Hair and meanings of ethnic-racial belonging in girls' conversations

Cabelos e significados do pertencimento étnico-racial em conversas de meninas

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Abstract

Objective
Structural racism is a systemic phenomenon in Brazilian society that distributes conditions of subordination and privilege among racial groups, reinforcing the dominance of the White group. Its individual expression can be seen throughout daily interactions. Children, through immersion in the social fabric, construct their cultural identity and gradually develop a sense of belonging to an ethno-racial group. The aim of this study is to identify racialized social stereotypes about hair in conversations among girls aged 9 to 11 years old.

Method
Two groups were organized in a public school, each consisting of two Black and two White girls. They participated in seven video-recorded play sessions, averaging 30 minutes each. Among the toys were a Black, blonde, Oriental, and a brown-haired White doll.

Results
Microgenetic analysis was performed, focusing on conversation segments about ethnic-racial belonging.

Conclusion
It revealed racist beliefs and values underlying the meanings attributed to hair.

Keywords: Child; Hair; Racism; Social interaction.

Resumo

Objetivo
O racismo estrutural é um fenômeno sistêmico, presente na sociedade brasileira, no qual condições de subalternidade e de privilégio se distribuem entre grupos raciais, mantendo o grupo branco no poder. Sua expressão individual revela-se nas interações cotidianas. Crianças, imersas no tecido social, constituem-se na cultura e vão construindo seu pertencimento a um grupo étnico-racial. O objetivo deste estudo é identificar estereótipos sociais racializados sobre cabelos em conversas de meninas de 9-11 anos.

Método
Em uma escola pública foram organizados dois grupos, cada um com duas meninas negras e duas brancas. Elas participaram de sete sessões de brincadeiras, videogravadas, de 30 minutos em média. Entre os brinquedos havia: bonecas negra, loira, oriental e uma branca de cabelos castanhos.

Resultados
A análise microgenética focou segmentos de conversas sobre pertencimento étnico-racial.

Conclusão
Evidenciou crenças e valores racistas subjacentes aos significados sobre cabelos.

***Palavras-chave:** Criança; Cabelo; Racismo; Interação social.*

Racism is a systemic phenomenon, for it manifests itself beyond the individual level of its expression, at the cultural and structural levels (Lima, 2020). In its structural dimension, racism concerns a process in which conditions of subalternity and privilege, which are distributed among racial groups, are reproduced in politics, economics, and daily relationships, serving to maintain the hegemony of the White racial group in power (Almeida, 2018).

Scientific racial theories were incorporated into Brazil from the 19th century onwards (Schwarcz, 1993). From that moment until today, with adjustments in its reproduction, it can be affirmed that racism in Brazil is based: (1) on the myth of racial democracy (Freyre, 1933/2005), which, despite being scientifically disputed (Guimarães, 2002), is a narrative that denies the violence of colonialism against Black and indigenous populations and hinders the visibility of racial segregation in the country; (2) on the ideology of Whitening (Bento, 2014), which perpetuates representations that hinder the strengthening of the Black subject's identity, while omitting the historically-expropriated symbolic and material privileges that sustain White racial supremacy in the country; and (3) on Black Genocide, in which state policies, or the absence of equity policies, function as a machine of concrete and symbolic extermination of the Black people (Nascimento, 1978/2016).

According to Lima (2020), all these aspects contribute to build, while at the same time reflecting, a racist culture that predicts specific social spaces, predetermined forms of self-presentation/representation, and limited mobility territories for Black people. Such culture constructs negative social stereotypes regarding the Black population. This sphere of racism is transmitted, directly or indirectly, in communication and socialization processes from childhood.

According to Sacco et al. (2019), the development of racial prejudice in children is more complex than a mere repetition of patterns observed in the family environment and is related to factors such as intergroup relationships, cultural context, and perception of social dominance. França and Monteiro (2013), based on a set of experiments, tested the hypothesis that children from age seven and up do not reduce the expression of prejudice, as predicted from a cognitive approach to development, but rather alter the way they express it, depending on the context. In other words, the expression of their prejudice changes from blatant to subtle. Thus, if the anti-racist social norm is salient, the expression of intergroup prejudice will be neutralized in public situations but not in private ones, and in older children but not in younger children under seven years old. The results of the experiments showed that children aged 8-10 only discriminate against the Black target if the context of the anti-racist norm is not salient.

