the exclusive breastfeeding presents short duration in Brazil. The exclusivity of women and children reflects the absence or the restriction of the male participation in the experience of breastfeeding. Associated with this, the simultaneous breastfeeding by the three characters symbolizes the mutual female support in caring for the children, in this case the nutritional care. The presence of an older child, a boy who eats a fruit, demonstrates that the maternal care in relation to the nutrition of children extend beyond the lactation period. In this sense, it seems that it is for women to ensure the maintenance of a healthy diet for children. Highlighted appears the actress Wanessa Camargo, who breastfeeds her child without showing excessively her body, but with the lap and part of the breast visible. However, the gentleness provided by the image seems to lessen the possibility of identifying sensuality in the scene. Her serene and happy aspect composes the outline of a sweet and delicate figure, which is accentuated by the use of light-colored clothes, delicate makeup and nail polish in light-pink shade, an outline also viewed in the other women. All women express affection for the children, mainly by touch and tender look directed at the children. Only Wanessa stares at the camera, and precisely for being a celebrity, the viewing of her face favors her recognition, as well as the identification, by the public, with her act of breastfeeding. Thus, the support network established among women would be extended to the observer of the poster that fits as target audience of the campaign, that is, women of childbearing age, pregnant women or nursing mothers. The pleasant scenario transmits tranquility and privacy for breastfeeding, and mostly allows a correspondence between nature and the naturalness of the act of breastfeeding, as if it was something naturally expected of the woman who experiences motherhood. This association gives an additional responsibility for the woman with respect to the provision of an adequate nutrition for the child. The presence of a heavy wooden chair among the grass in the park, on which one of the women breastfeeds the child, may also suggest that the image of nature in the background can symbolize the feeling of tranquility and naturalness experienced by women during the practice of breastfeeding, and not exactly the real presence of the characters in the park.

From the structuring of the deepest connotative aspects, it was sought to apprehend the characteristics prevailing in the set of posters and highlight the relationships established between them. For this purpose, categories called “axes of signification” were established.

The definition of the axes of signification was accomplished based on the meanings associated with the female characters and that would allow the linking of the posters from connotative aspects in common. In this sense, five axes were delimited, from cultural meanings commonly associated with the female subjects, according to a set of observable characteristics, which include physical appearance, behavior, daily activities and groups of belonging. In this way, each poster was associated with at least one of the following axes, according to the characters identified: Girl; Young Woman; Old Woman; Woman; Mother.

The breastfeeding poster was associated with the axes “Girl” and “Mother”, for sharing figures of female characters with sociocultural analogues for these axes. For each axis, the presentation of an interpretive synthesis of the poster was made, with attention to the central meanings arising from the visualization of the figures (Table 3).

Table 3.

Interpretative synthesis of the breastfeeding poster by axis of significance

Axis of significance	Interpretative synthesis
Girl	<p><u>Warmth</u>: girl loved by her mother during the breastfeeding; <u>Support</u>: girl supported on her mother’s lap during the breastfeeding, conducted in peaceful and pleasant place; <u>Permanence of breastfeeding</u>: girl with over one year of age being breastfed.</p>
Mother	<p><u>Inspiration in nature</u>: relationship with nature for a “natural” experience between mothers and children, and possible naturalization of breastfeeding; <u>Female privacy</u>: no other people besides children and breastfeeding women; <u>Maternal responsibility</u>: the mothers of the children are the only adults portrayed in the scene; <u>Focus on the child nutrition</u>: the babies are breastfed and oldest child is eating a fruit. Presence of a basket of fruits; <u>Femininity</u>: use of delicate clothes; <u>Warmth</u>: children are loved and warmed on the women’s lap;</p>

The interpretative synthesis was materialized as the disclosure of the meanings highlighted in the poster, with focus on the female characters, our object of research. The same procedures described were performed in the other posters of the *corpus*, which in turn showed specific profiles of signification.

The characteristics of the female characters identified from the connotative analysis of all posters are indicative of the feminine facets in our society. The access to the meanings allowed the identification of dimensions of the social representations of female, circulating in the publications analyzed, which express aspects of current and historically determined models of femininity.

In the analyzed *corpus*, it is highlighted the fragility, or also the vulnerability of the female characters, as an important element of the representational contents. As depicted in the breastfeeding poster, fragility seems to be associated to the conception of “weaker sex”, which is popularly shared.

