

**MOTHERHOOD AND LABOR IN BRAZIL: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS**

MATERNIDADE E TRABALHO NO BRASIL: UMA ANÁLISE INTERSECCIONAL

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7999-9002>**Resumo**

Este estudo objetiva compreender como as interseccionalidades das opressões de gênero, raça e classe comprometem as trajetórias de vida de mães trabalhadoras nas organizações. A pesquisa documental de natureza qualitativa teve como corpus o documentário "Como Ela Faz?" submetendo-o às análises documental, temática e interseccional. Discutimos interseccionalmente os desafios e as opressões, bem como caminhos propositivos que articulam Estado, família e organizações. Ao ampliar o debate sobre as desigualdades enfrentadas, pretendemos promover a conscientização sobre as lutas das mães trabalhadoras apoiando estudos interseccionais relacionados ao tema, preenchendo as lacunas de estudos anteriores e direcionando a abordagem decolonial.

**Palavras-chave:** Mulheres. Maternidade. Interseccionalidades. Organizações. Desigualdades.**Abstract**

This study aims to understand how the intersectionalities of gender, race, and class oppressions compromise the life trajectories of working mothers in organizations. This qualitative documentary research utilized the film 'Como Ela Faz?' as its corpus, subjecting it to documentary, thematic, and intersectional analyses. We intersectionally discuss the challenges and oppressions, as well as proposed pathways articulating State, family, and organizations. By broadening the debate on experienced inequalities, we intend to promote awareness of working mothers' struggles, supporting intersectional scholarship, filling gaps in prior studies, and directing a decolonial approach.

**Keywords:** Women. Motherhood. Intersectionalities. Organizations. Inequalities.

## Introduction

The gender literature has discussed the importance of women in organizations (Maria Tonelli, 2023; Santos & Flávia Machado, 2024; Dilaelza et al. 2025). Women's participation in the labor market has, however, been accompanied by persistent gender inequality, which remains a critical social impediment globally. In 2025, the Global Gender Gap Report - which analyzes four main dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment - concluded that none of the 148 countries evaluated had achieved gender parity and that the world is 123 years away from closing this disparity (World Economic Forum, 2025).

Considering the global relevance of this theme, international bodies are mobilizing efforts to reduce gender, race, and class inequalities. For example, the United Nations (UN) established, among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 5 - Gender Equality, which calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination; SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities, which, among other measures, guarantees equal opportunities; and SDG 16 - Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which promotes the implementation of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (ONU BRASIL, 2025).

In Brazil, female participation - both within and outside organizations is characterized by high unemployment (53.4%); 39.9% of women earning up to one minimum wage; and remuneration 22.3% lower than that of men (with the average salary of Black women (R\$1,957.00 / BRL) being lower than non-Black women (R\$3,242.00 / BRL)). Furthermore, women occupy only 39.2% of managerial positions; dedicate an average of 21.3 hours weekly to care activities and/or domestic chores; and 36.2% are not covered by social security (41.0% of Black women versus 30.8% of non-Black women) (IBGE, 2024). The scenario is even more complex for women with children, where the occupation rate drops by 9.6%, and half of mothers are dismissed within two years after returning from maternity leave (Cecília Machado & Pinho Neto, 2016). Recognizing the simultaneous complexity of being a mother and working in organizations, Brazilian legislation ensures the rights of pregnant women and working mothers through legal provisions, such as the Federal Constitution (FC) of 1988, which guarantees the protection of maternity as a social and social security right (CF, 1988), Decree-Law No. 5,452/1943, Law No. 8,112/1990, and Law No. 8,861/1994, which guarantee maternity leave and protection for pregnant women (Decreto lei nº 5452, 1943; Lei 8112, 1990; Lei 8861, 1994).

Furthermore, studies focusing on working mothers in organizations guide the development of this research and highlight the need to: (1) address the theme within the Brazilian context, focusing on aspects of race and class (Meiridiane Deus, Jana Zappe & Viera, 2022; Julice Salvagni, Vitória Lagemann, & Marília Veronese, 2023) and diverse family compositions (Ana Benatti, Caroline Pereira, Dalila dos Santos, Ilana de Paiva, 2020); (2) more deeply investigate the reality of women in the post-maternity period (Márcia Maggioni, Vânia Costa & Sabrina Borba, 2024); (3) identify pathways that allow for the empowerment of women to balance work and family relations (Márcia Maggioni, Vânia Costa & Sabrina Borba, 2024); (4) study solo motherhood, especially the isolation experienced by Black women (Alexsandra Barbosa & Sônia Braga, 2024); and (5) understand the factors affecting the psychological well-being of working mothers (Vartika Kapoor, Jaya Yadav, Lata Bajpai & Shalini Srivastava, 2021).

From the perspective of working mothers in Brazil, this study aims to understand how the intersectionality of gender, race, and class oppressions compromises the life trajectory of working mothers in organizations. The study was developed based on the first episode of the documentary "Como Ela Faz?" titled "Trabalho" (Work) (Uol Prime, 2021). The research employed a qualitative, documentary approach, with the corpus subjected to documentary, thematic, and intersectional analyses. Following this introduction, the article is structured by presenting the main concepts and theories used to underpin the research. Subsequently, we describe the methodological path, the analysis

and discussion of the results, and finally, we present our final considerations.