In general, studies on ethnic-racial relations in childhood (Marques & Dornelles, 2019 ; Ponte, 2019) mention the dimension of hair given that it is an important element in aesthetic appearance, especially for women and girls. The type of hair is also a defining element of ethnic-racial belonging; it is a relevant marker that interacts with other aspects and includes an aesthetic-corporal pattern, for example, skin color for defining a person as Black. In Brazil, the illustrious sociologist Oracy Nogueira (Daflon, 2018) defined racial prejudice as 'mark prejudice', precisely because it is based on aspects of physical appearance to categorize people into certain racially devalued groups.

The concept of intersectionality, pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, demarcates the paradigm of Black feminism, denouncing structural conditions in which racism, sexism, and their related violence articulate to maintain unique discriminations and burdens for Black girls and women (Akotirene, 2019). As highlighted by Chaveiro and Minella (2021), the constitution of subjectivity crossed by race and gender begins in early childhood, and the dimension of hair in the racialized experience of girls emphasizes the importance of examining intersectionality in children, as is the case in this article.

Curly hair is an undeniable mark of Blackness and appears in everyday language with many different names, both in adult and children's cultures (Sarmento, 2018), from seemingly harmless terms like "curly", "spiraled", "*sarará*" (Brazilian term denoting curly, blond or red hair), and "springy", to more commonly used racial insults such as "messy", "*balaio*" (Brazilian word denoting a straw basket), "steel wool", "scrubber", "hard", among others. From these observations, questions arise about how racism is understood among children who are affected by this phenomenon in a macro culture characterized by structural racism, as is the case in Brazilian society.

Group play has proven a productive space for observing children for research purposes. Playing with partners promotes interactions where children engage in tasks, appropriate themes, cooperate, negotiate their scripts, positions, and hierarchies within the group, resolve conflicts, disagree, evaluate, and learn from their partners, all in pursuit of their playful purposes (Menezes & Bichara, 2021; Moll et al., 2011; Simões & Resnick, 2019). Moreover, play provides researchers with an indirect way to access children's perspectives, given their protagonism is inferred from the activities they engage in, which are often hidden behind the pretense and make-believe of the play. Thus, studying ethnic-racial belonging and racial prejudice in children by inferring them from their speech and gestures in a ludic context can represent a promising methodological approach.

As a hypothesis, it is believed that racist meanings may emerge in girls' conversations, specifically racial stereotypes that associate curly hair and Blackness with a devalued position and straight hair and Whiteness with an overvalued position of ethnic-racial belonging. Investigating this topic could provide subsidies for an educational approach with children who live with this phenomenon in a silent and concealed way, as if racism did not exist in our society. It is necessary to educate children to respect differences, whether they are cultural, ethnic, religious, etc. Differences enrich our coexistence; discrimination violates our rights.

Racism is real; it exists for Black boys and girls, and it's not just an embarrassing behavior; it often prevents children and teenagers from fully exercising their right to learn, grow, and develop. Highlighting subtle aspects that reveal racist attitudes can possibly help combat it and reduce inequality between White and Black children. The school can contribute to this task by paying attention to the jokes and language used by children in the classroom or during informal activities like recess. It can encourage and value respectful behavior towards ethnic diversity and combat discrimination in any form.

Method

The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the *Universidade de Brasília* (UnB), under protocol number 155/08. It followed all current resolutions' requirements.

Participants

The study was conducted with eight female students from the two fifth-grade classes of the morning shift, aged 9 to 11 years. The girls – referred to in the investigation as Leila, Paula, Bianca, and Rafaela to preserve their identities – had a predominantly Black phenotype, varying characteristics such as curly hair, thick lips, wide nose, and dark skin color. Those called Helen, Vivian, Érica, and Laura had a predominantly White phenotype, varying characteristics such as straight and blond hair and light skin color. Leila, Paula, Helen, and Vivian belonged to class 5A and formed the first of the two groups observed in the research; Bianca, Rafaela, Érica, and Laura, members of class 5B, formed

the second observation group of the research. Therefore, each observation group was composed of two Black and two White girls.

