

#MOTHERHOODWITHOUTJUDGMENT: negotiations of meanings of guilt and maternal love among consumers of O Boticário

#MATERNIDADESEMJULGAMENTOS: negociações de sentidos sobre culpa e amor materno entre consumidoras de O Boticário

#MATERNIDADESSINJUICIOS: negociaciones de significados sobre la culpa y el amor maternal entre consumidoras de O Boticário

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Abstract

This article explores interpretations of the meanings related to the Motherhood Without Judgment campaign, launched in 2022 by the brand O Boticário. The proposal is to discuss how advertising enables the study of the circulation of meanings about motherhood, mothering, and their consequences in women's lives, considering the context and sociocultural values. The social representations and the encoding/decoding model of Stuart Hall (2009) underlies the theoretical and methodological framework applied in the interpretative analysis. The empirical material consists of 92 Instagram posts. Results indicate that the advertising discourse interacts with consumers in a discursive space, where the hegemonic sense of patriarchal motherhood prevails. We also observed objections and the production of a political view of motherhood and mothering, which questions the social structure and gender, race, and class inequalities.

Keywords: Advertising. Motherhood. Maternal guilt. Consumer culture.

Introduction

Despite being a topic that is still approached in a timid way among feminist studies and in the field of communication in Brazil, motherhood remains one of the most impactful experiences with regard to the construction of cultural identities and social roles historically assumed by women (O'Reilly, 2016). In this article we signal, from the outset, the notion of motherhood as a social construction upheld by the most diverse institutions (family, science, religion, economy, and politics) so that it is considered a destiny to be fulfilled by women. It is often embedded in the biological dimension as part of the feminine nature or essence, or even, the divine dimension. For this reason, the social roles attributed to mothers are naturalized around meanings such as achievement and completeness, guided mainly by the perspectives of instinct and maternal love (Badinter, 1985).

Care work, culturally associated with women, is directly linked to the debate on motherhood since the demands related to children and the time dedicated to mothering become significant determinants of the choices and limitations that women face in relation to life in general. It is in this context that Andrea O'Reilly (2016) proposes the formulation of a matricentric feminism, to highlight that there are problems and needs – social, economic, political, cultural, and psychological – that make demands on women who are mothers in specific ways, impacting on their activities and social roles, as well as the shaping of their identities and subjectivity.

Faced with the impossibility of fulfilling unattainable ideals, maternal experiences are imbued with feelings of ambivalence, anxiety, guilt and insecurity, in addition to social judgment. For Rozsika Parker (1997), maternal ambivalence is a complex and contradictory mental state, permeated by feelings of guilt, shame, love and hate related to sons and daughters. And in this tangle of conflicting feelings and social pressures, maternal judgment arises at the individual (from each mother towards herself) and social (from others towards mothers) levels.

Starting from the recognition that communication mediates all forms of social and cultural life in society (Martín-Barbero, 2009), it is interesting to consider the ways in which, over the years, media narratives about motherhood have supported parameters of behaviors and practices that are suggestive of how to be a good mother. From the perspective of our study, we consider representation as “an essential part of the process by which meanings are produced and shared among members of a culture” (Hall, 2016, p. 31). Thus, we began to reflect specifically on how advertising, in its articulation with society and culture, also makes it possible to observe the circulation of representations about motherhood and mothering, and their consequences in the lives of women.

Taking as our object of study the O Boticário brand campaign in celebration of Mother’s Day 2022, we built our debate around the following question: how are the meanings about motherhood and mothering guided by the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgment campaign interpreted by consumers and how did it enable reflection on their own maternal experiences? Based on publicizing strategies (Casaqui 2014), the campaign aimed to stimulate debate among mothers and consumers of the brand, who were invited to share their experiences on social media.

The analysis corpus comprises 92 publications by mothers, influencers and mothers’ collectives who, in different ways, utilized the meanings about motherhood and mothering present in the campaign to construct their own narratives, which both celebrate and problematize the prevailing ideas of motherhood in society. The methodological proposal draws on the perspective of social representations by Stuart Hall (2009). This is based on the coding/decoding model, configuring the analysis of the dominant, negotiated and oppositional meanings of publications in dialogue with theoretical reflections from different authors of motherhood studies.

