Dossier

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RACIAL IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION OF BLACK STUDENTS AT UFMG: FROM THE EXPERIENCE AS EVALUATED TO THE ROLE OF EVALUATORS IN HETEROIDENTIFICATION PROCEDURES[1]

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Abstract

The article analyzes the experiences of Black students entering through affirmative action quotas at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), focusing on the subjective and identity-related impacts of racial heteroidentification procedures. The research starts with the following question: how do these students attribute meaning to their racial identity and identification based on their experiences in these procedures? Based on interviews and focus groups with fifteen quota students, the investigation reveals that these procedures produce ambiguous effects — ranging from insecurity and fear to identity strengthening. The theoretical framework engages with authors such as Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Achille Mbembe, and Neusa Santos Souza to understand how structural racism shapes Black subjectivity. The results indicate that the experience in the identification boards, especially the transition from being assessed to becoming assessors, acts as an educational and political device, contributing to the reconfiguration of the students' racial identity and their role in the affirmative action policy. The research points to the need for institutional policies that consider the complexity of racial identity in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education; Heteroidentification; Racial identity; Quota policies; Black subjectivity.

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IDENTIDADE E IDENTIFICAÇÃO RACIAL DE ESTUDANTES NEGROS NA UFMG: DA EXPERIÊNCIA COMO AVALIADOS A AVALIADORES NOS PROCEDIMENTOS DE HETEROIDENTIFICAÇÃO

Resumo: O artigo analisa as experiências de estudantes negros ingressantes por cotas na Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), focalizando os impactos subjetivos e identitários decorrentes dos procedimentos de heteroidentificação racial. A pesquisa parte da seguinte questão: como esses estudantes atribuem sentidos à sua identidade racial e à sua identificação a partir das experiências nesses procedimentos? A partir de entrevistas e grupos focais com quinze estudantes cotistas, a investigação revela que tais procedimentos produzem efeitos ambíguos — desde insegurança e medo até fortalecimento identitário. O referencial teórico dialoga com autores como Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Achille Mbembe e Neusa Santos Souza, para compreender como o racismo estrutural molda a subjetividade negra. Os resultados indicam que a vivência nas bancas, especialmente a transição de avaliados a avaliadores, atua como um dispositivo educativo e político, contribuindo para a reconfiguração da identidade racial dos sujeitos e sua atuação na política de cotas. A pesquisa aponta para a necessidade de políticas institucionais que considerem a complexidade da identidade racial no ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: Educação Superior; Heteroidentificação; Identidade racial; Políticas de cotas; Subjetividade negra.

IDENTIDAD E IDENTIFICACIÓN RACIAL DE ESTUDIANTES NEGROS EN LA UFMG: DE LA EXPERIENCIA COMO EVALUADOS AL ROL DE EVALUADORES EN LOS PROCEDIMIENTOS DE HETEROIDENTIFICACIÓN

Resumen: El artículo analiza las experiencias de los estudiantes negros que ingresan mediante cuotas en la Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), centrando la atención en los impactos subjetivos e identitarios derivados de los procedimientos de heteroidentificación racial. La investigación parte de la siguiente cuestión: ¿cómo estos estudiantes atribuyen significados a su identidad racial y a su identificación a partir de las experiencias en estos procedimientos? A partir de entrevistas y grupos focales con quince estudiantes beneficiados por las cuotas, la investigación revela que estos procedimientos producen efectos ambiguos: desde inseguridad y miedo hasta un fortalecimiento de la identidad. El marco teórico dialoga con autores como Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Achille Mbembe y Neusa Santos Souza para comprender cómo el racismo estructural moldea la subjetividad negra. Los resultados indican que la vivencia en las bancas, especialmente la transición de evaluados a evaluadores, actúa como un dispositivo educativo y político, contribuyendo a la reconfiguración de la identidad racial de los sujetos y su actuación en la política de cuotas. La investigación señala la necesidad de políticas institucionales que consideren la complejidad de la identidad racial en la educación superior.

Palabras clave: identidad racial; heteroidentificación; políticas de cuotas; educación superior; subjetividad negra.

Introduction

This article is part of a broader research project developed within the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). The aforementioned research aims to understand the meanings attributed by Black students (both Black and Brown) who entered UFMG through the reserved-seat quota system for Black individuals, to their phenotypic characteristics, ancestry, and experiences with racism. It also investigates how these elements influence the construction of their identity and their perception of how they are viewed by other, non-quota students.

Within the context of racial inclusion policies, racial quota policies at universities, as in other social spheres, have been a significant advancement in promoting equality, seeking to correct historical inequalities and ensure access to higher education for marginalized groups. However, a little-explored aspect of this policy is the experience of Black students, especially in relation to the racial hetero-identification procedures[4]. This practice, which emerged with the goal of ensuring the authenticity of racial self-declarations, constitutes a critical moment in the process where questions of identity and racism are widely discussed, but also carry significant tensions.

In this sense, this stage prompts studies focused on the psychological and social implications it has on students, particularly regarding the construction of racial identity and social interactions in academic environments. However, little is still known about how Black students experience this process, particularly regarding the impact it has on their racial identity. Existing research tends to focus on the social implications of quotas, but few studies address how students attribute meanings to their phenotypic characteristics, how their experiences with racism affect their perception of identity, and how this complementary form of self-declaration influences the construction of this identity throughout their university trajectory.

