

# **SOCIAL WORK IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRAZIL: Gender, Feminism and Theoretical Constructions in Professional Practice**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyzes the similarities and differences between Social Work in the United States and Brazil, focusing on feminism, gender, and intersectionality. This qualitative and descriptive study explores the theoretical foundations of the profession in both countries, highlighting the individualistic pragmatism of the United States and the critical, structural approach of Brazil. The research also addresses the feminization of the profession and the contributions of feminist movements to professional practice, emphasizing how intersectionality has expanded the analysis of multiple forms of oppression. The findings highlight the historical, cultural, and political particularities that have shaped Social Work in each context, as well as their contributions to public policies and practices that promote gender equity and social justice. It concludes that strengthening theoretical and critical debates is essential to addressing the contemporary challenges of the profession, particularly in combating structural inequalities.

**Keywords:** Social Work, Theories, Gender, Feminism, Intersectionality.

## **Introduction**

In Brazil, Social Work has played a central role in addressing gender inequalities, with an emphasis on issues related to violence against women and reproductive rights. Gradually, a framework of knowledge about gender and feminism was consolidated, materialized by the inclusion of mandatory subjects in undergraduate courses and the incorporation of public policies in the professional debate. The approach of the Maria da Penha Law in the 2016 National Student Performance Exam (ENADE) exemplifies the recognition of this theme as a structuring part of academic training and professional intervention.

In the Brazilian context, gender relations also reveal power asymmetries between men and women, perpetuating social and economic inequalities. The profession of social worker, which is mostly female, is marked by the phenomenon of "feminization", which reflects subordinate positions, low remuneration and little social prestige (Cisne, 2004, p. 20). This reality is widely discussed in Social Work, especially since the Reconceptualization movement,

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which began in the 1960s. The Marxist critical approach, consolidated in this period, remains an important theoretical basis for professional training and practice to this day.

In the United States, Social Work was consolidated as a profession during the Progressive Era, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a period marked by social reform and the expressive presence of women activists. The first feminist wave, focused on the fight for the right to vote, had a direct impact on the work of Social Work pioneers, such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond. During the second wave, in the 1960s, feminist social workers and educators began to articulate critical perspectives in professional practice. In 1975, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) created the National Committee on Women's Issues, resulting in the development of the Feminist Practice Project, aimed at systematizing feminist theories and models applied to Social Work (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1983).

Over the decades, American Social Work has maintained consistency in some fundamental principles, such as empowerment, relationship building, contextual analysis, and the search for social change. Professional practice in the United States emphasizes problem-solving, multilevel intervention, and individual empowerment, characteristics that have influenced the generalist model adopted in the profession.

This study proposes to analyze the similarities and differences between the contexts of Social Work in the United States and in Brazil, focusing on issues of feminism and gender. The objective is to highlight the theoretical-methodological composition that sustains professional practice in both countries, showing how the United States prioritizes clinical methods and individual strengthening, while Brazil is characterized by a critical and structural approach.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **1. Theories of Social Work in the United States**

In the context of Social Work, "theory" is understood as a set of concepts, hypotheses and principles that guide professional practice (Heam, 1958; Siporin, 1989; Unrau, Gabor and Grinnell, 2006). Historically, this theoretical construct has developed simultaneously in different contexts, resulting in approaches such as individual casework in the United States and community-based interventions inspired by the work of Jane Addams.

Mary Richmond's contribution as founder of casework was groundbreaking in introducing a scientific method that included social inquiry, diagnosis, and systematic intervention (Turner, 1986). On the other hand, Gordon Hamilton brought an integrative look

by incorporating psychoanalysis, enriching the practice with an understanding of human relationships and the processes of change. Although fundamental, these approaches, by prioritizing the individual and his or her circumstances, often neglected the social and structural dimensions of the problems, limiting the critical analysis of Social Work.