In addition to the introductory section, the text is divided into four parts. In the first, we list the different ways in which advertising has contributed to the negotiation of meanings and perpetuation of idealized motherhood. Next, we present the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgment campaign, its main parts and strategies. In the third stage, we outline how the senses of guilt and maternal love are linked in the campaign and how these support the notion of judgment (individual and social) among mothers. Finally, we develop the analysis of the dominant, negotiated and oppositional meanings of decoding, based on the set of publications that constitute the study corpus.

Advertising and motherhood

It is possible to affirm that the way mothers are represented in advertising, as well as the different ways in which the public understands and interacts with these narratives, reflect the meanings that are held about motherhood and mothering according to culture, society and the historical period in which they occur. In 2011, Laura Guimarães Corrêa argued that the ideal of the good mother present in national advertising was directly associated with caring for children and the home. In this case, “the wife and mother not only appears committed to this role, but also demonstrates pleasure in carrying out these tasks” (Correa, 2011, p. 9). From a similar perspective, Maria Collier de Mendonça observed, in 2014, how advertising at that time tended to reinforce culturally dominant maternal ideals, consistent with the patriarchal model and consumer culture. In the last decade, the demands and debates proposed by feminist movements have intensified and created new fronts of action and dispute with regard to gender issues (which includes motherhood), particularly since the emergence of social media. There is, on the one hand, a contradiction that is revealed through the idealized view of motherhood on social media and the difficulties and pressures experienced by mothers daily. This problematization “has been the target of various criticisms and personal accounts circulating online under the guise of expressing/debating ‘real motherhood’” (Oliveira-Cruz; Conrad, 2022, p.5).

Based on the premise that the interactions between advertising and consumption facilitate the observation of cultural, social and economic premises to examine contemporary social experience (Piedras, 2009), it is important to reflect on how advertising narratives have updated the ways of representing motherhood and consequently, how the public has dialogue with proposals that, in principle, provoke questions about patriarchal motherhood.

The discussion proposed here focuses on a relatively recent change that encourages advertisers to include in their campaigns support for issues emerging from social groups who have been historically subjected to conditions of inequality. This reconfiguration proposes new ways of seeking recognition and legitimacy with the consumers (Wottrich, 2019).

The “Maternidade sem filtro” (“Motherhood without filters”, freely translated) research project was conducted by MindMiners with 900 women from all over Brazil in 2019. It highlights the main maternal stereotypes still present in Brazilian advertising that, according to the participants, do not represent them.

The idealized images of a perfect mother (66%), always happy (54%) or a heroine (39%) do not match the reality of experiences of motherhood (FIG 1). It is also interesting to note the critical perception participants have of advertising because it does not present different realities, drawing attention to the fact that, for 44% of respondents, the advertisements present mothers as “all the same” (usually from a hegemonic/dominant reference point).

Figure 1 – Stereotypes that do not represent mothers in advertising, according to interviewees



Source:Camargo (2019), adapted by the authors

However, it is possible to affirm that, in recent years, some brands have updated their narratives by trying to disrupt some idealized models of motherhood. This transformation is understood to have been designed as a response to the demands made by the female public. Considering the recent circulation of more heterogeneous representations of motherhood in advertising, we understand that this is a dynamic scenario, as Laura Wottrich (2019) suggests. For the author, “transformations in the advertising field trigger sociocultural dynamics, but only actually occur through economic pressure on advertisers, which affects other agents in the field” (Wottrich, 2019, p. 69). Thus, we have issues of gender and discrimination against women as central themes in this context of interaction between advertising and its audiences, with social media being a privileged space for this observation. It is against this backdrop that we present the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgment campaign.

#MotherhoodWithoutJudgment: maternal guilt and love guided by advertising

On Mother’s Day 2022, O Boticário launched an advertising campaign to honor mothers, simultaneously starting a discussion on some concepts that create controversy about hegemonic maternal roles and identities, such as love, guilt and judgment. The campaign had as its main commercial “Discurso” (FIG 2), released on prime-time open TV on April 17th. The one-minute video, created by AlmapBBDO, showed a court with an audience and a mother as a defendant, being judged for the many times she “failed” as a mother.