Within this context, the study seeks to achieve three specific objectives: (1) to analyze how negative actions, such as discrimination and racism, impact the subjectivity

[4] From this point forward, the term hetero-identification procedure will be used exclusively to formally refer to the institutional procedure that complements the racial self-declaration of Black candidates. However, the use of the term board is maintained in the students' accounts to preserve the original language they employed in their statements, considering its familiarity and recurrence as a popular synonym for the procedure.

of Black students entering UFMG through quotas; (2) to investigate how participation in racial hetero-identification procedures affects their subjectivity, influencing the construction of their racial identity; and (3) to explore the disputes surrounding Black identity faced by these students and how these disputes influence their self-perception within the context of the hetero-identification procedures.

The research question guiding the study is: How do Black students (both Black and Brown) attribute meanings to their racial identity and their identification based on their experiences in the hetero-identification procedures? This research consists of a qualitative study, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions. In total, 15 subjects participated: 4 were interviewed individually and 11 participated in group discussions. All participants are UFMG quota students who went through this stage, which is complementary to the racial self-declaration at UFMG. The data analysis followed Bardin's (1977) content analysis method.

The article is structured as follows: initially, the Theoretical Framework (2) is presented, organized into three main topics: (2.1) Negative Action Policies and the Impact on Black Subjectivity, (2.2) The Emergence of and Disputes over Higher Education in Brazil, and (2.3) Affirmative Action Policies at UFMG. Following this, the section on knowing the research subjects is presented (3), and subsequently, the Analysis of Experiences in the Racial Hetero-identification Procedures (4), divided into two sub-topics: (4.1) Students Being Evaluated and the Processes of Racial Identity Construction, and (4.2) The Reconfiguration of Racial Identity in the Transition from Evaluated to Evaluators.

Finally, the Conclusion (5) and References (6) are presented. The results demonstrate a convergence in the construction of racial identity and the challenges faced in the hetero-identification procedures and the academic environment. Individual interviews highlight personal experiences and the emotional impact of discrimination. There is a convergence in the perception that this procedure is not only technical but also educational and transformative.

Theoretical Framework

Negative Action Policies and Their Impact on Black Subjectivity

First and foremost, we would like to clarify our understanding of negative action policies aimed at the Black population, a central concept in this first sub-chapter and the article itself. In our view, negative action policies can be understood as a set of public and private policies—whether compulsory, optional, or voluntary—designed to produce and reproduce racial, gender, and national origin discrimination, as well as to perpetuate the effects of past discrimination. Their objective is to maintain racial hierarchies in the fields of education, health, employment, social life, and relationships, among others.

In the specific case of Brazilian society, negative action policies have been constructed in an ambiguous way: they deny the existence of race while giving full meaning to the distinctive and hierarchical idea that the concept of race allows. The title of this sub-topic, therefore, underscores the urgency of understanding how discriminatory and racist practices, rooted in Brazil's history since the slavery period, shape the identity and self-perception of Black individuals. Frantz Fanon (2008) discusses how the violence of racism, especially in contexts of colonization and slavery, destroys self-esteem and alienates Black individuals, creating a lasting impact on the formation of their subjectivities.

Fanon notes that "[...] the black man carries the burden of white civilization in his body and in his mind" (Fanon, 2008, p. 14), which highlights the psychological and identity-related impact of these negative actions. These negative actions include physical and symbolic violence, economic and social exclusion, all of which perpetuate structural inequalities. Such practices profoundly affect the subjectivity of Black people, influencing their self-esteem, mental health, and social relationships.

For Stuart Hall (2006), identity is formed by the interaction of cultural and historical forces that mark bodies and minds. In racialized contexts where racism prevails, Black subjectivity is shaped by discourses and images of racial inferiority, which foster a perception of oneself as subordinate (Hall, 2006, p. 55). From our perspective, analyzing the impacts of these negative actions is crucial for the development and updating of public

policies, as such impacts favor the proposal of educational strategies that promote racial equality and the appreciation of diversity.

These initiatives can provide a solid foundation for resisting the adversities imposed by racism. As Achille Mbembe (2017) emphasizes, structural racism, which has shaped the lives and deaths of Black people throughout history, especially in the context of his "necropolitics," must be actively confronted, as it defines who lives and who dies under a regime of racial oppression (Mbembe, 2017, p. 29). In the Brazilian context, the persistence of racism and the policies of “whitening” reflect a historical continuity of discriminatory and exclusionary practices that date back to the slavery period and are perpetuated to the present day.

When discussing these racist practices in the Brazilian context, Lélia Gonzalez (1988) reflects on how they affect the self-esteem and identity of Black people in Brazil, while maintaining a deeply rooted structure of social and economic inequality (Gonzalez, 1988, p. 123). The negative action policies aimed at the Black population in Brazil, therefore, show how slavery profoundly shaped the country's social and economic structures, creating a legacy of racial inequality that still persists.

The slave regime, in addition to brutally exploiting African labor, established a culture of violence and repression that consolidated a racial hierarchy. This social order, maintained through severe punishments and the dehumanization of enslaved people, perpetuated the marginalization of Black people even after the formal abolition of slavery in 1888. Despite the oppression, enslaved men and women continuously resisted throughout Brazil’s history through the formation of *quilombos*, revolts, and escapes, symbolizing the persistent struggle for freedom and dignity. However, after formal abolition, the Brazilian elites developed new ways to marginalize Black people, reinforcing racist stereotypes and discriminatory practices that still shape the social dynamics of contemporary Brazil.