Parad introduced ego psychology into professional practice through works such as *Ego Psychology and Dynamic Casework* and *Ego-Oriented Casework*, although his contributions did not present major theoretical innovations (Parad, 1958b; Parad and Muller, 1963). This approach, derived from North American Freudianism, is considered relevant to Social Work, as it "advocated the strengthening of the ego so that it would be able to master its drives and thus adapt better to its social environment" (Nicácio, 2008, p. 3-4).

Florence Hollis and Helen Harris Perlman, in turn, developed their own models that expanded the theoretical and practical understanding of Social Work. His works, *The Psychosocial System* and *The Problem-Solving Process*, represented a significant advance in the profession (Hollis, 1964; Perlman, 1957). The concept of psychosocial system addresses the social, emotional, and mental health needs of individuals, emphasizing the comprehensive care offered to meet them. In this sense, Johnson (2007, p. s/n) states that "other health professionals can contribute to meeting psychosocial needs and improving quality of life, which also depend on the processes and general environment in the person's home."

In recent decades, in the context of social work practice, a striking trend has been the specialization and fragmentation of methods aimed at different areas of intervention, such as individual care, work with groups, and family interventions. However, this fragmentation revealed the need for a more plural and integrated theoretical basis, capable of responding to the growing complexity of professional demands in Social Work (Turner, 1986).

The evolution of theories in Social Work demonstrates a balance between the search for integration and the appreciation of theoretical diversity. During the 1970s, enthusiasm for experimenting with new approaches brought innovation to professional practice. In the 1980s, the emphasis shifted to a critical reflection on theoretical construction and empirical validation, thus strengthening the scientific basis of the profession (Turner, 1986). In this scenario, systems theory, developed by authors such as Lutz, stood out by broadening the understanding of social and institutional dynamics, offering an integrative approach (Lutz, 1956).

In contemporary times, theoretical eclecticism has consolidated itself as a common practice in Social Work, allowing the combination of elements from different theories to develop more effective interventions. In addition, the evidence-based approach gained

prominence, valuing practice based on proven results and documented experiences (Turner, 1986).

Social Work in the United States emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, in response to the social transformations caused by the Industrial Revolution and urbanization. This period was marked by social inequalities and poverty, which boosted initiatives aimed at serving the most vulnerable populations. Mary Richmond, in her pioneering work *Social Diagnosis*, systematized individual intervention methods, while Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, promoted community actions aimed at social inclusion. These initiatives were crucial for the institutionalization of Social Work, with a strong influence in countries such as Brazil (Pereira, 2016).

The creation of Charities Organization Societies (C.O.S) represented a milestone in North American social assistance by introducing a logical and rational approach to social work (Vieira, 1984). Subsequently, Social Work in the United States incorporated elements of psychoanalysis, especially ego psychology, as a tool to strengthen the social adaptation of individuals. This approach, widely adopted, prioritized individual subjectivity as the central focus of intervention. However, Jacques Lacan criticized ego psychology as an "adaptationist ideology", arguing that it ignored social determinations and perpetuated a fragmented view of subjectivity, aligned with the interests of capitalism (Duarte, 2010).

The Marxist critique of the bourgeois conception of subjectivity, which separates the individual from social relations, offers a broader perspective to analyze social issues (Duarte, 2010). By recognizing subjectivity as a social and historical process, Social Work can develop more effective and emancipatory practices. However, psychosocial theories, although they have contributed significantly to the understanding of subjectivity, have important limitations that must be critically analyzed.

One of these limitations is the fragmentation and individualization of subjectivity, which can hinder the analysis and intervention in structural social problems that demand collective actions and social transformations. Excessive emphasis on the individual can lead to the prioritization of individual interventions, to the detriment of collective actions and social transformation (Duarte, 2010). In addition, this fragmentation can restrict the critical capacity of social workers, preventing them from identifying the structural causes of social problems and formulating more comprehensive and effective responses.

### **3. Feminism and Gender in Social Work**

The trajectory of feminist movements in the United States can be divided into three main waves. The first wave was marked by the struggle for suffrage and equal civil and political rights, culminating in the conquest of the right to vote (Pinto, 2010). This phase influenced Social Work, as the predominance of women in the profession reflected an active engagement in the struggles for equal rights. However, the gender perspective was still limited, often reinforcing traditional roles and bourgeois values.