In the commercial, the lawyer, played by the same actress who is in the dock (referring to the idea of self-reflection and guilt), lists her mistakes: she did not breastfeed, allowed the use of screens, pacifiers and bottles; worked outside of the home and even questioned herself about the choice of motherhood. Finally, the lawyer asked the jury whether that mother deserves “all that love and affection”. In the role of witness, a child acting as her daughter responds: “Of course she does”. A female voiceover ends the video with scenes of the mother being presented with O Boticário products and hugging her daughter: “Motherhood is not judgment, it is love. O Boticário. Where there is love, there is beauty.”

The commercial was widely publicized on social media, having a significant impact, and even being awarded the title of Best Commercial in Brazil of the year 2022 in a ceremony held by the television network SBT. Only on O Boticário's official Instagram page (@oboticario), on June 9, 2023, the video had 1,905,179 views, 657,527 likes and 24,656 comments. The campaign strategy was extended to social media using an aesthetic with mothers in black and white, with the “guilty” sign, as a reference to police archive images. In the posts, statements from celebrities (FIG 3), influencers and content creators circulated about their experiences and the most varied judgments and factors of mother blame. The influencers encouraged other mothers, using the hashtag #MaternidadeSemJulgamentos (#MotherhoodWithoutJudgment, freely translated) to share their experiences about the judgments they had suffered.

Figure 2 - Scenes from the commercial “Discurso” (AlmapBBDO)



Source: YouTube, adapted by the authors

Figure 3 - Prints of posts by celebrities and influencers who participated in the campaign



Source: Instagram.

luapio - Guilty for being exhausted, happy to have made a dream come true, but exhausted, dreaming of “holidays” even though I know that when my “chicks” are not with my sleep is not the same... guilty, exhausted and happy... go figure, huh? And you, what was the worst judgment you received as a mother? #MaternidadeSemJulgamentos#Publi@oboticario
camilamonteiro - Did you, mother, identify with any photos? Have you gone through similar

judgements? @boticario invited me to talk about the trial of motherhood. I've heard a lot of judgment since the day I announced that I wanted to be a mother. After that it never stopped. We are not always able to relax and pretend that nothing was said. It really hurts, certain comments! Motherhood already comes with heavy baggage, which involves insecurities, fears and guilt. A LOT OF GUILT!

Finally, also on social media, collaborative content actions were produced with accounts whose editorial lines are more critical or aligned with feminist demands, such as Revista TPM and Quebrando o Tabu (FIG 4). Supported by data from scientific research and questions about the consequences of maternal guilt in the lives of women who become mothers, the paid publications offered an informative reinforcement to the more personal/private tone of the influencers' posts.

Figure 4 – Screenshots of campaign content actions



Source: Instagram. @revistatpm @quebrandoatabu

revistatpm – (Card: things you DO NOT tell a mother:) Being a mother is not always an easy task and can become even more complicated with undesirable comments and unsolicited opinions about raising children. Judgment, added to doubts and fears which can arise naturally in motherhood, can lead to a feeling of guilt and inadequacy. Some figures show that 70% of mothers feel judged and pressured in their daily lives, according to the 2019 “The new Brazilian mother” survey carried out by the Qualibest Institute and the website Mulheres Incríveis...

quebrandoatabu – (Card: What is the be a mother?) Saying that there is only one right way to be a mother is the same as saying that there is only one right way to be a child. The truth is that there is no manual that teaches you how to be the best mother in the world, motherhood is an experience that you learn every day. There can be despair, emotion, surprises, a lot of challenge and the prize is certainly experiencing a unique form of love. Is it worth judging how each mother finds her way? We and Boticário believe not...

The communication efforts and actions of the campaign had the clear aim of stimulating debate on the topic, considering different appropriations and negotiations of meanings in response to the advertisements. This proposition is similar to the notion of ‘publicizing’ (Casaqui, 2014), which refers to different advertising communication strategies that transcend their discursive standardization and leads to the intensification of interactions between individuals and brands through mediatization.

The author adds that publicizing strategies give new meanings to communicative contracts between producers and consumers of the advertising message in the mediatized sphere (Casaqui, 2014). In this scenario, consumers (in our case, mothers) are introduced as mediators of the brand’s message, becoming key players in the circulation (and resignification) of advertising messages. These publications, created spontaneously by consumers/mothers on Instagram, are the subject of our analysis and discussion in this article.