## A Theoretical And Conceptual Approaches

This section addresses the concepts of gender, race, class, intersectionality, and motherhood, which are the guiding concepts of this study and facilitate the understanding of the research's theoretical and methodological choices.

### Gender, Race, Class

To comprehend the concepts of race, gender, and class, we first introduce the differentiation and understanding of the terms decolonization, colonialism, and coloniality. This is necessary because such classifications originate within modernity/coloniality - a specific project marked by European invasions, the formation of the Americas and the Caribbean, and the trafficking of enslaved people - and fundamentally shape social systems of power (Mignolo, 2017). Decolonization is characterized by the historical moment when colonized peoples rose against established colonial empires, demanding independence. Colonialism, conversely, refers to the historical construction of colonial territories by Western empires (Maldonado-Torres, 2018). Coloniality, however, consists of the “global logic of dehumanization capable of existing even in the absence of formal colonies” (Maldonado-Torres, 2018, p. 36). This structure of domination questions the legitimacy of the modern subject-citizen, territory, the State, and institutions - as, from this perspective, such authorization favors the colonizer, who civilizes and disciplines. It frames colonization around the concept of “discovery” of territories and resources, and challenges the respectability of normative concepts, which includes the normative meaning of race, gender, class, among other social markers of difference (Maldonado-Torres, 2018).

In light of the understanding of these concepts, the categories of gender, race, and class are intrinsically linked to a Eurocentric cognitive perspective, particularly coloniality. Race was instrumentalized, through color and phenotypic traits, to legitimize the domination relationships imposed by colonizers, establishing a social hierarchy (Quijano, 2005). Consistent with the concept of race, racism is a political system that is strengthened by marginalization and the hierarchical naturalization of races - reproducing socioeconomic privileges, norms for the distribution of wealth, and opportunities - and can assume different forms at different times (Sueli Carneiro, 2023; Munanga, 2004). This colonizing instrumentalization is also perceived in the category of class - derived from capitalism, with its forms of control and labor exploitation (Quijano, 2005), and conceived through structural (Santos, 2015) and hierarchical positions (Graciete Silva, 1981), which determine material access, advantages, and disadvantages (Santos, 2011). This logic limits and hierarchizes, and further introduces a universal social classification of society (Quijano, 2005).

Challenging a colonial perspective, we recognize the concept of women by moving away from biological (Joan Scott, 1995), universal (Oyeronke Oyěwùmí, 2004), and immutable characteristics (Judith Butler, 2018), in order to include other identities (Letícia Nascimento, 2021). We agree with the definition of women based on a social construction (Guacira Louro, 2008), supported by the pluralization of the notion of women and femininities (Letícia Nascimento, 2021). This is justified by the need for “a de-essentialization and de-naturalization of the woman's identity” (Letícia Nascimento, 2021, p. 42), as the naturalization so strongly marked by machismo, sexism, and patriarchy in society constitutes a barrier to the inclusion of trans women, travestis, and transgender people in feminism (Letícia Nascimento, 2021).

Defying a society based on mechanisms that favor coloniality, decoloniality proposes an “epistemic turn” - “a suspension of the logic of recognition and a renunciation of the institutions and practices that maintain modernity/coloniality” (Maldonado-Torres, 2018, p. 49). This aesthetic (vision and sense), creative (thought, activities), and, above all, epistemic (knowledge) detachment differs from post-colonial theories, which merely circle the established and fixed boundaries (spaces that break

binary perspectives). The decolonial project reinvents these divisions, transforming them into a “locus of enunciation” (Bernardino-Costa & Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 18) - composed of geopolitical position, and racial, class, gender, and sexual hierarchies - that impact the body, where knowledge is constructed from the experiences of subalternized subjects, thus establishing an ethical-political commitment to the formulation of counter-hegemonic knowledge (Bernardino-Costa & Grosfoguel, 2016).

Based on the decolonial perspective, intersectionality challenges hegemonic conceptions and positions, enabling a deeper understanding of the naturalized system of inequalities in which women are immersed. This approach allows for the comprehension of the crossroads of related axes of power that intensify these oppressions and facilitate the overcoming of the power standard based on modernity/coloniality (Bernardino-Costa, 2015).

### **Intersectionality: A Theoretical and Methodological Tool**

Grounded in the concept of power as an exercise stemming “from innumerable points, and in the play of an unequal and mobile relation” (Foucault, 1988, p. 90), and manifested across all social practices (Foucault, 1988), intersectionality is understood as an analytical tool that addresses identities and power relations, identifying invisible bodies (Kimberly Crenshaw, 2015). Going beyond the mere identification of identities and systems of oppression, intersectionality “seeks to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination” (Kimberly Crenshaw, 2002, p. 177). Consequently, the adoption of intersectionality as a methodological tool is justified by the limitations of the gender concept - which is insufficient to fully determine a subordinated social position - and by the importance of identifying the multiple intersecting identities of subalternized groups (Jenny Rodriguez, 2018).