The second wave, in the 1960s, brought new focuses, such as sexual and reproductive rights, formal equality and the contestation of gender roles imposed on women. In this context, Social Work began to address gender issues in a more critical way, implementing specific programs and services for women victims of violence and social inequalities. The concept of female empowerment emerged, and social workers began to act as agents of social transformation, promoting women's autonomy and the deconstruction of oppressive social norms. The 1970s, as a consequence of the 1968 uprisings, strengthened the second feminist wave not only in industrialized countries, but also in much of Latin America, encompassing both left-wing countercultural feminism and liberal feminism (Hollanda, 2020, p. 225).

The third wave, which began in the 1990s, adopted a more inclusive and intersectional perspective, expanding the debate to topics such as race, social class, sexuality, and gender identity. For Social Work, this evolution brought a more diversified and critical look, considering different identities and experiences of women, including race, class, sexual orientation and disability (Nogueira, 2001). The debate on gender began to incorporate criticism of the universalization of inequalities, highlighting the complexity and multiple oppressions experienced.

However, in the United States, to claim that Social Work works, in its entirety, to end oppression and promote feminist principles would be an inadequate simplification. Reisch and Andrews (2002) highlight that, in contemporary times, the social, political and economic environment prioritizes clinical practice and immediate results, with less emphasis attributed to social transformation. Careers focused on clinical practice have proven to be more lucrative and prestigious, while opportunities aimed at social change remain limited.

The term "intersectionality" was introduced in 1989 by the American jurist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who criticized the tendency of black feminism to approach "race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis". She argued that this approach theoretically and politically erases the experiences of black women, especially in confronting racial and gender discrimination. In Brazilian Social Work, intersectionality makes multiple oppressions visible, denaturalizes inequalities, broadens the understanding of diversity, and

strengthens the struggle for rights (Pinto, 2010). Professional practices based on this perspective involve the critical analysis of situations, empowerment, articulation with other sectors, and the deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes that perpetuate social inequalities.

North American feminist theory combines feminist and multicultural perspectives, reflecting significant changes in family roles. It recognizes the plurality of female experiences, promoting interventions that value diverse identities and particular experiences. These approaches have directly influenced the areas of intervention of Social Work, including individual, family, group and community care (Turner, 1986). In addition, feminist theories have contributed to the development of public policies and research aimed at gender equality.

In the United States, feminism and Social Work share a historical commitment to social transformation, strengthening the struggle for gender equality since the nineteenth century (Bell, 2009). This commitment is reinforced by the predominance of women in the profession, who have integrated feminist principles into their practice for more than a century. The feminist movement played a fundamental role, influencing public policies and community interventions.

In terms of public policy, a significant example is the *Violence Against Women Act*, which provides legal protection and resources for women who are victims of violence. The feminist movement also pushed for investment in social programs such as women's shelters, child care centers, and vocational education programs (Turner, 1986).

As for community interventions, the North American Social Service presents concrete practices, such as shelters for women victims of violence, non-formal education programs and advocacy actions for the implementation of parental leave policies. Wendt and Mourling (2018) highlight fundamental principles that guide feminist practice in Social Work: social justice, a critical and reflective stance, and the appreciation of personal experiences as a form of political action.

Finally, social workers have the ethical and professional responsibility to base their practices on social theories aligned with the values of social work, as established by the Code of Ethics of Social Workers (1993). The theoretical debate is essential to understand how people interpret their experiences and give meaning to the world around them, being indispensable for a critical and effective performance in the field of Social Work.

#### **4 Brazilian Social Work and the Reconceptualization Movement**

The theoretical bases of Brazilian Social Work are deeply rooted in the Social Sciences, especially from the debates of the 1970s. During this period, there was a growing resistance to left-wing theoretical expressions considered irrationalist, often articulated with the postmodernity movement and neoconservatism (Coutinho, 2010). This scenario led to the abandonment of critical perspectives, which valued historicity and humanist praxis, while the bourgeoisie, by consolidating its hegemony, rejected dialectical reason and restricted critical thinking.