Understanding this historical legacy is fundamental to recognizing the roots of racial inequalities and the challenges faced by the Black population. Virginia Leone Bicudo's research, conducted in the 1940s in the city of São Paulo, investigated the racial attitudes of "Blacks and *mulattos*" and became a pioneer in understanding the dynamics of racial discrimination in urban Brazil. Using interviews and the case study method, Bicudo

(1945) analyzed the impact of racial relations on the subjectivity of Black and *mulatto* people and, consequently, how they perceived themselves.

One of the main findings of Bicudo's research was the identification of a feeling of inferiority present among Black people, especially those belonging to the lower social classes. According to Bicudo (1945), this feeling of inferiority was a response to contempt and social exclusion, both from other Black people and from White people. She also observed how many interviewees expressed antagonistic attitudes towards other Black people, while showing sympathy towards White people. According to her, this would suggest that structural racism was internalized in Black subjectivities, producing a greater acceptance of racial hierarchies that reinforced marginalization and segregation within the Black community itself. This internalization of racism and the feeling of inferiority was, according to Bicudo, a direct reflection of the negative actions suffered by Black people throughout their lives.

The experiences of systematic discrimination and social exclusion created emotional and psychological barriers that affected the way Black people saw themselves and interacted in the world. In addition to the issue of self-esteem, Bicudo's (1945) data show that the barriers faced by Black people in urban Brazil included difficulties related to economic and social opportunities. Many of the interviewees reported that, despite having comparable skills and educational levels to White people, they continued to face discrimination in the job market and in opportunities for social mobility.

Another important point of Bicudo's (1945) research concerns the distinction between the attitudes of Black people from lower social classes and those belonging to the intermediate classes. While the former tended to show greater antagonism towards other Black people, those in the intermediate classes, although also affected by racism, developed more complex strategies for coexisting with White people, attempting to align themselves with the values and customs of whiteness and internalizing attitudes that, ultimately, reinforced their own social exclusion.

This phenomenon is described by the author (Bicudo, 1945) as a defense mechanism, in which the Black individual tries to erase their racial characteristics to be accepted in social circles dominated by White people. This set of data demonstrates how discriminatory actions directly affected Black subjectivity, creating a series of psychological and emotional mechanisms that reinforced structural inequalities.

Systematic discrimination and structural racism, present in all spheres of social life—from the job market to everyday interactions—profoundly shaped the way Black people perceived themselves and were perceived by society.

This process of marginalization and exclusion already reinforced, at that time, the idea that the fight against racism cannot be just a fight for economic equality, but also a fight for the reconstruction of Black self-esteem and identity. Finally, Bicudo's research highlighted the importance of affirmative and educational policies as ways to combat these negative impacts on Black subjectivity, suggesting, as early as the 1950s, that to break the cycle of dehumanization and marginalization, it would be essential for Brazilian society to invest in initiatives capable of promoting the recognition of the cultural, social, and historical importance of Black populations, in addition to offering quality education and real opportunities for social mobility to these populations.

The Emergence of and Disputes over Higher Education in Brazil

Although demands for access and support for the Black population in quality basic and higher education date back to the early 20th century in Brazil, it was only at the dawn of the 21st century that the first affirmative action policies aimed at the Black population in Brazilian higher education were initiated. It is worth remembering that public higher education in Brazil has its roots at the end of the colonial period, with the creation of isolated schools focused on the national elites, such as the Faculties of Law and Medicine in the early 19th century.

The consolidation of the Brazilian university system, however, only occurred in the 20th century with the founding of the first university in 1920, the University of Rio de Janeiro (now UFRJ) (Cunha, 1988). During this period, higher education was still a privilege for a few, aimed at training liberal professionals such as doctors, engineers, and lawyers. Over the following decades, public higher education underwent several transformations, influenced by educational and economic policies, as well as significant political changes.

During Getúlio Vargas's government in the 1930s and 1940s, there was a centralization and control of higher education, with the creation of the University of Brazil,

now UFRJ, and a movement to federalize state and private institutions. During the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985), there was a great expansion of public universities, with the creation of new campuses and the implementation of postgraduate courses, in addition to an increase in enrollments. However, the regime also encouraged the private sector, resulting in an exponential growth of private higher education institutions, which came to dominate the educational landscape in the following decades.

In this phase, the departmental model of universities was consolidated, moving away from the traditional chair system, which facilitated the expansion of the number of faculty members and courses in various areas of knowledge. In the 2000s, under the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, there was a significant increase in the number of places in public universities with programs like Reuni (Program for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities) and the creation of new federal universities in various regions of Brazil. At the same time, affirmative action policies were implemented, such as racial and social quotas, to promote greater inclusion of groups historically excluded from higher education, especially Black and Indigenous people and low-income students.

These actions resulted in a greater diversification of the university student profile. According to Neves, Sampaio, and Heringer (2018), the number of enrollments in public and private higher education grew significantly in the early 21st century, jumping from 2.5 million students in 2000 to over 8 million in 2015. Women also came to represent the majority of enrollments, and the age range of students diversified, with a growing number of students over 25 years old. The implementation of public policies, such as the National Student Assistance Policy (PNAES), sought to minimize socioeconomic inequalities and ensure the retention of the most vulnerable students in public higher education (Barbosa, 2019).