Dominant and negotiated meanings of motherhood in the O Boticário campaign

It is important to emphasize that we consider advertising to be a cultural and symbolic resource that (re)produces meanings that circulate and are (re)appropriated by individuals thus aiding understanding of the dynamics of society itself (Piedras, 2009). The objective of this study is to analyze the relationship established between women and the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgment campaign, focusing specifically on the consequences

of the brand's commercial action through the consumers' production of meanings about motherhood, based on Instagram posts.

Our methodology for corpus selection and data analysis draws on the perspective of social representations by Hall (2009) based on the encoding/decoding model. In his proposal, the author regards the meanings present in media texts to be dominant, but not determining – requiring the consideration of different possibilities for decoding the same message: hegemonic/dominant, negotiated and oppositional. In the dominant mode, decoding occurs in relation to the referential code in which it was encoded. Negotiated decoding contains elements of adaptation and opposition to the hegemonic discourse. In the oppositional perspective, the receiver dissociates the message from the dominant code to associate it with another reference, decoding the message in a broadly opposite way (Hall, 2009).

In developing our methodology, we adopted the perspective of Veneza Ronsini (2011) when considering a possible reconfiguration of Hall's encoding/decoding model. For the author, in addition to decoding, coding can also involve assuming dominant, negotiated and/or oppositional cultural codes. The methodological construction must consider as a premise that the different meanings about motherhood and mothering present in the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgement campaign can both support culturally dominant maternal ideals, as well as present a disruption of this hegemonic model and problematize (or at least negotiate) these meanings. In order to observe the ways in which mothers interpret and interact with the meanings of the campaign (decoding), it is first necessary to consider how representations of motherhood and mothering are systematized in the campaign itself (coding).

Therefore, we list the dominant meanings present in the campaign based on the notions of guilt and maternal love (recurrent in the hegemonic discourse as part of the subjective construction of identity by mothers), originating from the idea of social judgment experienced by women (which appears throughout the campaign on media networks from the metaphor in the scene to the campaign hashtag).

Figure 5 – Dominant meanings of the campaign



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023)

On the right side of the diagram, we kept the notion of maternal guilt that is included in the campaign narrative (both in the audiovisual presentation and in the influencers' testimonies in the complementary pieces). This is based on what the mother "was unable to accomplish" in her culturally and socially-constructed role. Thus, the idealized dimension of motherhood has consequences for the way mothers' subjectivities are constituted, from the mothering parameters they impose on themselves to the way they evaluate their practices and feelings. "Given that no one can achieve intensive mothering, all mothers see themselves as failures. This is how the discourse works psychologically to regulate (i.e., paralyze) mothers through guilt and shame" (O'Reilly, 2016, p. 77).

We highlight that the video leaves open the possibility of interpreting that the mothers' "failures" are, to a certain extent, results of their "choices" (breastfeed or not, work outside the home or not, allow screen time or not, etc.). Once interpreted as "choices", they are likely to generate regret. In this way, it is clear how collective and individual expectation is imposed on each mother, who, "having failed", has the weight of judgment on her shoulders.

The woman feels guilty about the impossibility of achieving an ideal of perfection, an internalized ideal that, as previously seen, is culturally internalized. However, she cannot get rid of the shame felt by the gaze of others and by the very feeling of being a public figure that she attains when she becomes a mother, due to the amount of approaches that occur at this stage [...] both feelings go together and paralyze the woman: the guilt of what is internalized, as well as the shame of seeing in the other a sort of disappointment for the attitude taken (Halasi, 2018, p. 71).

On the left side of the image, we place maternal love, socially constructed as an unconditional, divine and instinctive/natural feeling of mothers for their children (Badinter, 1985). This notion is made clear in the last scene, in which the daughter answers “yes”. Even with all her “flaws”, the mother deserves “all the love and affection”. The campaign objectively reaffirms the ideal of maternal love through its slogan: “Motherhood is not judgement, it is love”.

Love, in this case, presents itself as an answer to every possible sacrifice and the reward for every doubt or difficult moment in the mother’s experiences. Maternal love, in the campaign’s narrative, is what makes the experience of mothers homogeneous and suppresses the position of judgment among women themselves (it should be noted that the court audience is almost exclusively female). It is love that alleviates guilt.

Analyzing within the proposed framework, we understand that the narrative of the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgement campaign uses hegemonic meanings of motherhood. But, to some extent, it does so from a disruptive perspective, because it intends to criticize the construction of maternal guilt and discourage the judgment of other people. On the other hand, it constitutes a reasonably safe zone, because it presents “reasons” for guilt and justifies the daily difficulties experienced by mothers based on an idealized (and individualized) feeling that is maternal love. In other words, it is a negotiated codification, because it provokes a reflection on the oppression suffered by mothers but does not break with the dominant meaning.