Simultaneously to fragility, the female characters were often linked to a benevolent and attentive profile. Especially, the leading role in the child care reinforces the primacy of motherhood in women and approaches the mothers presented to a chaste ideal, which can be related to the figure of “holy mom”,

described by Del Priore (2009). Such aspect can be perceived by the similarity of some characters with the figure of Virgin Mary, which seems to link a state of holiness and purity in light of the fulfilment of the role socially expected.

In this sense, the figure of Wanessa Camargo can be understood as analogous to some classical paintings of Virgin Mary breastfeeding Jesus, as shown in Figure 2. The hairstyle of the character acts as a frame for the face, surrounded by regular fringe and by the long hair positioned on the shoulders, such as a cloak framing her face. The shades of pink, blue and white are also similar to the contrast of colors commonly used to portray the Madonna.



Figure 2. Painting on canvas of Madonna breastfeeding. Batoni, Pompeo – questioned authorship. *The Virgin Nursing the Child*, Lucca, Italy, 1708 – 1787. Copyright © 2009 São Paulo Museum of Art Assis Chateaubriand – MASP. Electronic address: <http://www.masp.art.br/>

The aspects highlighted in the breastfeeding poster illustrate allegorically the association of women with a model of zealous, educating and responsible mother who naturalized the woman as a mother over the centuries. (Badinter, 1985). This aspect constitutes an important dimension of the social representation of female, identified from the contributions of the semiotic analysis of images.

Discussion

The set of posters analyzed allowed identifying the social representations of female and, thus accessing the social knowledge of a particular group on this object of representation. The posters analyzed can be considered as a social product that expresses the world from a depicted reality. Thus, it is observed that all features linked to the female characters are in combination, forming an articulated and coherent informal theory, a form of organization of relating knowledge and that define a representational content, as defined by Moscovici (2012).

Initially, it is important to emphasize that the meanings identified do not exhaust all the possible meanings of the images, since additional elements can be perceived based on other analytical theories, by other analysts, or also, in other historical moments, as highlights Penn (2006). As the symbolic message is discontinuous and delimited from the cultural code, it generates a variety of readings, according to the variety of subjects. Thus, the analysis of connotation is not accurate, and even has a specific language that can name its meaning, being about approximations from the current language (Barthes, 1990).

Aware of the analytical possibilities, the choice and the use of the semiotic analysis of images enabled the identification of social representations, through subsequent stages, adopted according to the contributions of scholars in the field of semiotics. Each methodological step had as a reference the foundations of visual sign, especially the denotative and connotative aspects described by Barthes (1990).

The research of the content of advertising campaigns favored the design of the methodological approach since in general commercials provide rich analyses, because there is an intentional allocation of the signs (Joly, 2012; Penn, 2006). The study of the permanent images of the campaigns of the Ministry of Health was relevant to the interests of our research, delimited from the theme on women's health.

From the set of figures of each poster, the analytical process prioritized the initial identification of the denotative message, so that this would enable access to the connotative message, as recommended by Joly (2012). To this end, a detailed description should consider all the iconic elements observed, including the posture of the models and the arrangement of the elements, as well as the plastic elements, which include predominant colors, lighting and textures (Joly, 2012). The list of such elements is essential, because the set of iconic elements is what propitiates the association with possible meanings mediated by the sociocultural knowledge.

It was considered important to report ethnic characteristics of the characters, their clothes and characterization, which reveal aspects of the sociocultural profile. The interaction portrayed between them was also identified as an important aspect, since it can suggest actions, emotions and relationships established.

The confirmation of characteristics common to all characters of the posters and social relationships portrayed are indicative of current cultural aspects. Thus, the vast presence of happy characters, who adopt active and interactive positions suggests correspondence with the profile desired for the citizen, because it expresses a healthy life and reflects satisfaction with the state of health and, consequently, with the health actions conducted by the government.

Ethnic and age diversity of the characters, as well as the exposure of environments frequented or accessible to the citizens also suggest that a large portion of the public can identify with the images and with the depicted action. In the breastfeeding poster, whose scene happens in a public space, the presence of women of childbearing age, white or brown, suggests that the act of breastfeeding practiced by them corresponds to potential actions of various women.