In consonance with the investigation of analytical categories, consubstantiality seeks to analyze, “in a non-mechanical manner, the social practices of men and women regarding the social division of labor in its triple dimension: class, gender, and origin (North/South)” (Daniele Kergoat, 2010, p. 93). While Marxist and socialist feminism focuses on the gender-class dimension, Black feminism and intersectionality studies emphasize the gender-race dimension (Flávia Biroli; Miguel, 2015). Helena Hirata (2014) posits that the major point of convergence in both approaches is the non-hierarchization of forms of oppression, further highlighting two relevant aspects of both analyses: differentiation and origin.

Regarding differentiation, consubstantiality stems from three fundamental and transversal social relations (gender, race, and class), whereas in intersectionality, the intersection varies and can incorporate other social relations (sexuality, age, religion, among others), in addition to the markers of consubstantiality. When analyzing origin, both theories trace back to the 1970s and the questions raised by Black feminists - where racial oppression was analyzed before France (as in Brazil) - influencing a movement centered on race. Conversely, race issues were not utilized in consubstantiality, which generates different theoretical and political implications given the theoretical-methodological tension between both analyses (Helena Hirata, 2014).

In complementarity, Patrícia Hill Collins (2015) underscores the importance of the race category, which was relegated to a secondary status as an unwanted interference—due to French Marxist thought—in the European conception of consubstantiality. Consequently, this category was reduced to a local problem, while studies that privilege class—or address intersectionality while disregarding race—adopt class as a preferred approach, failing to acknowledge racism as a fundamental issue.

We adopt the concept of intersectionality as the theoretical and methodological perspective, anchored in the analytical categories of gender, race, and class.

## Motherhood and Intersectionality

Modernity/coloniality also structures the social and historical construction of motherhood (Rachel Iagnecz & Josiane Wedig, 2021). Supported by a Eurocentric foundation, society expects all women to fulfill the social function of motherhood, which is accompanied by domestic and care work. This function, characterized as "natural" (Simone de Beauvoir, 1967), along with the diverse and/or complex experiences related to motherhood - whether through pregnancy or the adoption of a child - is intensified by the oppressions of gender, race, and class. Although motherhood is largely perceived as a private experience, it directly impacts the public sphere and the exercise of citizenship for women-mothers. Consistent with the aforementioned oppressions, the sexual division of labor is one of the main intensifiers of the oppressive conditions faced by women, especially working mothers (Rachel Iagnecz & Josiane Wedig, 2021).

Flávia Biroli and Débora Quintela (2020) clarify that the Sexual Division of Labor (SDL) is a "mode of social organization of work that establishes a split between the public and private spheres, between production and social reproduction. And this occurs in a way that expands or restricts people's autonomy based on their sex" (Flávia Biroli & Débora Quintela, 2020, p. 73). Analyzing the consequences of the SDL, Helena Hirata (2010) elucidates the relationship between gender and neoliberal globalization, arguing that at different times in the 19th and 20th centuries, the demand for labor power conflicted with patriarchal strategies. Simultaneously, this conflict generated more precarious and vulnerable jobs directed at women - with an increased workload (paid or unpaid) and a transference of part of the social reproduction work, previously secured by the State, to women.

For Helena Hirata (2010), the SDL is constituted by the professional and domestic, formal and informal, paid and unpaid dimensions, encompassing new configurations: (1) Bipolarity of female employment - one pole is formed by women who achieved higher levels of education, and the other pole comprises positions traditionally occupied by women (such as care, health, and education); (2) Changes in the modes of "reconciliation" between family and professional life - (a) traditional model (woman does not work outside and the man is the provider); (b) reconciliation model (woman works outside and reconciles activities; man does not reconcile); (c) partnership model (men and women share domestic and care tasks); (d) delegation model (woman delegates care work to other women).

Considering the challenges of being a mother and working in organizations, compounded by the oppressive origins of gender, race, and class, this research proposes an intersectional analysis seeking, beyond the deepening understanding of inequalities, the promotion of social justice and equality (Patrícia Collins & Sirma Bilge, 2021).

## Methodological Procedures

This research focused on the first episode of the audiovisual documentary "Como Ela Faz?", titled "Trabalho" (Work) (Uol Prime, 2021). Through a qualitative approach, which explores the meaning that individuals and groups attribute to a social problem (Creswell, 2007), we sought to understand how the intersectionalities of gender, race, and class compromise the life trajectory of working mothers in organizations.

Regarding technical procedures, we adopted a documentary-type research - characterized by the use of documents without analytical treatment or that need to be prepared according to the research objectives (Arida Godoy, 1995) and bibliographical research - developed from already elaborated and treated materials (Raupp & Ilse Beuren, 2004).