Self-narratives, negotiations of meaning and maternal activism: reverberations of the campaign on Instagram

The second stage of the methodology involved the cataloging and systematization of the appropriations and negotiations of meanings made by consumers. Instagram posts representing the impact of the campaign were collected between April 19 and May 2, 2022 using the platform’s search tool, for the campaign hashtag (#MotherhoodWithoutJudgement). In total, 92 publications were identified, whose data (profile, link, classification of main information) were organized in a spreadsheet. These were categorized according to the position their decoding took in relation to the campaign: dominant, negotiated or oppositional. In quantitative terms, of the 92 posts analyzed, 60 represent a hegemonic reading; 15 negotiate with the message (presenting critical arguments but considering positive aspects of the approach) and 15 are more forceful when criticizing the action. Figure 6 presents a summary of the main meanings mapped from the corpus.

Figure 6 – Summary of dominant, negotiated and oppositional meanings



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023)

In relation to the dominant meanings, users reproduce the discourse of maternal guilt based on their own experiences. It is possible to say that the ways in which mothers produce meanings about motherhood form a set of social practices based on culture, which regulate and guide society's values, behaviors, beliefs, ways of being and relating in the world (Hall, 2016). If "culture permeates the entire society" (idem, p. 21), the dominant meanings of the campaign provide indications to confirm that the culture of motherhood is linked to patriarchal culture. According to Andrea O'Reilly,

Patriarchal motherhood has become the official meaning of motherhood, and as such, it marginalizes and renders illegitimate alternative practices of mothering. As a normative discourse, it polices all women's mothering and results in the pathologizing of those women who do not or cannot perform normative motherhood. Finally, the patriarchal institution of motherhood, as a normative discourse, restrains women's power to challenge and change the oppressiveness of their motherhood experience (O'Reilly, 2016, p. 19).

The posts analyzed reveal that the cultural meanings about motherhood involve love, understood as the most esteemed sociocultural value in Western society, and this relationship is simultaneously subject to the judgments of this same society. By reframing and reproducing the dominant meanings of the campaign, we perceive a movement that seeks to naturalize guilt as a "maternal destiny" promoting another meaning addressed in the narratives: mutual support among mothers. The influencers, by inviting other mothers to share the judgments they have suffered for the way they mother, reinforce, in some way, that guilt is part of the maternal condition. Thus, the love-judgment-guilt triad is formed as the "dominant cultural order" (Hall, 2009, p. 374, author's emphasis).

[EXCERPT 1] I've received a lot of judgment but hearing that I'm a "toxic mother" hurt me a lot. I felt weak, helpless. Sad. [...] There is no recipe for being a mother, it is the constant practice of love! Excellent advertising theme by the company "O Boticário" in reference to the upcoming Mother's Day .

[EXCERPT 2] Mothers sentenced and judged for doing or not doing what society or the pediatrician, the Instagram mom blogger, the grandmother, or the great-grandmother understands as right or wrong. But relax because motherhood without judgments and comments is not motherhood.

[EXCERPT 3] We are tired of judgement, being a mother means loving unconditionally regardless of the standards that are imposed by society, as the #oboticario campaign #maternidadesemjulgamentos says - it is time to join forces and be a support network for one another!

It is clear from the posts that, predominantly, there is an ideal of motherhood that establishes values, norms and behaviors about what it means to "be" a "real mother". This reinforces the idea that mothering practices are (or should be) carried out exclusively by women-mothers. Among the meanings negotiated with the advertising discourse conveyed by the brand, we highlight the campaign's position of appreciation, dialoguing with values that question the meanings of mother guilt. In general, guilt is understood as a requirement of society. However, some posts have a prescriptive nature in saying that mothers should make "informed choices". The logic behind this reasoning is recognizing that, having access to information, mothers can base their choices on this information, dispensing with the opinions (read, judgments) of other people. This reveals a form of maintaining hegemony by shifting to mothers, once again, the fallacy of the power of choice regarding responsibility in care work. Thus, if mothers believe they can supplant maternal judgment with "informed choices," they do not recognize the oppressions to which they are subjected.