The presence of celebrities placed in everyday scenes, as can be seen by the presence of the singer Wanessa Camargo, seems to emphasize that public personalities, often admired and imitated, also develop the actions proposed by the campaigns. The participation of artists or famous athletes in the health campaigns is commonly observed and relates to the credibility aroused by the public personalities, as well as to the attention that they draw to the campaigns (Porto, 2005).

Even though the reader does not follow the interpretive path foreseen in the systematized analytical process, the production of meanings from a particular image can be made in an implicit and casual manner for it. It is known that the interpretation depends on the knowledge of the viewer and thus is related to aspects socially shared that are beyond the individualities (Joly, 2012).

The consideration of the context in the study of images is fundamental to understand the attributions of meanings by the subjects, for unraveling aspects socially diffuse on the topic under review. Thus, the stage of contextualization reduces the possible ambiguities and promotes the understanding of the images, considering that they are polysemous and iconically complex (Gervereau, 2004; Joly, 2009).

The contextualization of images favors the understanding of the signs analyzed, as can be observed on the poster that served as an example. The knowledge of the age recommended for the breastfeeding allows understanding the decision about the age range of the children depicted in the breastfeeding poster. Similarly, the knowledge of the statistics about the early weaning provides favorable conditions for understanding the aspects reiterated on the poster in order to stimulate the breastfeeding.

The women's responsibility, identified as important aspect of strengthening, relates to the historical path of the female in Brazil, marked by models of femininity linked to discipline, religious devotion and motherhood (Pinsky, 2012a). Although the traditional model of woman has been increasingly threatened by her emancipation, the "modern mother" remains liable in relation to the home care and her children, despite the greater fluidity in negotiating the division of tasks (Pedro, 2012; Pinsky, 2012b).

In addition to the contextualization of images, Joly (2009) points out that an image can cause the evocation of images already seen before, making reference to iconic elements already recognized. Thus, the connection established between a new image and another that already was observed, promotes the intertextuality and influences the interpretation, according to the author. In this sense, the research of previous images by analogy to the images analyzed tends to enrich the analysis. The linking of the image of Wanessa to the image of Virgin Mary, for instance, strengthened the recognition of the relationship between the sanctification of motherhood and the act of breastfeeding, which characterizes an association evinced since the colonial period in Brazil (Del Priore, 2009).

The whole set of aspects observed and relationships, established with "external" elements to the images, reflect topics with potential impact on the production of meanings. Thus, considering the context of production, the existence of analogous figures and the meanings socially shared, on the figures portrayed, characterize essential steps to the semiotic analysis of images and its use in research on social representations.

Final considerations

Throughout life, we have contact with a variety of images and their interpretation is processed in a natural way, socially learned. The recognition of common sense as a form of legitimate and detachable knowledge through the Theory of Social Representation allows exploring the images as a significant expression of the knowledge shared by social groups.

By seeking to tread the interpretation path of visual images, this report sought to recognize some possible stages of the meaning of these important signs of the contemporary communication. Currently, we live according to some authors, in a "hypervisual", world in which the images assume a prominent place in the production and socialization of meanings (Weller & Bassalo, 2011).

The transcultural and transhistorical nature of the images indicates that they overcome geographical and cultural barriers and that their interpretation is essentially social (De Rose & Farr, 2001). Such nature does not only reinforce the importance of delimiting efficient methods for image analysis but also explains the existing methodological challenges.

In order to potentiate the conditions of analysis and understanding of the iconic signs, semiotics constituted as a pertinent input and of vast contribution, by assuming that the observation of an image can also be a producer of meanings (Barthes, 1990).

It is noteworthy, however, that the development of research of the content expressed in still images, from this perspective, is not intended to speculate on the repercussions of the reception of that same content. The consideration to the socially developed meanings is focused on the semiotic analysis of the images selected. Therefore, the systematization of the analytical stages proposed by this study suggests contributions to the analysis of social representations, highlighting the relevance of the images in the natural learning process, based on historical and cultural aspects (Joly, 2009; 2012).

Without wishing to exhaust interpretive possibilities, the methodological path established proved to be a powerful tool for the apprehension of representational contents, opening up to the exploratory perspective in several visual media of image sharing and distinct objects of study.

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