With the consolidation of the bourgeoisie as the dominant class, there was an effort to justify the status quo through limiting theoretical constructions. This strategy reduced the space for comprehensive analyses of social reality and replaced dialectical reason with fragmented methods, compromising the understanding of structural dynamics (Coutinho, 2010, p. 22). Lukács (2010, p. 51) describes this phenomenon as the "ideological decadence of the bourgeoisie", which occurs when the ruling class achieves political power and shifts the class struggle to a secondary plane. This marginalization of Marxism, replaced by formalistic and apologetic methods, results in superficial analyses devoid of critical depth.

According to Lukács (2010), the excessive fragmentation of modern sociology disregards the historical perspective of social phenomena. In the context of Social Work, this fragmentation compromises the understanding of the structural relationships that shape inequalities, reducing the effectiveness of professional interventions. The search for scientific neutrality ignores the laws that govern society, treating social phenomena in an equivalent and decontextualized way. Coutinho (2010) reaffirms that the revolutionary understanding of man and society is anchored in historicity and social contradiction, while Lukács proposes the categories of humanism, historicism, and dialectical reason as essential tools for a critical and emancipatory analysis (Silva, 2023).

The Movement for the Reconceptualization of Latin American Social Work, which began in the 1960s, represented a historic milestone in the renewal of the profession. The movement criticized Traditional Social Work and sought to adapt professional practice to the social and historical particularities of Latin America. In Brazil, the impacts were fundamental for the criticism of traditionalism and the development of new theoretical-methodological perspectives, breaking with conservative practices (Netto, 2009).

The approach of Marxism in Brazilian Social Work, although marked by debates and divergences, consolidated a rupture with traditional practice. This appropriation, however, was not linear, being influenced by textbook Marxism and the structuralist scientism of

Althusserianism. Yazbek (2009) points out that this trend, although considered a "mistaken Marxism", marked the beginning of a practice committed to social transformation.

Reconceptualization remains a relevant movement to this day. It influenced the formulation of the Code of Professional Ethics (1993), the Law for the Regulation of the Profession (1993) and the Curricular Guidelines (1996), consolidating the ethical-political project of Social Work. Netto (2001) points out that "forty years later, Reconceptualization is still alive as a starting point for the critique of traditionalism". From this period on, the ethical-political project promoted academic qualification, theoretical debate, and the strengthening of research (ABEPSS, 2015, p. 2).

From the end of the 1990s, gender discussions gained space in Brazilian Social Work. In 1996, these issues were incorporated into the curricular guidelines of undergraduate courses by ABEPSS, consolidating them as transversal themes in professional training. Lima (2014) highlights that the creation of the Thematic Research Groups (GTP) strengthened the insertion of gender discussions in academic practices and training. Machado (2000) points out that gender studies have influenced the formulation of public policies, revealing the historical contributions of women who are often neglected.

In Brazil, the feminist movement has roots in the struggles of the working class, initiated by enslaved and indigenous women, who resisted oppression and paved the way for gender equality. The movement developed in three waves: the first focused on the right to vote and political participation; the second, influenced by international feminism, addressed sexual and reproductive rights; and the third wave brought diversity and intersectionality to the center of the debate, using new technologies as tools for mobilization (Pinto, 2010).

Reconceptualization, by incorporating the critique of the social order, brought to Social Work an analysis of gender inequalities and a commitment to empowerment. Torres (2006, p. 4) observes that, although professional practice has sought to adapt individuals to the social order, it has also brought to light debates about the impacts of subordination on life in society.

The 1996 Curriculum Guidelines represented a milestone in professional training in Social Work. Prepared by ABEPSS, these guidelines consolidated the ethical-political project, prioritizing human rights, social justice and the fight against inequalities (Torres, 2006, p. 8). Salvan and Lusa (2023) highlight the generalist training, which enables social workers to work in various fields, articulating theory and practice. Barbosa, Barbosa and De Paula (2018) emphasize that this valorization of research and extension produced its own bibliography and expanded the articulation between teaching and professional practice.