Even so, social and regional inequalities continue to be an obstacle to full access to quality public higher education. Starting in 2002, Brazil initiated one of the most important changes in its higher education policy with the implementation of affirmative actions aimed at the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, especially Black and Indigenous people. The initial milestone of this process was the creation of the first racial quotas at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) and the University of the State of Bahia (UNEB), which reserved places for Black students and those from public schools. This policy sparked an intense and heated national debate.

The first quotas generated controversy and polarized opinions (Jesus, 2011). For critics, quotas represented a threat to the principle of meritocracy, while supporters of the initiative argued that it was a necessary measure to combat structural inequalities rooted in Brazilian society. The inclusion of reserved places for the Black population in Brazilian higher education institutions was strongly influenced by the efforts of the Black Movement, which played a crucial role in political mobilization and the articulation of demands for historical reparations and social inclusion of Black people.

Between 2004 and 2012, there was a significant expansion of affirmative actions in federal and state public universities. The University of Brasília (UnB), in 2004, was the first federal institution to adopt the racial quota system. During this period, the Black Movement continued to play a central role in the debate, organizing awareness campaigns and defending quotas in forums and courts. In 2011, a legal landmark consolidated the quota policy in Brazil, as the Federal Supreme Court (STF) judged and considered the adoption of racial quotas at the University of Brasília constitutional, strengthening the legality of these affirmative actions.

The year 2012 marked a crucial point in the history of affirmative actions in Brazil with the enactment of Law No. 12,711, known as the Quota Law, which made it mandatory to reserve 50% of places in all federal universities and institutes for students from public schools, with sub-quotas for Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. According to Daflon, Feres Júnior, and Campos (2013), this law represented the formalization and expansion of policies that had been implemented experimentally in various institutions since the early 2000s.

Rodrigo Ednilson de Jesus's (2011) study offers a critical analysis of affirmative actions and their implications for racial relations in Brazil. One of the main points of his research is the reflection on how public affirmative action policies, specifically racial quotas, destabilized the historically constructed image of a Brazilian nation based on a myth of racial democracy. Jesus's analysis shows that affirmative action policies, by making racial inequalities explicit, provoke a re-evaluation of social structures and perceptions of identity and racial equality in Brazil (Jesus, 2011, p. 143).

From a critical perspective, the author suggests that affirmative actions not only promote the inclusion of historically marginalized groups but also profoundly question the pillars of Brazilian society, forcing a review of the concepts of social and racial justice.

Furthermore, Jesus (2011) emphasizes that the debate surrounding racial quotas is often restricted to a superficial dichotomy of being for or against, without addressing the broader structural issues of social inclusion and the redistribution of power in Brazilian society.

He further argues that quotas are one of the most effective measures to correct historical and systemic inequalities in Brazil, especially in the fields of education and access to higher education (Jesus, 2011, p. 161). However, he also recognizes that to be fully effective, affirmative actions must be accompanied by other public policies that promote equity in various spheres, such as the job market and political representation. The author also discusses the role of the Black Movement in the formulation and defense of quota policies.

According to Jesus, the Black social movement played a fundamental role in articulating demands for recognition and historical reparations, fighting for policies that could correct racially structured inequalities. The author states that these demands contributed to the creation of a space for public debate on the racial issue, challenging the historical silence that covered racial tensions in the country (Jesus, 2011, p. 172). Finally, Jesus points out that despite the advances provided by quotas, there is still significant resistance to these policies, both socially and academically.

The author concludes by stating that the implementation of quotas not only provides opportunities for Black students but also forces society to deal with its own contradictions and racial inequalities. These policies, therefore, represent an important, but not definitive, stage in the process of fighting for racial equality in Brazil (Jesus, 2011, p. 205). With this analysis, Jesus proposes that racial quotas, far from being a final solution, are a critical step towards social justice, requiring, however, continuous monitoring and an expansion to other areas of public and private life in Brazil.

Affirmative Action Policies at UFMG

The history of quota policies at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) reflects the institution's late adoption of affirmative actions, which officially occurred in 2013, following the enactment of Law No. 12,711 of 2012. This law was a landmark for the higher education system in Brazil, obligating federal universities to reserve 50% of their

spots for students from public schools, with a portion of these spots allocated to Black, Brown, Indigenous, and disabled students (Brasil, 2012).

However, before the official adoption of quotas, UFMG had already implemented a bonus policy starting in 2009, granting a 10% bonus to the exam score of candidates who had studied in public schools and an additional 5% for those who self-declared as Black (Black and Brown). This bonus policy reflected UFMG's initial resistance to adopting racial or social quotas (Jesus, 2021). The argument, as published in 2008, was that the bonus would be a more balanced alternative to quotas, as many believed that the reserved-seat policy could undermine meritocracy.

However, social pressure and a growing movement of reports of fraud in racial self-declarations eventually encouraged the implementation of a more rigorous system. Starting in 2017, UFMG began receiving a significant volume of complaints related to fraud in racial self-declaration, which led to the creation of investigative commissions to look into these cases. These commissions analyzed self-declarations and performed hetero-identification procedures, a practice that complements candidates' self-declarations based on visible phenotypic criteria.

According to Rodrigo Ednilson de Jesus (2021, p. 12),

> At the same time that the percentage change impacted the aesthetic dimension of UFMG's student body, at least at the undergraduate level, this new contingent of students gradually began to impact different dimensions of academic life, from the micro-space of the classroom, to the collective processes of politicizing aesthetics and racial identity, also causing shifts in the spaces for formulating and monitoring university policies. In UFMG's case, the fact that the complaints came, for the most part, from the student body, organized in groups and collectives, seems to show the existence of a sense of incompatibility between the way the students applying for admission see themselves (self-declaration) and the way other students, particularly Black students, see these applicants (hetero-identification).