With the objective of ensuring the reliability of the study, the analysis and data treatment consisted of documentary analysis, thematic analysis, and intersectional analysis. Documentary analysis involves the examination of different materials, not used for any analytical work, or that can be re-examined, in

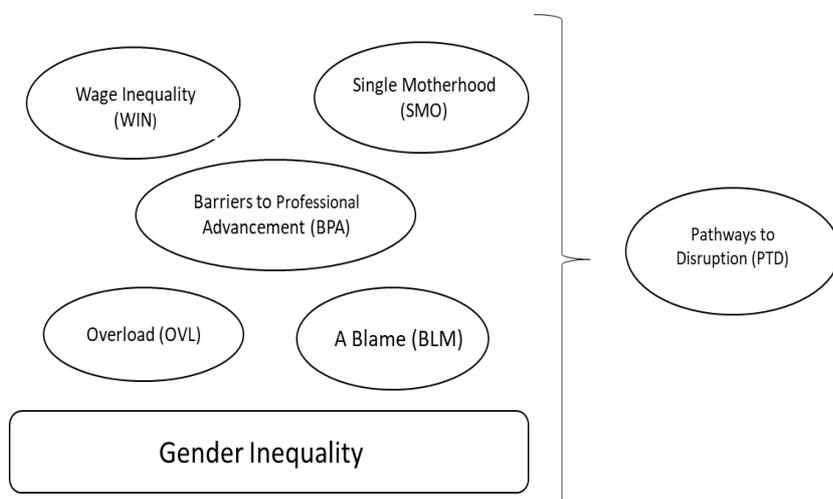
order to seek—through documents—other interpretations or complementary information (Guba & Yvonna Lincoln, 1981), completing the information obtained by other techniques (Menga Lüdke & Marli André, 1986). For the study, the main document was the first episode of the audiovisual documentary "Como Ela Faz?", titled "O trabalho". To analyze the corpus, we fully transcribed the documentary's audio using the Google Docs transcription tool, and subsequently organized and revised it to ensure the quality of the transcription. Although the documentary broadly discusses women at work, we selected the themes surrounding the complexity of working mothers, in accordance with the research objectives.

The analytical treatment was carried out by submitting the corpus to Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), which consists of "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) in a data set" (Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2014, p. 57), based on the recurrence with which a topic is spoken or written (Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2014). We highlight that Thematic Analysis can be used with both the inductive approach - with categories or themes constructed from the analysis of the corpus - and the deductive approach - which starts from a pre-established set of categories. In our analysis, we used the inductive approach (Luciana Souza, 2019).

Based on the documentary transcription, the RTA was conducted in 6 phases. In phase 1 (Familiarization with the data), we transcribed the documentary and organized our notes, which contributed to constructing the first ideas and allowed us to identify patterns that formed as the active reading - with the search for patterns - occurred, responding to the research objectives. For phase 2 (Generation of initial codes), we synthesized the contents for interpretation in a way that patterns were identified for subsequent theme adjustment. This analysis was conducted based on our interpretations and the speeches of the documentary participants (Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2012; Luciana Souza, 2019). The codes were grouped in phase 3 (searching for themes), by classifying similar characteristics, in order to describe significant patterns in the corpus. At this point, we identified the themes: Barriers to Professional Advancement (BPA); Wage Inequality (WI); Guilt (GLT); Overload (OVL) and Solo Motherhood (SMO) - which we considered the main challenges cited by the participants. In addition to the challenges, the category "Pathways for Rupture (PR)" emerged during the RTA. This category was included as it complements the research objectives. Subsequently, in phase 4, we revised and related the themes to the research corpus, with the definition and naming of themes (phase 5), and grouped them (Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2012), as shown in **Figure 2**:

**Figure 2.**

Thematic analysis map of the research.



Research Data

After structuring the thematic map, we interpreted the categories using the analytical tool of intersectionality (Patrícia Collins & Sirma Bilge, 2021), which considered the social markers of gender, race, and class. Intersectional analysis is an analytical methodological tool that investigates intersectional power relations (Collins, 2017) and, above all, the articulations of modern colonial structures (Carla Akotirene, 2019). The analysis and report were developed in phase 6, in section “Intersectionalizing the Challenges of Working Mothers in Organizations”.

The Documentary and the *Corpus* Composition

Launched in 2021 and composed of 5 episodes, the Documentary "Como Ela Faz?" (How She Does It) gathers testimonies from 13 women who occupy various positions in Brazil to discuss gender and race inequality at work (Tocha Filmes, 2024). For the study, we selected the first episode, titled “Trabalho” (Work), according to the technical specifications (Figure 3):

**Figure 3.**

*Technical Specifications of the Documentary “Como ela Faz”, Episode 1 “Trabalho”*

Technical Specification of the Episode	
Director	Tatiana Vilella
Producer	Sylvio Rocha
Screenplay	Selma Perez; Vanessa Franquilino
Editing	Selma Perez
Director of Photography	Janice D’Avila
Research	Carolina R. N Barreira; Camila Mouri; Vanessa Franquilino
Art	Patrice Garcia
Soundtrack	Garbato + Loud
Production	Tocha Filmes

Database: Uol Prime (2021)

We chose five participants (Figure 4) as central to the first episode for the selection of narratives, due to the detailed nature of their life experiences in the documentar.