The practical consequences were wide-ranging, including:



1. Expansion of the field of action: Social workers began to work in health centers, schools, social movements and government agencies.
2. Strengthening political participation: They have become protagonists in the formulation of public policies and in the defense of social rights.
3. Innovation in professional practices: Qualified training and the valorization of research have allowed the development of more effective practices that are aligned with contemporary demands.
4. Greater visibility of the profession: The guidelines consolidated the role of the social worker as an agent of social transformation (Moniec; Gonzáles, 2009; Faleiros, 1990).

### 3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is based on a qualitative approach of descriptive character, focusing on a literature review. This methodological choice allows for an in-depth analysis of the theoretical and practical bases of Social Work in the United States and Brazil, especially with regard to gender and feminism issues.

This article uses the literature review as the main methodological tool, providing a systematic analysis of academic texts and documents relevant to the topic in question. The qualitative approach is appropriate to explore the historical and theoretical dynamics of Social Work, while the descriptive character allows a detailed presentation of the similarities and differences between the contexts studied.

The sources analyzed include classic and contemporary works by renowned authors in the field of Social Work, feminism and gender, such as Mary Richmond, Gordon Hamilton and José Paulo Netto, as well as recent studies on professional practices in both countries. The selection of texts was guided by the following criteria:

1. **Thematic relevance:** Sources that directly discuss Social Work, gender and feminism.
  2. **Academic impact:** Texts widely cited or recognized as theoretical landmarks in the area.
  3. **Temporal diversity:** Classic works to contextualize historical evolution and contemporary texts to understand current debates.
- The texts were analyzed in three main stages:
1. **Thematic Survey:** Identification of the central theories and concepts that guided Social Work in the United States and Brazil.
  2. **Contextual Comparison:** Analysis of cultural, political, and historical influences in both contexts.
  3. **Critical Synthesis:** Organization of findings into sub-themes that reflect similarities and differences, as well as country-specific contributions to the profession.

## 5. Findings

The results of this analysis reveal important nuances about the theoretical and practical influences on Social Work in both countries.

In the United States, Ego Psychology was widely adopted as a theoretical foundation, advocating the strengthening of the ego so that the individual could master his drives and better adapt to the social environment. The ideal was a successful, productive, and family-friendly adult, which represented the prevailing view of "healing" and adaptation. This approach, based on pragmatic and psychosocial theories, brought an individualistic perspective, which still characterizes part of North American practices (Nicácio, 2008; Parad, 1958b). Authors such as Mary Richmond and Gordon Hamilton contributed significantly to the systematization of social work, by prioritizing intervention methods based on social adaptation and the strengthening of the individual. However, Marxist criticism highlights the limitations of this approach, which tends to neglect the social and economic structures responsible for generating inequalities (Duarte, 2010).

In the United States, social policies also reflect this individualistic perspective. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), for example, emphasizes work as a condition for assistance, delegating the provision of services to private organizations and reinforcing the logic of the market. The "competitive market" view encourages competition between organizations, but it makes universal access to social services precarious and negatively impacts vulnerable groups, such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities (Reisch & Andrews, 2002).

In Brazil, gender discussions emerged more slowly, but gained strength in the late 1990s, especially in the context of the Movement for the Reconceptualization of Social Work. This movement incorporated critical elements, such as Marxism, to address the structural inequalities affecting women in subaltern social positions. According to Netto (2009), Brazilian Social Work began to prioritize the understanding of inequalities as structural and historical phenomena, as opposed to individualism. The impact of these discussions is visible in professional education, which began to incorporate intersectionality as an analytical category to understand multiple oppressions (Crenshaw, 2004).

The historical and cultural differences between the two countries shaped different approaches in Social Work. While North American pragmatism prioritizes individual and

psychotherapeutic interventions, the Brazilian critical perspective turns to collectivization and social transformation.