In 2018, UFMG took another important step by incorporating a new procedure into the selection process: the requirement for candidates who self-declared as Black or Indigenous to submit a "Substantiated Letter," which aimed to promote a reflection on the candidate's ethnic-racial belonging. The following year, in 2019, the university implemented the commissions complementary to self-declaration, responsible for carrying

out the hetero-identification procedures for candidates who self-declared as Black, of Black or Brown color.

According to Jesus (2021), the participation of members in the hetero-identification commissions is preceded by a training workshop, which aims to prepare them for the process, discussing issues related to racial identity and the technical procedures of the evaluation. During the workshop, commission members are instructed to evaluate the set of a candidate's phenotypic characteristics without discussing their assessments with the other members, ensuring the independence and impartiality of the analyses.

The commission is composed of five members from the academic community. If any member identifies that they have a kinship, in a direct or collateral line, up to the third degree, or any evident situation of friendship or animosity with the candidate, they must declare themselves ineligible to serve on the commission. This procedure aims to guarantee the transparency and impartiality of the hetero-identification procedure. To confirm the declared racial status, the Complementary Commission to Self-Declaration uses the candidate's phenotype as the main criterion, without considering their ancestry or self-perception.

The hetero-identification process is carried out mandatorily in the presence of the candidate, who must appear for the procedure on the designated date. If the candidate is under 18 years old, they must be accompanied by their legal representative. The non-appearance of a minor accompanied by their legal guardian will result in the rejection of their academic registration. During the hetero-identification procedure, the candidate confirms, in a specific document, their self-declaration as a Black person (Black or Brown) before the commission.

The decision on the candidate's eligibility for the spot is made based on the evaluation of each of the commission members. To be considered eligible, the candidate must obtain a majority of confirmations, meaning at least three members of the commission must consider that the candidate has the phenotypic characteristics that make them socially read as a Black person. Otherwise, the candidate will be rejected. All evaluations performed by each commission member are registered in an operating system developed by UFMG's systems team, called AVLRACA (Hetero-identification of Racial Self-declaration).

After entering the candidate's CPF (Brazilian individual taxpayer number) into the system, their full name is displayed on the screen, along with two evaluation options: a)

the candidate IS a subject of the affirmative action policy that reserves spots for Black people (Black and Brown) in public higher education, and b) the candidate IS NOT a subject of the affirmative action policy that reserves spots. Each member's decision is made in a confidential and individual manner, and the majority vote determines whether the candidate will be confirmed or rejected.

Candidates who are rejected by the first regular board have the right to appeal to the appeals board, which follows the same procedure as the regular board. The confidentiality of each evaluation is maintained, and the final result is determined by the majority's position. This process offers a second opportunity for candidates whose self-declarations were initially rejected, allowing the final decision to be reviewed based on the evaluations performed by the appeals board.

Getting to Know the Research Subjects

For this study, aligned with the proposed problem and objectives, a qualitative, exploratory approach was chosen, using individual interviews and focus groups as strategies. UFMG was selected as the research field due to its prominent role in implementing hetero-identification procedures, being one of Brazil's leading universities to adopt this method to ensure the fair application of racial quotas.

The choice of the focus group technique was based on its characteristic as an approach derived from different forms of group work, as explained by Gatti (2005, p. 7). The use of interviews was due to their being an essential tool for exploring the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of the interviewees, allowing the researcher to deeply understand the phenomenon under study.

The selection of participants followed criteria directly related to the central question of this study: How do Black students (both Black and Brown) attribute meaning to their racial identity (how they perceive themselves racially) and to their racial identification (how they perceive others' views of them) based on their experiences in the hetero-identification procedures? To this end, the inclusion criterion was being a Black student (Black or Brown) at UFMG, who entered through racial quotas and participated in the hetero-identification procedures.

For the analysis of the collected data, we chose the content analysis technique proposed by Bardin (1977, p. 42), who defines content analysis as "a set of communication analysis techniques." This approach guides the researcher to make inferences from the messages presented in the interviews and focus groups of this research, using specific procedures and indicators. In this study, we heard from 15 subjects: four students who participated in individual interviews and eleven who took part in the focus groups, all of whom entered UFMG through the reserved-seat quota system for students from public schools who self-declared as Black.

For this article, we chose to present a selection of statements from the interviewees and focus group participants, totaling seven accounts. To ensure a diverse sample, we sought to include participants from different courses and years of entry, ensuring the representativeness of different perspectives and experiences within the student community.

Table 1 – Research Participants

Codename	Admission	Gender	Course	Self-declaration
Sueli Carneiro	2020	feminine	Pedagogy	Brown
Lélia Gonzalez	2021	feminine	Anthropology	Brown
Milton Santos	2020	masculine	Master's Degree in Communication	Brown
Beatriz Nascimento	2019	feminine	Bachelor's Degree in Portuguese and Spanish Languages	Black
Machado de Assis	2021	masculine	Tourism	Black
Mãe Stella de Oxóssi	2021	feminine	Biomedicine	Brown
Abdias do Nascimento	2020	masculine	Psychology	Black

Source: Prepared by the author (2025).