According to Nascimento and Fonseca (2013), there are basically three methods of racial identification: self-assignment (subject chooses their own group), hetero assignment (another person defines the subject's group), and genetic analysis of large population groups. Although there are international recommendations in favor of self-assignment in research that captures race, ethnicity, or characteristics related to individuals' identity, there is also extensive discussion about whether this method of identification would be suitable for Brazil due to the prevailing ideal of Whiteness. In this study, the researcher opted for hetero assignment to identify the children's race.

Instruments

The observation sessions, which are called play sessions, were recorded on video using a camcorder. In each session, the following toys were used: a Black Barbie doll, a blonde-haired White Barbie doll, an Oriental Barbie doll (Disney's character Mulan), a brown-haired White Barbie doll, dollhouse furniture, toy food, rag and wooden dolls, clothing, shoes, and doll accessories.

Procedures

The research was conducted in a public elementary school in the administrative region of *Plano Piloto de Brasília*, Federal District of Brazil. The school is well-regarded for its quality in education and serves the children of middle and low-income families.

Seven observation sessions were carried out. They were video-recorded, characterized as play spaces where girls were encouraged to play with objects that had been previously selected by the researcher and made available in the room, with the intention of promoting the emergence of the theme "ethnic-racial relations" through child-to-child interaction. The space provided by the school for the research was the reading room. The sessions took place during the same school period, during recess. Each group consisted of four girls, two Black and two White – groups A and B – who interacted for approximately 30 minutes. The toys were made available on a rug on the floor of the room. Overall, the researcher, who is Black, had a very discreet participation, but was free to ask specific questions during the session about topics that emerged spontaneously in the children's dialogue. Therefore, the data collection procedure was planned in such a way as to replace an interview with each child – a more common procedure – with a group conversation while playing, taking advantage of aspects of the ethnic-racial belonging or discrimination theme brought up spontaneously by the participants. Only in the first session of each group did the researcher distribute the dolls, offering one to each child. On purpose, the Black doll was given to one of the White children, and the blonde doll was offered to one of the Black children. There was intentionality in these offerings: the possibility of observing rejection or acceptance of the doll of the same or different ethnic-racial belonging of the child, and if there was rejection, the refusal of a doll could be a subject of conversation between the researcher and the children during the play.

In the data analysis stage, the sessions were watched numerous times, selecting video segments where the girls dialogued about the research topics of interest. These clippings, called episodes, were microgenetically analyzed, i.e., underwent a qualitative analysis supported by a detailed description of the observed scenes and behaviors. This analysis focuses on ongoing processes, tracking the changes and sequences of actions and meanings that permeate the interactional process and the transformations resulting from it. It prioritizes the unfolding of the

conversation and actions to highlight clues that may contribute to understanding the phenomenon being studied. Thus, they were transcribed meticulously (speech, gestures, postures, laughter, and facial expressions) to obtain more clues about the meaning of their dialogue (Costa & Amorim, 2015). Pacheco (2016) suggests that when researchers use videotaping and transcription of episodes to construct data, they focus on paying attention to details, examining how discourses function, studying intersubjective relations, and analyzing the social conditions of the situation. This process results in a meticulous report of events.

Pedrosa and Carvalho (2005) suggest that the purpose of describing and analyzing episodes is to scrutinize and evaluate theoretical concepts. By presenting empirical evidence, readers can assess the concepts' significance and coherence. Qualitative analysis of interaction episodes involves intricate interactional patterns that demand novel techniques for clipping and interpreting the data. In this research, among others, there are indications of emerging stereotypes and prejudiced social values in Brazilian ethnic-racial relations, mainly related to the theme of hair.

Results and Discussion

In societies where race is one of the structuring aspects of social power relations, hair and skin color are the most visible signs of racial difference and possess a strong symbolic dimension. Racism constitutes an ideological code that takes biological attributes as social values and meanings, imposing on Black people a series of negative connotations that affect them socially and subjectively. However, in the dialectical movement of social relations, the action of racism on Black people results in varied, subtle, and explicit forms of reaction and resistance. In this context, hair and skin color can move from a place of inferiority to occupy the place of Black beauty, assuming a political significance (Gomes, 2019). Four interactional episodes from the analyzed empirical material will be presented below, which demonstrate the power of hair-related meanings for ethnic-racial relations since childhood.