Figura 4

Central participants of the documentary

Adriana Barbosa	Cidália Bomfim dos Santos	Lidia Camargo Herzog	Maria Aparecida da Silva - Cida Silva	Kamila Rocha
<p><b>Self-presentation:</b> "I'm Adriana Barbosa, from São Paulo, I'm a social entrepreneur, a mother of one" (1 min 44 s).</p> <p><b>Additional Information<sup>1</sup>:</b> Black woman and single mother of one child.</p>	<p><b>Self-presentation:</b> "My name is Cidália, I'm from Bahia, I came to São Paulo when I was 19. So, I started working in a family home. And I never stopped working" (2 min 13 s)</p> <p><b>Additional Information<sup>1</sup>:</b> Black domestic worker and mother.</p>	<p><b>Self-presentation:</b> "My name is Lígia Camargo Herzog and I am 38 years old and I am an executive at a multinational company. I work in the area of corporate affairs, communication, and sustainability" (2 min).</p> <p><b>Additional Information<sup>1</sup>:</b> Lígia (white woman) has two children between 2 and 3 years old and has a caregiver (Black woman) to help with childcare. She complains that her husband is not as actively involved with the children as she is.</p>	<p><b>Self-presentation:</b> "I am a farmer, observer, experimenter, and multiplier" (1 min 35 s)</p> <p><b>Additional Information<sup>1</sup>:</b> Black mother, has five children. She has worked since childhood in the rural area</p>	<p><b>Self-presentation:</b> "I work at Casa Ângela, Casa Ângela is a birthing center" (19 min 28 s).</p> <p><b>Additional Information<sup>1</sup>:</b> Kamila (white woman) is a nurse-midwife, has one child, and relates that she divides domestic and care tasks equally with her husband.</p>

Source: Uol Prime (2021)

<sup>1</sup> Information generated by the authors, based on observation of the documentary and the participants' speeches.

### Analysis And Discussion Of Results

The five central participants of the documentary (Figure 4) share life experiences in which their main social markers are subjected to colonial logics of gender, race, and class. Based on the participants' speeches, we identified, analyzed, and discussed the challenges of working mothers in organizations in section "Intersectionalizing the Challenges of Working Mothers" and, additionally, indicated and discussed the Pathways for Rupture facing the aforementioned challenges, in section "Pathways for Rupture".

### Intersectionalizing the challenges of working mothers

Through RTA, we identified Wage Inequality (WI), Overload (OVL), Solo Motherhood (SMO), Barriers to Professional Advancement (BPA), and Guilt (GLT) as challenges for working mothers in

Brazil. These challenges were discussed and analyzed intersectionally below.

### **Wage Inequality (WI)**

The participants point to wage inequality as one of the challenges for working mothers. Cidália questions: “If I do the same work that a man does, I have to earn the same as the man... because I'm a woman, I have to earn less. Why? I don't think it's right that he earns more just because he's a man” (Cidália Santos, 5 min 59 s). This disparity is confirmed by IBGE (2024) data, which states a 22.3% difference in remuneration between men and women. Flávia Birolli (2016) explains that capitalism has shaped family and organizational dynamics that reorganized domestic life, especially the domesticity of women. The privatization of women's work—instrumentalized by neoliberalism—neglects them with low remuneration in order to ensure social reproduction work (Helena Hirata, 2010). Complementarily, Sheila Carvalho, Coordinator of Public Policies and Business Practices at the Ethos Institute, highlights that:

When you make these intersectionalities, you see that yes, the white woman earns less than the white man. Sometimes she earns less than the Black man - not Always - and the Black woman earns less than the white woman, the Black man, and the white man (Sheila de Carvalho, 6 min 37 s).

Sheila presents social markers as intensifiers of inequality, positioning the Black woman at lower salaries when compared to white men, Black men, and white women. Wage inequality intersects gender - when being a woman results in lower salaries ; class, which, based on labor exploitation and control, determines the existence of vulnerabilities, both economic and social (Quijano, 2005), especially for Black women, whose remunerations are the lowest (IBGE, 2024); and race - intrinsically related to class (Quijano, 2005)—when being a non-white woman is related to lower salaries, when compared to those of white women and white and non-white men (IBGE, 2024).

### **Overload (OVL)**

In addition to wage inequality, the participants point to overload as one of the challenges for working mothers in organizations. Kamila Rocha explains: “The woman, she has to be perfect. We grow up hearing this since childhood. You have to know how to cook, wash, iron, take care of your husband, work... because even now in our generation we have this too” (12 min 29 s). Adriana Barbosa also feels the overload

I feel overloaded. I would like to have more equity in the care of her [daughter], for him to participate more and understand that I do everything... you know? but I also work. I am the head of the family, just like my great-grandmother was, just like my mother was (Adriana Barbosa, 13 min 13 s).