In the United States, there is a strong emphasis on individualization, with a focus on interventions aimed at developing individual skills and solving problems based on family dynamics. The practice of casework is a classic example of this approach, which, over time, has been influenced by the view of less state intervention. The public management model, based on market competitiveness, limits the role of the State and prioritizes short-term solutions, deepening inequalities and making care more precarious (Reisch & Andrews, 2002).

In Brazil, the State adopts a more interventionist role, with comprehensive social policies that guarantee greater universality in access to rights. Social Work operates in several areas, such as health, education and social assistance, seeking to ensure social justice and address inequalities. Emblematic examples include income transfer programs, such as Bolsa Família, popular housing policies, and programs to combat domestic violence.

In addition, Brazilian Social Work stands out for the incorporation of feminism and intersectionality in its practices:

1. **Research and knowledge production:** Social Work has developed a critical and transformative foundation, addressing topics such as gender, race, class, and sexuality (Hooks, 2019).
2. **Professional training:** Academic curricula have incorporated discussions on gender, intersectionality, and diversity, preparing professionals who are more aware and prepared to work in complex contexts (Lima, 2014; Salvan & Lusa, 2023).
3. **Professional practices:** Women's groups, empowerment projects and affirmative actions are implemented to promote gender equality and combat social inequalities (Nogueira, 2001).
4. **Public policies:** Social Work has influenced the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of women and other vulnerable groups, in line with the profession's Code of Ethics (Brasil, 2012).

Despite the differences, the Brazilian and North American contexts share similar challenges, such as:

- Deepen discussions on intersectionality to consolidate inclusive practices;
- Strengthen emancipatory practices that integrate gender, class, and race as analytical categories;
- Overcome institutional resistance to the implementation of feminist policies and the fight against inequalities.

In view of the above, it is observed that, while the North American model favors individualistic interventions and market solutions, Brazilian Social Work prioritizes a critical, collective and structural approach. This perspective seeks social transformation and the strengthening of public policies aimed at historically marginalized groups.

## **5. Discussion**

The analysis allows an in-depth reflection on the theoretical influences and challenges faced by Social Work in both countries.

Feminism has played an essential role in professional practice in the United States and Brazil, albeit in different ways. In the United States, it has directly influenced practices, aligning with the demands of gender equality and diversity. In Brazil, the incorporation of feminism occurred in dialogue with Marxist critique, broadening the debate to include issues of class and race. The Marxist feminist perspective represents a significant repertoire of analysis for the reading of the current scenario of oppression-exploitation relations in the face of the dismantling of rights and public policies under the times of de-democratization (Biroli; Vaggione, 2020). It should be noted that both the historical and dialectical materialist method and the Marxian categories have scientific validation, whose verification occurs through historical processuality. Both are very current, as they still explain the immanent movement of bourgeois sociability.

In addition, it is important to highlight that the work of Brazilian social workers, influenced by the critical feminist perspective, has sought to combine gender debates with regional specificities, such as the oppression faced by black and indigenous women. This intersection between gender, race, and class provides a more complete analysis of the dynamics of exclusion and allows the construction of more effective intervention strategies.

While North American Social Work values social and individual adaptation, Brazilians adopt a more structural perspective, approaching inequalities as historical and social phenomena. This difference reflects the limitations of a pragmatic approach in the face of the theoretical and critical advances that characterize Brazilian Social Work. In the United States, social adaptation consisted of a social service of individual cases that developed the personality, consciously and individually readjusting it to its social environment. The term "Social Question", for example, widely used in Brazilian Social Work, is not found in the North American production and debate of the profession.

This absence highlights a relevant distinction: Brazilian Social Work considers the "Social Question" as a structural and permanent phenomenon of the relations of exploitation in capitalism, thus requiring critical and collective action. In the United States, on the other hand, the liberal perspective leads to an individualized view of social problems, often associated with the search for punctual and adaptive solutions.

The United States and Brazil face common challenges, such as institutional resistance to the implementation of feminist and intersectional practices. In addition, the lack of articulation between theory and practice limits the scope of professional interventions on gender and feminism issues.