Episode 01: Strange hair, even if blonde! (Group A)

Participating children: Paula (10 years old, Black); Leila (11 years old, Black);
Helen (10 years old, White); and Vivian (10 years old, White)

Each child handles a doll and alternates actions of combing, dressing, and decorating it, while they talk to each other or with the researcher (Res.).

Res. asks the group after a few minutes of the session: *"Why doesn't anybody want the doll that Helen has?"*
Paula: *"No, I didn't say that I didn't want it..."* (Looks at the researcher).
Vivian: *"Her hair is weird!"*
Helen: *"Oh, guys, I love kinky hair! It's so cool. I just didn't want her because I thought she was ugly"* (Picking up the oriental doll). *"So now I want her. She's going to be mine."* (Hugs the Black doll).
Res.: *Why?" "Why? Why is her hair weird, Vivian? Tell me."*
Vivian: *"I don't know, I thought it was kind of weird when it's loose. I didn't think about tying it. And I had already seen this one"* (Picks up the White doll with brown hair).
Res.: *"Mm-hmm. And would you have accepted it, Paula?"*
Paula: *"I would've. If you had told me any, any doll. If it was..."*
Res.: *"Why did you want the doll you got?"* (Addressing Leila).

Leila: *"Because she has blonde hair"* (Smiles).
Res.: *"Is that so?"*
Leila nods in agreement.
Res.: *"And do you like it?"*
Leila: *"I like it, blonde hair..."*
Res.: *"Why do you like blonde hair, Leila?"*
Leila: *"It's because I'm going to dye my hair blonde"* (Walking around the room).
Res.: *"You're going to dye it?"*
Leila: *"Yes, when I grow up, maybe."*
Paula comments: *"When you grow up..."*
Helen: *"Maybe!"*
Res.: *"Hmm. Did you wish you were blonde, Leila?"*
Leila: *"No."*
Res.: *"Well, then why are you going to dye your hair blonde?"* (Smiling)
Leila: *"What do you mean?"*
Vivian: *"You said you were going to dye your hair blonde."*
Leila: *"Dye... Dye... Well, I might dye it, right?"*
Helen: *"Well, I don't think it's a good idea!"* (Giving Leila an evaluative look).
Vivian: *"Yeah, it's going to look weird, Leila."*

It is noteworthy in this episode that, in response to a question from the researcher about specific rejection of the Black doll, Vivian immediately stated, without embarrassment, a racist perception, i.e., the reason was the doll's hair: *"Her hair is weird! [...] I don't know, I thought it was kind of weird when it's loose. I didn't think about tying it. And I had already seen this one"* (Picking up the White doll with brown hair). The typical curly hair of the Black population needed to be concealed and modified to be accepted by the White girl. As the hair of the Black doll was typically voluminous, it was labeled as 'weird' by Vivian and needed to be tamed and disciplined to be considered acceptable by her. Helen, the White partner, rushed to value the doll's curly hair as if she wanted to mitigate the discriminatory weight of her colleague's speech: *"Oh, guys, I love kinky hair!" It's so cool. I just didn't want her because I thought she was ugly"* (Picking up the oriental doll). *"So now I want her. She's going to be mine."* (Hugs the Black doll). We can think of some hypotheses based on this dialogue: (1) Vivian's positioning is indicative of how Whiteness is constituted in this discriminatory place presented by hierarchized racial relationships since childhood; and (2) Helen may have been more exposed to contexts that emphasize an anti-racist norm (Rodrigues et al., 2012) and, therefore, demonstrated a position of opposition to racial discrimination and a valorization of differences.

On the other hand, regarding the effects of Whitening on Black children, Leila, when asked by the researcher, also did not hesitate to show her racialized aesthetic preferences about dolls: *"Because she has blonde hair* (smiling), *I like blonde hair...".* In addition to the doll's hair, Leila talked about plans to have her own hair dyed blonde: *"It's because I'm going to dye my hair blonde* (walking around the room) [...] *I'll do it, when I grow up, maybe".* This refers to a new/old type of slavery to beauty standards where White characteristics are hyper-valued and Black characteristics are devalued (Oliveira & Mattos, 2019). Children are exposed from an early age to racist aesthetic standards that overvalue physical characteristics of Whiteness such as light eyes, fair skin, and straight, blonde hair. It would not be an exaggeration to say that a eugenic standard of beauty is something White children learn to overvalue in themselves from an early age, while Black children learn to devalue and deny it in themselves. However, even with Leila's attempt to disguise her curly hair by making