The primary objective of assigning pseudonyms to the research subjects is to ensure the confidentiality and protection of the participants' identity, thereby respecting the privacy of the data collected. Furthermore, this practice also aims to confer visibility upon important figures from the national Black community, whose contributions have been

fundamental to the emancipation of Black people. In this way, by associating the research participants with the names of historical or contemporary figures from the Black struggle, the study seeks to honor and acknowledge the impact of these individuals on the strengthening of identity and the fight for social and racial justice.

Analysis of Experiences with the Boards

In this article, among the various topics addressed in the interviews and focus groups, we chose to focus on 4.1. Experience with hetero-identification procedures and the construction of racial identity, investigating how the experiences lived during these processes influence the construction of racial identity among Black quota students who became UFMG students. The analysis will concentrate on the psychological and social effects generated by this process.

Following this, we will expand the discussion to 4.2. The reconfiguration of racial identity in the transition from evaluated to member of the hetero-identification procedures, addressing how the experience with these procedures not only impacts the identity of those being evaluated but also provokes a reconfiguration of the racial identity of those who, after becoming UFMG students, go on to join the complementary self-declaration procedure as evaluators.

Evaluated Students and the Processes of Racial Identity Construction

To begin the analysis, we will address the theme of *Experience with hetero-identification procedures and the construction of racial identity* and examine how experiences in these procedures impact the construction of racial identity in Black quota students, with an emphasis on the psychological and social effects generated by this process.

Although this type of procedure aims to verify the correspondence between a candidate's racial self-declaration and their phenotypic characteristics, focusing solely on the racial identification of the subjects without intending to define their racial identity, such

a process can impact the subjects' identity dimension, as identity is always constructed and reconstructed in social relationships. The evaluation, which is based on an external observation of phenotype, can trigger feelings of belonging or non-belonging, as will be evidenced in the statements of some subjects in this research.

The experience of having one's self-declaration approved or rejected by the boards has emotional and psychological consequences, since many people associate skin color and phenotypic traits with a lived experience that is also cultural and social. Students who went through this stage reported a series of feelings that preceded the experience of this process and reappeared at the exact moment of meeting the board. From our perspective, these emotional aspects constitute an important dimension for understanding the students' experiences with this stage, which is complementary to racial self-declaration.

The statement given by Sueli Carneiro, reproduced below, is quite illustrative of this profusion of feelings.

> [...] When I found out I would have to go through a racial hetero-identification board, I started to question my racial identity. I found myself in a dilemma, because, while I identified as Brown, for a long time my appearance didn't completely match the image I had of what it meant to be Black. At home, my mother always took care of my hair, making a point of straightening it since I was little, and that was something that, deep down, I always associated with what was acceptable or appropriate in the context of society. I had difficulty understanding my own hair, until recently I started to recognize myself more naturally, without straightening, and I realized how much my process of acceptance was influenced by my self-image and social standards around hair and skin color. Arriving at the board was distressing, mainly because I wasn't fully sure how I would be perceived. I was afraid of not passing, of being seen as someone "committing fraud." I saw other people with physical characteristics much closer to the "white" stereotype, but declaring themselves as Black or Brown, and this created an internal conflict for me. During the preparation for the board, I kept reviewing every detail of my appearance: my nose, my mouth, the color of my skin... but I was never really sure how this would be perceived by others [...].

Sueli Carneiro's statement reveals an insecurity that is not derived only from her lack of knowledge about how the hetero-identification board works, but also from a racial conflict internalized since childhood. These two processes lead her to question her own racial identity. By analyzing her account of the care her mother dedicated to her hair, we

observe that the straightening reflected the imposition of a hegemonic aesthetic standard that made it difficult to accept kinky hair.

This practice, therefore, is not just an aesthetic choice but a reflection of a process of internalized racism, where Black physical characteristics are devalued in favor of aesthetic standards closer to whiteness. According to Santos Souza (1983), "[...] the possibility of constructing a positive racial identity is also a political task and is directly linked to family relationships." We also note that throughout her youth, Sueli begins to affirm her identity, accepting her natural hair and changing the image she had of herself.

This change in her self-recognition shows how racial identity is influenced by external factors, such as social and aesthetic standards, and how the process of self-acceptance is crucial for the reconstruction of racial identity. Another point worth highlighting in Sueli's testimony is her use of the category "Black" as a way to refer to skin color, demonstrating a imprecise understanding of racial categories. This association seems evident to us when the interviewee refers to "Black and Brown," making explicit a collective imaginary that positions Brown people as a middle ground between White and Black people (Jesus, 2021).

This confusion reveals not only a lack of knowledge about the nuances of racial categories but also a lack of understanding about the social dynamics that shape the construction of Black identity in Brazil. Although she went through many feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, Sueli expresses a positive perspective regarding her experience on the hetero-identification board, highlighting some changes in her perception of her racial identity and the impact of that moment on her self-affirmation.

> The board experience was quick, but very intense. I was nervous, but in the end, it was quite calm. I didn't get many questions, but at the same time, it was a moment of reaffirmation. When I finally saw that I was approved, it was a relief. Not only for securing the spot, but for being recognized as a Black person. Although for a long time my identity was questioned because of my appearance and my hair, today, after going through this process, I feel more secure and firm about who I am. I know what it is to be Brown and to be Black, and that doesn't make me less or more Black than anyone else. Today, my process of self-affirmation is much clearer. I recognize myself as Brown, and I'm proud of it, because it's an identity that carries both my sense of belonging and the struggle that Black, Brown, and people of other racial identities need to continue fighting. Going through the board was not just a matter of approval for the spot, but a profound experience of racial awareness, and I realize that the battle continues every day, not just in how I see myself, but also in how I am perceived by others, both inside and outside the university.