A The overload cited by the participants is related to childcare and domestic chores, which results in an average of 20.4 hours per week for white women and 22 hours per week for Black women (IBGE, 2022). This workload, added to working outside the home, generates physiological, emotional, and psychological consequences, compromising the development of all work and functions performed by these women (Lorena Souza & Luiza Machado, 2021). The psychoanalyst Vera Iaconelli explains:

The office is full of depressed, sick, phobic women, somaticizing, because they think they should be able to handle something that they shouldn't have to handle, they should speak up, they should complain, they should say no, they should share, they should call the family, call the State (Vera Iaconelli, 17 min 17 s)

Vera Vera reports psychological illnesses in her patients resulting from the overload they endure as working mothers. This is because many women assume this overload believing it is their obligation to balance and accumulate all these functions and/or responsibilities for being women. Furthermore, the

psychoanalyst encourages the participation of the family and the State to solve the problem.

In the documentary, when demonstrating participant Lígia's routine, a Black woman (unidentified) assists with the care of Lígia's children—apparently a caregiver. The contribution aims to reconcile work outside the home with childcare. Flávia Biroli and Debora Quintela (2020) justify that the higher the income, the less time dedicated to domestic work, which may also apply to the time spent on childcare for working mothers. Although there is a release of time dedicated to activities in the private sphere, “how much a woman takes on varies according to her possibility of assigning the same work to other women, with lower income and a structurally more vulnerable situation” (Flávia Biroli & Debora Quintela, 2020, p. 78).

Overload intersects gender, when women are socially incumbent to accumulate responsibilities from the public sphere (paid work) and the private sphere (care work, domestic chores, and unpaid work) ; class—since the higher the income level, the less time dedicated to domestic work—that is, income is related to the time dedicated to the private sphere (Helena Hirata, 2010; Flávia Biroli & Débora Quintela, 2020); and race, when income defines the level of overload, with non-white women being the ones who receive the lowest remuneration when compared to white women (IBGE, 2024), meaning that income is related to race, impacting the level of overload for working mothers.

### **Solo Motherhood (SMO)**

Motherhood, characterized “as a social phenomenon marked by social, racial/ethnic, and underlying gender inequalities” (Lucila Scavone, 2001, p. 48), is often experienced by women without a bond, either conjugal or parental, in raising children—solo motherhood (Sabrina Finamori, 2019). From this perspective, different forms of motherhood are not experienced in the same way by women, and can be more precarious when these women accumulate the responsibilities of childcare, domestic work, and working in the labor market alone (Lucila Scavone, 2001). In the second half of 2022, there were about 11.053 million solo mothers in Brazil, and 77.6% of them performed some paid activity (IBGE, 2023). Cidália describes the overload of care in solo motherhood, affirming:

I would leave her at the neighbor's house, I would give her a little money so she could stay with my children. The man wants to put the burden on the woman. Because the children... the woman has to take care of them, you know? And that's not it. The responsibility is for both (Cidália Santos, 14 min 26 s).

The account presents a strategy adopted by Cidália for childcare due to work and the lack of shared responsibility. In addition to the concern of childcare, the race aspect stands out in this family composition in Brazil. When analyzing the characteristics of solo mothers in Brazil, it is found that 61.7% of these women were Black (IBGE, 2023). Sheila Carvalho emphasizes the race aspect in solo motherhood:

[...] Black women are historically shunned for affective relationships, both by white men and Black men. Which results in Black women ending up having children alone, right? We see here that the number of single mothers among Black women is much higher than the number of single mothers among white women (Sheila Carvalho, 13 min 42 s).

Considering coloniality, Black women are intersectionally affected by aspects of gender, race, and class—as they are the ones who receive the lowest incomes (IBGE, 2024). When solo motherhood is added, the vulnerability of these women deepens (Cláudia Barbosa, Edmeire Pires & Maria Di Gregório, 2023).

In this scenario, the intersectionalities of solo motherhood are based on aspects of gender—with women as the sole responsible for the child and, consequently, the most overloaded ; class, when poorer women are more overloaded because they do not have the income to finance the delegation of

domestic and care tasks (Flávia Biroli & Debora Quintela, 2020); and race, when Black women are the majority of single-parent families and, simultaneously, compose the population with the lowest income (IBGE, 2023).

### **Barriers to Professional Advancement (BPA)**

The participants highlight BPA as one of the challenges for working mothers. Based on the sexual division of labor, these barriers both impede professional advancement and segregate women to specific organizational spaces (Flávia Biroli & Débora Quintela, 2020). Participant Lúcia Hergoz exemplifies BPA:

When I got married, my husband and I... we are practically the same age. We had very similar positions, recently promoted or manager. And if I analyze today... 9 years later, his career was much faster than mine, in terms of development, opportunity, speed, remuneration. So, his salary... I earned more when we got married. Today he earns much more than me (Lúcia Hergoz, 5 min 13 s).

When questioned about the reasons for these barriers to professional advancement, Lúcia responds uncomfortably: "I don't want to answer what I'm going to answer [pause], but I think it's because I'm a woman" (5 min 44 s). For working mothers, the sexual division of labor - and its different dimensions - especially childcare, compromise career progression when compared to a man's career, which generates less free time for women and lower income (Flávia Biroli, 2016).