it blonde in the future, it still wouldn't go unscathed to the aesthetic judgment to which White girls claim entitlement: "Well, I don't think it's a good idea!" (Said Helen); "Yeah, it's going to look weird, Leila" (Commented Vivian). Thus, the message for Black children is that curly hair will never be good and will always be "weird," even if dyed blonde. As Fanon (2008) discussed, even if Black people use "masks" to try to approach the ideal of White beauty, the hierarchical social structure will never allow Black people to be seen as equals because it exists to keep groups racially separated.

According to Cruz (2014), the dimension of curly hair, when associated with color, is a defining element of race, just like skin tone itself, considering that they almost always appear together in indicating racism by White children and in indicating a desire for Whitening by Black children. Color and hair are intimately linked to aesthetics and femininity, and in the eyes of a racist masculinity that is still hegemonic, the standard should be that of a White woman. Among children, sexism and racism gain strength when they merge in the social construction of what it means to be a girl and Black.

The school trajectory (Moreira-Primo & França, 2020; Silva & Bernardo, 2019) appears in most of the testimonies of research participants on racism as an important moment in the process of constructing Black identity, unfortunately reinforcing stereotypes and negative representations of this ethnic-racial segment and its aesthetic standard. According to Gomes (2002), the body appears as a support for Black identity and curly hair as a strong identity marker. The pedagogical discourse about Black people, even without explicitly referring to the body, addresses and expresses impressions and representations about this body. Hair has been one of the main symbols used in this process because, since slavery, it has been used as one of the defining elements of a subject's place within the Brazilian racial classification system. The same author also emphasizes that this situation is not limited to discourse; it permeates the pedagogical practices and school and socio-cultural experiences of Black and White individuals.

Episode 02: Ideal hair – straight or curly? (Group A)
Participating children: Paula (10 years old, Black); Leila (11 years old, Black);
Helen (10 years old, White); and Vivian (10 years old, White)

The children talk while playing with dolls, combing them and changing their clothes and accessories. The researcher shows interest in what they are talking about.

Paula: *"I think I'm pretty! But then, sometimes..."*
Helen smiles.
Res.: *"What do you think is the prettiest thing about you?"*
Paula: *"Oh my God! Oh my God!"* (As she speaks, she covers her face with a toy as if she were embarrassed) *"I don't know."*
Vivian: *"What the heck?"*
Paula: "No, I think I'm pretty... *Everything. I don't think one part of me is prettier than the other."*
Vivian: *"I love my hair!"*
Helen: *"I do!"* (Opposing Paula, who said she didn't think one part of her was prettier than the other).
Vivian: *"I love rehearsing in front of the mirror..."* (And tosses her hair from side to side).
Helen: *"I hate my hair. But the part I like the most..."*
Paula: *"Why don't you..."* (gesturing with her hands). *"Because if I had hair like that!"* (Running her hand through her own hair) *"Are you kidding?! Look, I would swing it and move it all the time!"* (Tossing her hair back and forth) *"I would use a bunch of stuff, and no one would keep me from touching my hair. Mine, I have hair like this, I can't even let it loose because it turns like this!"* (Makes a gesture of

something big around her head and claps) *"I can't let it loose because it does this too!"* (Repeats the gesture) *"So, my God, if I had hair like that, help me Jesus!"* (Points to Helen's hair) *"Because…"* (Shakes her head negatively, emphasizing what she said).

Res.: *"What do you mean, how would you like your hair to be?"* (Addressing Paula).

Paula: *"Oh, I… No, my… My hair is good like this! I like it like this. But, you know, when I see that Helen doesn't take advantage of her straight hair!"* (Touches Helen's hair a few times, smiling) *"If Helen took advantage of it… If Helen could exchange it… If she could exchange her hair, and wanted to exchange it with me, I would swing my hair like this…"* (Swings her hair emphatically). *[…]*

Noteworthy in this episode is the contrast between Paula's (Black) demonstration of shame when talking about her appearance, and Vivian's (White) uninhibitedness when discussing the same topic. Paula says: *"I think I'm pretty! But then, sometimes… […] Oh my God! Oh my God!"* (Covering her face with a toy as if embarrassed). *"I don't know".* While Vivian comments: *"I love my hair! […] I love rehearsing in front of the mirror…"* (Tossing her hair from side to side). This contrast suggests the extent to which hierarchized beauty standards, observed through a racial lens, interfere in girls' conceptions of themselves, offering different possibilities of expression of self-esteem and self-concept for children based on their ethnic-racial belonging (Guizzo et al., 2017).