[EXCERPT 4] But we are all adults, responsible for our choices, with access to information that no generation has had before, including information that is increasingly biased, unreliable and that can victimize us more every day...be careful.

[EXCERPT 5] You need to take responsibility for your children's education and not blame yourself or allow others to blame you.

The way in which meanings that mix "elements of adaptation and opposition" (Hall, 2009, p. 378) coexist indicates that discourses on motherhood present themselves in a contradictory way in contemporary society. A point of intersection between the dominant and negotiated meanings in the analyzed corpus is how

the O Boticário campaign appropriates the dominant discourse about motherhood and uses the logic of social media to (re)produce narratives about maternal experiences.

While in posts with a dominant meaning there is a recognition of guilt as a collective element that is integral to motherhood, in posts with a negotiated meaning mothers imagine that taking responsibility for their choices in an “informed” way can be a means of liberating themselves from maternal judgment. From this, we understand that the naturalization of mother guilt leads to the development of tactics to deal with judgment, which are placed in a kind of maternal episteme: the knowledge to make decisions in care work continues to be the responsibility of mothers.

The strategy of sharing experiences through #MotherhoodWithoutJudgment can also be interpreted as a way of countering the previously presented stereotypes of representation of motherhood in advertising (Camargo, 2019). Different experiences circulated on the social network Instagram, producing a unique effect on motherhood (“Each mother is unique, and each mother has her own reality”). However, the campaign discourse standardizes motherhood by constructing maternal love as the most important value in the relationship between mothers and children. To this day, this discourse tends to occupy a structural place in contemporary society. And, therefore, it acts ideologically as a form of power that keeps women under the aegis of patriarchal motherhood (O’Reilly, 2016).

Analyzing the meanings presented in the corpus that oppose the campaign, we particularly consider the notion of advertising contestation practices developed by Laura Wottrich, which synthesizes “the modalities of receptor participation aimed at subverting or undermining the logics of the advertising field, carried out through contact with advertisements” (Wottrich, 2019, p. 202).

It is interesting to emphasize that the number of posts critical of the campaign narrative is considerably smaller than those which are favorable to it and express appropriation. We highlight the presence of voices that constitute the arena of maternal militancy on digital networks, whether from organized collectives, or from individual/professional profiles whose positioning and publications are already well aligned with feminist demands. This quantitative finding, and the identity of those posting who contest the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgment campaign, help to understand the maintenance of patriarchal ideology among culturally dominant maternal meanings, meeting resistance from a more specific/organized and politically engaged section of the audience.

These narratives question the way in which advertising both homogenizes motherhood, using love as a bargaining chip in care work, and problematizes the need to make it a social problem, the responsibility of which should not fall exclusively to women. Below we cite two significant examples.

[EXCERPT 6] What you call love, I call unpaid work. Love does not create children, does not pay bills, does not give peace of mind, does not guarantee opportunities, access, study. The script for an advertisement like this is easy to produce: put a white mother in court, in the background a black mother offering a hand to her black daughter and let the white woman assume the narrative of what it is to be a real mother, in the name of the non-judgment. Maternal judgment exists as long as maternal guilt exists. And it is maternal guilt that underlies what is understood as being a mother in contemporary society. A fragmented guilt, divided into little pieces that occupy the family’s daily life. The advertisement deserves success, yes, for emptying all meaning of sisterhood, of maternal empowerment in the name of a toxic discourse. It individualizes the issue: what counts here is the love between mother and child.

[EXCERPT 7] No woman is “guilty” and it’s not because “love has no judgments”, but it’s because an entire social organization is needed aimed at producing conditions that truly aim for the best conditions to be offered to a child and that’s not what we have here. We have a predatory structure that doesn’t give a damn about women and children and has the sole interest of maintaining the labor exploitation of women and the ever-increasing enrichment of white men. Guilty my a#s . The patriarchal-capitalist system that passes over our heads like a tractor is to blame. Reject this foolish idea of saying you’re “guilty”, reject the individualization of our problems.

The acts of challenging the campaign (Wottrich, 2019), evident in the posts above, demand the resignification of motherhood through broader meanings that intertwine gender, work, race, and class and, thus, form new symbolic arrangements regarding judgment and maternal guilt. For Scavone (2004, p. 172), motherhood must be seen as “a social phenomenon marked by social, racial/ethnic inequalities, and the gender issue that underlies it. Consequently, the changes and social implications of realizing this experience do not reach all women in the same way.”