Parallel to the barriers to advancement, Ana Fontes (President and Founder of the Rede Mulher Empreendedora Institute) highlights the absence of women in positions of power, stating: "We are more than half of the population and we are not reflected in the environment of power. When you go to the issue of race, those numbers worsen to an absurd proportion" (6 min 58 s). The participant points out segregation of women in organizations and emphasizes the race aspect as an intensifier of inequalities in organizations, since non-white women appear in smaller numbers in leadership positions compared to white women (IBGE, 2024). For Márcia Leite (2017), this segregation marginalizes women in more precarious and lower-income occupations, meaning they are excluded from organizational environments of power. Both barriers to professional advancement and segregation restrict women's autonomy to specific organizational locations according to gender (Flávia Biroli & Débora Quintela, 2020).

BPA intersects gender, when women's work is socially undervalued - either due to the absence or reduction of their presence in positions of power or by the reduction of remuneration - and with fewer chances for professional advancement (Flávia Biroli & Débora Quintela, 2020); class and race, when such BPA are more evident and intensified in non-white women/mothers who receive lower incomes (Helena Hirata, 2015) and are in smaller number in leadership positions compared to white women (IBGE, 2024).

### **Guilt (GLT)**

Faced with the overload, working mothers report being unable to reconcile work from the public and private spheres, feeling guilty. Simone Mestre and Érica Souza (2021) justify that the feeling of guilt and responsibility are related and are supported by personal motivation and social pressure imputed to these mothers. Kamila Rocha vents:

In addition to taking care of the house, you have to be a good professional [...] you have to be the best mother in the world. So it's cruel. This is cruel to women, isn't it? In addition to all that, there's the mental load, there's the guilt of not feeling like a good mother. It's having to keep reconciling who you are with your work and bringing money home. And you know... and you get into this thing of having to handle everything (Kamila Rocha, 12 min 45 s).

Kamila describes the attempt to balance the demands of motherhood with personal and professional desires and achievements. Guilt coexists even when they feel happy with their respective professions.

It's complicated... because a mother is born, guilt is born. So, and even though I love what I do, many times I feel guilty about leaving Benjamin [Kamila's son]. Many times, I feel guilty for not feeling guilty, right? Because I'm going to work happy. And then I think, should I be happy? And he's at home. I shouldn't be sad because I'm away from him (Kamila Rocha, 15 min 41s).

A sociedade Society has romanticized motherhood as a female fulfillment and an elevation of femininity. The feminist movement problematized this conception and re-dimensioned motherhood as a social, historical, and cultural construction so that it is seen as a female decision and option. When women opt for motherhood, they feel guilty for continuing with their professional career and not being full-time mothers (Selma Benzoni, Noemi Baptista, Musacci & Jenifer da Silva, 2024). This blaming stems from society and is internalized by women. Society produces contradictory discourses that simultaneously demand that women assume all tasks and exercise full-time motherhood. Such discourses lead to ambiguous feelings regarding motherhood, as observed in Kamila's account (Ruane César, Amanda Lourdes & Bárbara Andrade, 2019).

Guilt intersects gender, when women are socially charged to reconcile full-time motherhood and work; class and race, when women from lower economic classes - predominantly non-white women - dedicate more hours to work (IBGE, 2024) and, without conditions to finance the delegation of care and/or have more flexible jobs, feel more guilty.

### **Pathways for Rupture (PR)**

Faced with the challenges mentioned, the participants propose pathways for rupture that contribute to the reduction of inequalities, as well as the improvement of the quality of life for working mothers. These are: The social promotion of gender equality; a change in mindsets; the sharing of responsibilities and the education of children for gender equality.

The social promotion of gender equality is cited by the participants, who point to two directions: the reflection on concepts and the implementation of actions aiming at inequalities. Regarding the reflection on concepts, the participants argue in favor of the importance of discussing the principles of these actions so that pathways for solving the problem of inequality can be thought out. Jaqueline defends that:

There is a whole historical, philosophical, psychological construction that we don't discuss and that, in the end, is what provides the cultural basis for you to have different salaries. What makes salaries different is a cultural construction (Jaqueline Conceição, 6 min 12s).

Discussing the relations and constructions that permeate gender inequalities and related concepts allows for questioning power relations, as well as reflecting on possible collective coping pathways (Juliana Teixeira, 2021). In addition to discussions about concepts, the participants suggest actions aiming at equality in the public sphere - such as ensuring equal pay between men and women, eliminating barriers to professional advancement due to gender, and other gender-based discriminations.

Participant Vera Iaconelli highlights the active involvement of women in promoting gender equality, stating that “they should speak up, they should complain, they should say no, they should share, they should call the family, call the State [...]” (17 min 28 s) Vera emphasizes the importance of social actors, such as the family and the State, for a social change towards *de facto* gender equality. The State plays a role as a conciliator - in promoting between productive work and family responsibilities - and an articulator of public policies (such as the implementation of quality full-time daycares with flexible hours that adapt to the needs of families, school transportation, among others); elaborating,

implementing, and supervising laws that ensure gender equality in organizations, in addition to offering quality services that ensure social demands, especially those of working mothers (Márcia Leite, 2017).

Another possible path is the change of mindsets, both for women and for society as a whole. Ana Fontes explains that:

For many years, I used to say that he helped me. Today I say to all women: A partner doesn't help, a partner divides tasks and we live our lives together. That is, there is no greater responsibility for one or the other (Ana Fontes, 18 min 08 s).