Moreira-Primo and França (2020) highlight some effects of racism on children's school trajectory, such as the overvaluation of White children and the devaluation of Black children by schools. This devaluation has a strong impact on the negative construction of Black children's identity, who sometimes come to dislike their skin color, feel inferior, and consequently have low self-esteem. The Whitening pedagogy present in schools is based on an ideal that values "normative Whiteness", favoring, by both adults and children, the White standard. Although not the focus of the present study, there is a need for more scientific investigations into the reproduction of this beauty ideal in school institutions.

In this episode, we can also observe Helen's unusual speech: *"I hate my hair. But the part I like the most…"* in which the White child expressed severe self-criticism regarding her hair. Next, Paula's reaction to her speech was evidence of the harmful effects of racism that structures beauty standards and oppresses Black children from an early age with the notion of Whitening: *"Because if I had hair like that!"* (Running her hand through her hair) *"Are you kidding?! Look, I would swing it and move it all the time!"* (Tossing her hair back and forth) *"I would use a bunch of stuff, and no one would keep me from touching my hair. Mine, I have hair like this, I can't even leave it down because it turns into this!"* (Makes a gesture of something big around her head and claps). These racialized beauty standards massively present characteristics of Whiteness such as straight and blonde hair on the positive pole, and characteristics of Blackness, such as curly hair, on the negative pole, thus circumscribing the meanings that children construct about their own appearance and the appearance of others. Paula adds: *"But, you know, when I see that Helen doesn't take advantage of her straight hair!"* (Touches Helen's hair, smiling) *"If Helen took advantage of it… If Helen could exchange it… If she could exchange her hair, and wanted to exchange it with me, I'd swing my hair like this…"* (Swings her hair emphatically).

Understanding how aesthetic standards are socially constructed is crucial to recognizing certain forms of exclusion that result from imposing these standards on oneself or others. Regarding beauty, it is highlighted that in contemporary societies it has become a means of access to social ascent and therefore functions as symbolic capital that engenders privileges in everyday relationships (Santos, 2015). As can be seen in the analyzed episodes, it is indicated that these privileges prevail from an early age in children's social interactions.

Gomes (2002) highlights that the different beliefs and feelings that constitute the foundation of social life are applied to the body. If the body speaks about our being in the world, the historical relationship of the slave with the body expresses much more than the idea of submission, persistently preached by the society of that time and still echoing in our ears today. The difference imprinted on this same body by the color of the skin and other diacritical signs served as yet another argument to justify colonization and cover up economic intentionalities and political goals. It was the comparison of the signs of the Black body (such as the nose, mouth, skin color, and hair type) with those of the White European colonizer that, in that context, served as an argument for the formulation of a standard of beauty and ugliness that haunts the Black population to this day.

Episode 03: Funny hair (Group B)

Participating children: Bianca (10 years old, Black); Rafaela (10 years old, Black); Erica (9 years old, White); and Laura (10 years old, White)

The girls play with the dolls and talk. Although present in the session, Laura does not speak during the conversation. This time it is Rafaela who introduces the researcher into the conversation.

Rafaela: *"Look!"* (Shows the Black doll to Erica, pulling her hair up).
Erica: *"From here until the end Rafaela is fixing this hair."* (Referring to the Black doll).
Rafaela: *"Here, look!"* (Shows the Black doll to Erica).
Erica: *"Yeah."*
Rafaela: *"Look, ma'am!"* (Shows the Black doll to the researcher with its hair up).
Res.: *"Do you like it?"*
Rafaela makes a serious expression of strangeness and then smiles, nodding affirmatively.
Res. nods back affirmatively and smiles.
Rafaela: *"It looks funny."*
Res.: *"What looks funny, the hair?"*
Rafaela: *"Yes."*
Erica: *"No, but it's good... But it's prettier than be... than the other way."*
Rafaela continues to make curving movements with her hand on top of the Black doll's hair and says: *"My mom did this to my hair. Like this."* (Grabs her own hair braid and puts it up).
Res.: *"Your mom did that when, Rafaela?"*
Rafaela: *"No, not this, right?!"* (Eyes widen and then smiles) *"The... Ponytail."* (Shows her own hair tied in a braid). *"More or less like this, you just need to pull it down here..."* (Does to the Black doll's hair as her mom did on her hair). *"No, never mind."* (Shakes her head negatively and gives up showing).
Erica also smiles.