Although the purpose of this procedure is not to validate racial identities, Sueli reports that it had that effect on her, providing a self-affirmation of her identity as a Black person. The moment that preceded this stage and the experience lived during the process generated an educational and racial awareness movement that transcended the expectations she had built until then. Ultimately, this experience became a process of strengthening Sueli's identity, showing the subjective and transformative impact that this type of practice can have on an individual's personal experience.

As we explained earlier, the hetero-identification procedures at UFMG are composed of two distinct and complementary moments: the first regular board and the second appeals board, available for those candidates who were rejected by the first board, either by receiving 3 or more votes of rejection or by absence. The next interviewee, Lélia Gonzalez, centered her testimony on the feelings mobilized by being rejected by the regular board but approved by the appeals board.

> The experience on the hetero-identification boards was something very intense for me. The first time I went through the board, I was rejected, which left me very shaken. At the table, there was only one Black person and several White people, and I found out that to be approved, the majority of the votes had to be favorable. When I was rejected, I couldn't believe it. I had to appeal and I wrote a letter explaining my identity, referring to my mother as White, although I recognized my ancestral heritage and saw myself as a Black woman. The idea of being *mestiça*, and having to define myself, was always very complicated for me. I recognized myself as a Black woman, but I couldn't accept that the system, in such a rigid way, was forcing me to put a label that didn't exactly define what I felt. I went through many difficulties in this process. I was questioned a lot about my identity, which caused me emotional distress. There were times when I thought that maybe it wasn't meant to be, that maybe the university wasn't my place. But I was persistent and, with the support of friends and a Black movement, I managed to pass the second board. This time, the situation was different. The board was more diverse, with more Black people, and I really felt that the process was fairer.

Although rejection by the first hetero-identification board does not mean "losing the spot" for candidates at UFMG, we can note in Lélia's testimony that the rejection, even if temporary, represented a critical moment in her self-image, as it exposed an incompatibility between the candidate's self-declaration and how she was socially

perceived by the board. Although critical of the process, we can note that the candidate Lélia Gonzalez was also able to hetero-identify the members of the board, assuming that, because they were predominantly White, they would not have correctly interpreted her characteristics.

As described in the public notice, after being rejected by the first board, Lélia was reallocated and scheduled for the second (appeals) board, where the analysis by phenotype was repeated. As with the first board, Lélia was also able to perform a phenotypic analysis of the evaluators, this time identifying a majority of Black people. This greater racial diversity, according to Lélia, would have contributed to the process "being fairer," meaning they confirmed her as a Black person.

Although some of the interviewees, including students who self-declared as Black, reported going through moments of anguish and insecurity before the hetero-identification procedures, as expressed by Abdias do Nascimento, "I went through months of torment until the hetero-identification procedure," the process of confirming the self-declaration emerged, for some candidates, as a space for confirmation of racial belonging, which contributed to an increase in self-esteem and the strengthening of their academic journey. Milton Santos, for example, states that "it was a process of politicization, of learning more about my own identity."

The testimonies already presented show that the experiences in these processes that complement racial self-declaration play a crucial role in the construction of the participants' racial identity, providing a space for learning and consciousness-raising. These learnings become even more pronounced for those students who, in addition to being evaluated by the boards, become evaluators and begin to join these commissions as members. This is what we will discuss in the next topic.

The Reconfiguration of Racial Identity in the Transition from Evaluated to Evaluators

The experience of transitioning from being evaluated to becoming a member of the hetero-identification procedures at UFMG emerges as a moment of profound identity re-signification for some of the Black quota students. For Larrosa (2002), experience goes

beyond a simple event; it is something that profoundly transforms the subject. This process was described by three focus group participants. Let's start with the statement of Beatriz Nascimento.

> During the pandemic, there was an initiative to offer training to become a member of the hetero-identification board, and I found it interesting because I believe this is part of a process of understanding more about our own experiences. I thought it was important to be part of it, as a person. I entered UFMG in the first semester of 2019, and this experience brought me more awareness about my identity.

According to Jesus (2021, p. 65), the first hetero-identification boards held at UFMG for undergraduate students were scheduled for the first days of February 2019. Beatriz Nascimento was one of the students who, for the first time at the university, went through this process, joining the group of students who self-declared as Black. During the pandemic, Beatriz showed interest in participating in a training workshop to join the Complementary Commission to Self-Declaration, with the aim of working on the hetero-identification procedures.

The decision to participate in this evaluative practice as an evaluator seems to indicate the formative potential of this procedure, which goes beyond the simple confirmation of the Black (Black or Brown) candidate's self-declaration. The following testimony from Machado de Assis presents interesting reflections on his experience in the hetero-identification procedure as an evaluator.

> Participating in this experience as an evaluator was very important to me. First, I sought to find out how I could join the boards as an evaluator, because from the moment I participated as a candidate, I became deeply interested in the procedure. I wanted to be part of the process and contribute to guaranteeing Black students' right to racial quotas. I registered online for the training workshop that precedes the process and attended the training in person. Then, I made myself available for the boards. When I received my first call-up to participate, I felt a mixture of anxiety and happiness at being able to collaborate. The procedure took place at 8 a.m. at UFMG's CAD3 building, and on that day, besides me, there were four other people who would also participate in the process. As members of the board, we waited for the students in the room. Each member had their computer, and the president of the commission started the procedure, asking for the candidate's CPF and full name. At that moment, we watched the candidate read aloud the self-declaration confirmation statement in front of the commission. Simultaneously, each member of the commission evaluated the candidate's phenotype and

> registered the evaluation in the racial hetero-identification system, individually, without consulting the other members. For me, when a Black candidate came in, who was indeed the subject of this right, I was very happy. I felt that all the effort was worth it, because I was there to guarantee a legitimate right.