Ana emphasizes that she used to believe that the man's participation was “help”, but, with the change in mindset, she understands that it is a responsibility that must be shared. The participant adds that she talks to other women about the theme, with the intention of changing other mindsets. Kamila Rocha cites the inclusion of gender equality in the education of future generations and explains:

So, both have responsibilities within the home, duties to fulfill, and I think he sees that. So, he [son] doesn't see Gustavo sitting watching television, while I'm there killing myself doing domestic work. He doesn't see that. So, I think that's already the beginning (Kamila Rocha, 21 min 57 s).

The education that Kamila refers to comes from children's observation of family practices and dynamics that promote gender equality, aiming at a construction of mindsets in favor of gender equality. Maria Cardona (2024) reinforces that gender equality must be developed inside and outside educational institutions, promoting citizenship.

Complementary to the change in mindsets, the sharing of responsibilities focuses on actions against inequalities. Adriana Carvalho - Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Manager – UN Women - comments:

We really want a 50/50 planet in several aspects, don't we? If women went outside, men have to come and do their part inside, (right?) in the private sphere. And we have to show that it's good, that it's possible to have great models, that this equation is good for everyone (Adriana Carvalho, 21 min 28s).

When Adriana states wanting “a 50/50 planet,” she refers to equal sharing between men and women. Mothers went into the labor market, and men should turn to the private sphere, that is, to responsibilities with children and domestic chores, once the overload imposed on working mothers can be shared. Vera Iaconelli explains that:

The democratic space within the family is a fundamental mark for us to think about these changes in mentality. They also, paradoxically, involve the valuing of the man in the role of father. Because the moment he stops being just the guy who supports, but the role of father has value, he is not a poor imitation of the mother (Vera Iaconelli, 20 min 09 s)

The participant clarifies that the changes in mindset are linked to the partners' movement towards assuming responsibilities with children and domestic chores and to the participation of organizations. Adriana claims that:

The issue of eliminating inequalities is a complex problem, like many others that our society faces today, so it is never just one measure. In fact, we need companies to do their part, but also governments and society as well, right? (Adriana Carvalho, 21 min 8 s).

Organizations are fundamental in reducing inequalities. In this sense, organizational measures, such as: more flexible working hours, with better remuneration (Bell Hocks), stimulating organizational culture in the promotion of diversity and gender equality in organizations, and the internalization of diversity in recruitment, training, and people development processes (Fernanda Matos & Dias, 2023) are necessary

for the construction of a more egalitarian society.

## Final Considerations

The objective of this study was to understand how the intersectionalities of gender, race, and class oppressions compromise the life trajectory of working mothers in organizations. From this perspective, we identified Barriers to Professional Advancement; Wage Inequality; Guilt; Overload and Solo Motherhood as the main challenges for mothers who work in organizations. In addition to the analysis of the challenges, we pointed out and discussed pathways for rupture facing the situation of inequality. These are: the social promotion of gender equality; the change of mindsets; the sharing of responsibilities and the education of children for gender equality.

The discussion presented suggests possible pathways, such as the reflection on concepts and constructions regarding the theme, together with the implementation of actions aimed at combating gender inequality; social participation; awareness and educational actions against gender inequality; education and practices of gender equality in the family environment; stimulating organizational culture in the promotion of gender diversity in organizations, internalization of diversity in recruitment, training, and people development processes, flexible working hours, better remuneration, as well as the elaboration, the implementation, and the supervision of laws against gender inequality in organizations. All the actions cited can be contemplated in a public policy to support motherhood that aims to combat the oppressions of gender, race, and class. The pathways for rupture articulate working mothers, family, organizations, and the State in favor of better social and organizational conditions for working mothers.

In addition to these practical contributions that involve different social actors, we highlight the theoretical and social contributions of the research. These are: reflections on the dynamics of power and oppression imposed on mothers who work in organizations; assistance to intersectional studies that address the theme - theoretically and methodologically instrumentalizing the indissociability of structural systems of oppression (Machismo, patriarchy, capitalism, racism) that intersect through gender, race, and class identity lines (Carla Akotirene, 2019); the direction towards a decolonial approach; as well as expanding the debate on the challenges that impact not only working mothers, but also families and all of society. This fulfills the achievement of the SDGs: 5 (Gender Equality), which provides for the elimination of all forms of discrimination; 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which, among other measures, guarantees equal opportunities; and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which promotes the enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (ONU BRASIL, 2025).

The study's limitation includes the selection of participants by the documentary's director, as well as the restriction of the situations presented in the documentary under study, given the diverse and complex situations of power and oppression suffered by working mothers. In this sense, the development of the debate on the theme is encouraged, addressing the trajectories of other working mothers in Brazil and/or other events to expand the topics related to the theme, adopting intersectionality as a methodological and theoretical tool.

Note: In opposition to a sexist frame of reference—which contributes to the erasure of women in the academic sphere—we opted to reference female authors by their first name, both in the body of the text and in the references.

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