In this episode, Rafaela's approaching and distancing from the Black doll's curly hair is highlighted. This movement was synthesized, focusing on the identified nuances so that they are not overlooked in children's play: the first movement is of approach, showing the Black doll to Erica, her White partner: *"Here, look!"* (Fixing the doll's hair). Erica then comments: *"From here until the end Rafaela is fixing this hair."* By showing the Black doll, Rafaela may have identified with it and even felt aesthetic admiration for the result obtained with the hair fixed upwards. Indications of identifying with the doll are raised from the dialogue, in which Rafaela mentions what her mother used to do to her hair. The second movement is of distancing, when the researcher asks if she liked what she did to the doll's hair. Rafaela then shows a serious expression of strangeness and then smiles while shaking her head affirmatively and commenting: *"It looks funny."* It should be noted that 'funny'

does not necessarily imply it is beautiful and, sometimes, it can even serve to ridicule Black people based on the theory of recreational racism (Moreira, 2019), which ranges from the use of jocular images of Black men and women in media pieces, to the nefarious use of racist jokes and popular sayings. Rafaela's third movement is again of approach, when she evokes, from playing with the Black doll, the memory of her mother fixing her hair. Rafaela continues to make curving movements with her hand on top of the Black doll's hair and says: *"My mom did this on my hair. Like this."* (Grabs her own hair braid and puts it up). The fourth movement is of distancing, when the researcher asks about what her mother did to her hair and Rafaela responds: *"No, not this, right?!"* (Eyes widen, denoting an expression of astonishment, and then smiles). Rafaela continues: *"The... Ponytail."* (Shows, touching her own hair, which is braided and tied up). It's as if Rafaela is communicating that the doll's curly hair, which is the same type as hers, when up with its natural volume, is absurd and it only looks good or beautiful when it's tied up. The four movements, referred to as approach and distance, resemble a dialogue with oneself. In this process, the child takes action, assesses the outcome, confronts emotions based on the partners' reactions, and then continues to experiment and explore.

Gomes (2002) draws attention to the fact that Black girls, during childhood, are subjected to true rituals of hair manipulation, carried out by their mother, aunt, older sister, or closest adult. Braids are the first techniques used. However, they are not always the Black child's preferred hairstyle. At times, the care of these mothers, combing and styling their daughters, cannot prevent the Black child from being the target of jokes and derogatory nicknames in the school environment. Nicknames that express that Black people's hair is seen as a symbol of inferiority, always associated with artificiality (steel wool) or elements of nature (bird's nest).

This type of insult can be observed in childhood experiences (Cruz, 2014; Eurico, 2020), demonstrating that aesthetics are generally linked to the race marker, almost composing a single marker, which constantly structures boundaries and stigmas. A common fact in research is that boys are called *"Negão"* (Brazilian term used for men with very dark skin and robust physique), "Black", "Coal", "Monkey", and girls, "Steel Wool", "Broom Hair", or "Cannon".

Episode 04: Watch out for prejudice! (Group B)

Participating children: Bianca (10 years old, Black); Rafaela (10 years old, Black); Erica (9 years old, White); and Laura (10 years old, White)

The girls play with dolls and talk about prejudice. The researcher joins the conversation and asks some questions.

Bianca: *"Ta, da, da, da! Ta, da, da, da! Ta, da, da, da! Ta, da, da, da!"* (Introduces, solemnly, the doll dressed in white like a bride, humming Felix Mendelssohn's Wedding March – the music used in wedding ceremonies).

Res.: *"Bianca is getting married."*

Rafaela: *"Ew, Bianca! That ugly guy is not good enough for you!"*

Erica: *"Ha-ha!"*

Bianca: *"What guy, guys?"*

Rafaela: *"That guy there."*

Res.: *"Is he ugly? Who is this guy?"* (Smiling).