In the criticisms evident in the posts, the sense of guilt is displaced from the context of the campaign discourse to provoke ruptures, as they shed light on the structure of the capitalist system and male domination

(Miguel; Biroli, 2014). On the other hand, they denounce how media discourse, including advertising, have reinforced the value of motherhood as a vocation; a perspective that presents an obstacle and a challenge for the feminist movement.

It is interesting to note that, from a political and resistance perspective, some of the analyses of the campaign offer a completely different perspective for thinking about the concepts of guilt, judgment, and maternal love. Oppositional posts bring into the discussion reflections on the myth of racial democracy, meritocracy and the construction of roles and behaviors based on the biologization of gender relations, to oppose the meanings about motherhood and mothering produced by the brand. Therefore, they reinforce the notion that motherhood and mothering are pluralistic not due to the unique context of each mother, but rather due to the specificity of gender, race, and class conditions that, in different ways, oppress those who are single mothers, atypical mothers, black women, workers.

Consumer demands for more inclusive and politicized positions are a challenge that brands face. In the case studied, the juggling act is finding the tone, or gauging the pace of this disruption, in the face of a society that still supports motherhood as a patriarchal oppression. Advertising, and its relationship with the public, helps us to observe not only its commercial/economic tensions, but contradictions in the social world - such as gender inequalities that are based on the allegation of unconditional love - presenting blame and judgment as potential consequences.

From a broader perspective, we understand that the significant impact of the target audience on social media (mothers, influencers and collectives) means that the strategy achieves its objective in terms of visibility and also in the interaction of dialogues with different audiences. The dominant negotiated and oppositional readings of the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgement campaign demonstrate the prevalence of the hegemonic discourse but allow us to reach different dimensions of a debate that is underway, of problematizations that are expressed in a detailed and well-grounded way in the political and feminist arenas.

Final considerations

We observed that the repercussion through the analyzed posts reveals a predominance of the appropriation of meanings by mothers in accordance with the campaign's hegemonic pattern of motherhood. On the other hand, we understand that there is, in the construction of the narrative of O Boticário, the intention to break with some hegemonic meanings, which romanticize maternal experiences and remove any difficulty, diversity or problematization in the way that brands traditionally position themselves in tributes to Mother's Day. The negotiated decoding and especially those opposing the narratives present in the #MotherhoodWithoutJudgement campaign demonstrates the practices of production and consumption of advertising as a "scenario in transit" (Wottrich, 2019), which guides contemporary advertising communication.

Debates and demands about new ways of thinking (and living) experiences of motherhood have been increasingly frequent on social media. Driven by the reconfiguration of feminist movements, networks begin to establish themselves as discursive spaces that enable political developments which converge towards the visibility of pluralistic realities and inequalities that expand and diversify women's agendas.

From this perspective, the environment of social media has also led to "a continuous dialogue among individuals and between them and advertising, through strategies undertaken by advertising brands" (Wottrich, 2019, p. 68). The disruption proposed by the O Boticário brand when dealing with motherhood based on ambivalent concepts such as guilt and judgment, demonstrates, in some way, the adoption of strategies that favor a more pluralistic and inclusive debate, which addresses gender inequalities.

On the other hand, the brand's response to the problem that is put forward by the campaign itself, by being based on the ideal of maternal love, demonstrates how the mechanisms of patriarchal domination that support motherhood are engendered in a sophisticated way, because they are adorned with a feeling that is socially constructed as natural, divine, and unconditional (Badinter, 1985).

Regarding the spontaneous participation of mothers and consumers in this debate, it is interesting to realize how much the appropriation of this type of content (whether to endorse or to criticize the meanings of the campaign) allows for the construction of self-narratives and an elaboration of individual experiences and conflicts as women and as mothers. Thus, although the campaign may be seen as a discourse that reproduces rather than confronts dominant representations of motherhood, the richness of this interaction lies in the dynamics that mothers create to consider contradictions encountered in their own experiences. If maternal guilt and love underpin gender inequalities and the cultural contradictions of motherhood (Hays, 1996), addressing these issues more openly and reflecting on them in an expanded debate, based on the stimulus of an advertising campaign, may be an interesting step to observe the possibilities of connection between consumption, culture, and the social world.

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