The issues related to feminism and gender in Social Work by themselves already historically refer to the fact that the profession is characterized by "feminization", in view of the work it performs, with gender being one of its dimensions. This reality is evidenced by the fact that the profession is mostly developed by women, reflecting the unequal insertion in the labor market, with lower remuneration and social prestige, characterizing it as a "female profession" (Cisne, 2004). In this context, gender and Social Work are related due to the problematization of this feminization.

This feminization of the profession not only reflects the unequal power relations in society, but also demands a critical analysis that considers the impact of these dynamics on professional practice. Social workers, by working directly with vulnerable populations, become key agents in deconstructing gender stereotypes and promoting social equity.

It is highlighted, in this context, that intersectionality consolidates practices of inclusion and integration in Social Work, as possibilities of direction to be followed in the face of the understanding and imbrication of social inequalities and their dimensions. In this sense, among the population with whom Social Work works, black women are in a peculiar position in society because, in collective terms, they are at the base of the occupational pyramid, as well as their social status is inferior to that of any other group. "This means that we bear the burden of sexist, racist, and class oppression" (Hooks, 2019, p.26). Crenshaw identifies racial discrimination and gender discrimination, to better understand how these discriminations operate together, limiting black women's chances of success. "Both categories need to be broadened so that we can address the issues of intersectionality that Black women face" (Crenshaw, 2004, p. 8-9).

Intersectionality is challenging as it addresses differences within difference. In view of the above, it is a challenge to incorporate the gender issue into the practice of human rights and the racial issue into gender. Crenshaw (2004, p. 9) points out that "women should be protected

when they are victims of racial discrimination, in the same way as men, and should be protected when they suffer gender/racial discrimination in different ways."

The implementation of intersectional practices in Social Work, however, requires public policies that consider the multiple oppressions faced by women, especially those in contexts of vulnerability. Professionals in the area must act not only as mediators, but also as agents of denunciation and transformation, seeking to articulate actions at different levels of intervention.

In view of these reflections, it is necessary for the professional practice of Social Work to expand the critical and intersectional perspective, going beyond professional particularities. This movement is fundamental to understand the historical and social insertion of the profession, reinforcing its commitment to the transformation of power relations and the promotion of emancipatory practices.

## **6. Final Considerations**

This study carried out a comparative analysis between Social Work in the United States and Brazil, focusing on the theoretical influences and challenges of professional practice. The results showed that North American Social Work is strongly influenced by pragmatic and psychosocial approaches, while in Brazil, critical theories and the Reconceptualization Movement enabled the incorporation of gender and feminism in a more structured way in professional training and practice.

In addition, it was identified that intersectionality, although still developing in both contexts, has great potential to strengthen more inclusive and integrative practices in Social Work. This perspective offers a promising path to understand and address the multiple dimensions of social inequalities, expanding the possibilities of professional intervention.

The article contributes to the understanding of the historical and cultural particularities that guided Social Work in both countries, emphasizing the importance of theoretical and methodological dialogue between pragmatic and critical approaches. In the contemporary context, marked by the advance of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, it becomes even more urgent that Social Work act critically in the defense of social rights, especially in the fight against gender, race, and class inequalities.

By offering this comparative panorama, this study not only illuminates the trajectories of Social Work, but also points to the need to deepen debates on intersectionality and emancipatory practices. The Brazilian critique of the individualist perspective predominant in

North American Social Work represents a significant theoretical contribution, expanding the understanding of structural inequalities and the need for collective and transformative practices.

Among the limitations of this study, the dependence on bibliographic sources stands out, which restricts the analysis of empirical data on contemporary professional practices. Future research could investigate how discussions of gender and intersectionality are being applied in specific contexts, both in academic training and in the practical work of social workers. In addition, it would be relevant to explore how the principles of feminism and intersectionality can be integrated more broadly into public policies and social programs, contributing to gender equity and the reduction of structural inequalities.

These investigations can further strengthen the role of Social Work as a profession committed to social transformation, the promotion of justice and the guarantee of human rights, especially in a scenario marked by social and political setbacks.

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