Machado de Assis's testimony reinforces the educational role of the hetero-identification procedures. It also shows how his experience as an evaluated subject sparked a desire to participate more actively in public policy and contribute to its success. This desire to contribute to the effectiveness of the policy can also be observed in Beatriz's testimony, as discussed earlier. According to the interviewees, therefore, the transition from being evaluated to becoming a member of the hetero-identification procedures can be defined as a political decision, motivated by the explicit desire to contribute to ensuring compliance with the quota law.

The enthusiasm to become a policy operator of quotas is evident in Machado's account, especially when he expresses his feeling of fulfilling his role as a member of the procedure, actively participating in this process. The testimony of Mãe Stella de Oxóssi closely aligns with the previous statements, as it reinforces the educational potential of the hetero-identification procedures and, at the same time, shows her commitment to the effectiveness of the policy.

> I entered UFMG in the first semester of 2021. During the pandemic, I started to realize the lack of information I had about my own formation and identity process, and I felt the need to understand these aspects better. So, I went looking for information on how the hetero-identification boards worked and learned about the training workshop. After the training, my participation was not immediate; it was only on the third call-up that I managed to make myself available in the Commission's WhatsApp group. I confess that, although the desire to participate was great, my shyness almost made me give up. However, I recalled the initial training and the importance of my participation. Just as I felt secure seeing Black people on my board when I was a candidate, I realized it would be important for other Black students to see a Black woman with Brown skin participating in that procedure. I regained my courage, and in my first participation, I realized that, despite the challenge, it was very worthwhile to do my part. I can't say it's easy to be in that position; when I looked at each candidate, my sense of responsibility increased. When in doubt about whether a candidate was Brown or not, I didn't exempt myself and reject them, because I knew that was the just decision. In the first case where I had a doubt, I took a deep breath, remembered the procedure and its purpose: it was not to harm anyone, but to ensure the fulfillment of a right.

Mãe Stella's testimony shows us how the interviewee feels the weight of the decision and the evaluation of the phenotype, making it clear that the hetero-identification procedure is not a mechanical one, as it must be carried out with care, ethics, and justice. According to her, the doubts that arose during the evaluations, especially in the regular procedures, were always faced with seriousness and a sense of justice, guided by the legal principle of "*in dubio pro societate*"[5]. For the interviewee, the experience with the procedures goes beyond a simple administrative procedure, as she perceives it as a tool for inclusion and empowerment, with the potential to strengthen the racial identity of the participants and ensure equity in access to education.

Final Considerations

While the testimonies from the first group of interviewees—students who were evaluated by the hetero-identification procedures—revealed the emergence of ambiguous feelings, ranging from insecurity and fear to identity strengthening, the testimonies obtained from the second group of interviewees showed us a deeper understanding of the institutional dynamics and evaluation criteria used by the procedures. "[...] Now I see the impact we have on the candidates' lives. It's not just about what we see, but about what we build together" (Beatriz Nascimento). This statement alerts us to the complexity of the processes of constructing and reconstructing racial identities and how they are shaped, not only by how people see themselves but also by how they are seen, as pointed out by Gomes (2005).

In addition, the testimonies of the interviewees who experienced both being evaluated and being an evaluator affirmed that assuming the role of an evaluator provokes a direct confrontation with the criteria that created tension in their own identities. "[...] Who am I to say whether someone is Black or not?" (Machado de Assis). This duality is explored by Munanga (2012), who highlights how the racial hetero-identification procedure involves both the reconstruction of collective memories and the deconstruction of exclusionary narratives that reinforced a supposed Black inferiority. Another central aspect of the experience of those who, after being evaluated, became evaluators was the strengthening

[5] The principle of "*in dubio pro societate*" means that in case of doubt, if there is minimal evidence of authorship, the approval should proceed. It is a Brazilian legal principle.

of a collective perspective on racial identity. "[...] We are not just confirming self-declarations; we are building a space of belonging" (Machado de Assis). This engagement reflects a new understanding of the role of the procedures as agents of social and political transformation, aligned with Woodward's (2000) view, which understands identity as being shaped by power and belonging relationships, that is, identities are constructed in interpersonal relationships, but also by the interferences of social norms imposed by the current social system, which is markedly oppressive, exclusionary, and unequal.

In summary, the transition of Black quota students from the status of evaluated to members of the hetero-identification procedures not only re-signifies their identity trajectories but also expands their perception of power dynamics within the academic environment. The transformative and challenging experiences lived and reported by the students highlight the importance of institutional practices that consider the complexity of racial identities and the educational role of the procedures in the construction, strengthening, and/or re-signification of identities and racial belongings. Therefore, the experience with hetero-identification procedures reveals itself as a profound and multifaceted process that not only impacts the identity of the evaluated candidates but also provokes a reconfiguration in the identities of those who, after being evaluated, become evaluating members of the hetero-identification procedures. By joining the procedure, these students become active participants in the construction of the quota policy, confronting and reflecting on their own racial identities while performing the role of evaluators.

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