Rafaela: *"Very ugly! He's a cripple!"*

Res.: *"Cripple?"*

Erica: *"Ha-ha!" (Loudly)*

Laura: *"Oh... Watch out for prejudice!"* (Addressing Rafaela).

Bianca: *"Look at Rafaela's boyfriend, guys!"* (Shows a cloth doll, White with black hair).

Rafaela: *"No..."*

Laura: *"Prejudice!"* (In an accusatory tone)

Rafaela: *"I'm not saying that because he's a cripple, it's because he's truly ugly, you know?!"* (With a laughing expression).

Res.: *"Again with this story of prejudice!"*

Rafaela: *"No!"*

Laura: *"She's saying he's a cripple!"* (Accusatory tone).

Bianca: *"Oh, come on guys..."*

Rafaela: *"No, he's just ugly, okay?!"*

Bianca: *"But... how do you know that, if he... if he doesn't even exist?!"*

Res.: *"I still don't quite understand this story of prejudice."*

Bianca: *"How are you even seeing him?!"*

Erica: *"Ha-ha!* (Laughs while Bianca asks).

Rafaela: *"Because he's dead!"*

Erica: *"Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"* (Laughs while Rafaela speaks)

Res.: *"Rafaela said he's disabled, and that's prejudice?"*

Laura: *"It is!"*

Rafaela: *"No! It's... "*

Laura: *"You're being prejudiced against cripples!"*

Rafaela: *"No!"* (impatient with Laura). *"No, I'm saying, like, he's a cripple because he's ugly."*

Erica: *"Guys!"*

Rafaela: *"He's crippled because he's ugly! I'm telling you."*

Laura: *"Ugly."*

Res.: *"Oh, he's a cripple because he's ugly."*

Rafaela: *"Yes. My Goodness! Where did you get that... name from, huh?"* (Referring to the name Bianca chose for the doll).

Res.: *"What does an ugly guy look like, Rafaela?"*

Rafaela: *"Uhmm... Ugly."* (Nods affirmatively).

Laura: *"Erica, look, I'm getting ready!"*

Res.: *"An ugly boy. Not a guy, a boy..."*

Rafaela: *"Who drools all the time! Has curly hair! That's ugly."* (In a contemptuous tone)

Erica: *"Ha-ha!"*

Res.: *"Is that so?"*

Rafaela: *"Yes."*

Res.: *"What's curly hair like?"*

Laura: *"My friend's hair is like that of... that of..."*

Rafaela: *"Curly hair, like this girl's! Ha-ha!"* (Points to the Black doll's hair in her hands).

In the overall context of the episode, the children's positions were: Bianca dressed up the White doll with brown hair in a wedding dress; Rafaela told her not to marry because the imaginary boy was ugly: *"Ew, Bianca! That ugly guy isn't good enough for you!"* That's why he was nicknamed "crippled" by the same child: *"Very ugly! He's a cripple!"*; Laura accused Rafaela of being prejudiced: *"Oh... Watch out for prejudice!"* (Addressing Rafaela). And so, the girls start a conversation about

prejudice, a theme that also served for the researcher to explore further about children's concept on this topic.

Laura morally condemned Rafaela's "prejudice" against the person with a disability: *"You're being prejudiced against cripples!"* She demonstrated her understanding of the social norm that prohibits discrimination against people with physical disabilities. Rafaela expressed her devaluation of curly hair when she talked about what an ugly boy would look like in her perspective: *"Someone who drools all the time! Has curly hair! That's ugly."* (In a contemptuous tone). By depreciating curly hair associated with a standard of an ugly boy, Rafaela, who is a Black girl, also depreciates her own hair: *"Curly hair, like this girl's! Ha-ha!"* While talking, Rafaela points to the hair of the Black doll she is playing with, thus confirming social suggestions regarding existing hierarchical standards of beauty that regard typical characteristics of the Black population (curly hair) as negative.

Black identity encompasses a complex aesthetic system that involves the close relationship between the Black person, their hair, and Black identity. This process is not without conflicts. These conflicts can express feelings of rejection, acceptance, resignification, and even denial of ethnic-racial belonging. The multiple representations constructed around Black hair in the context of a racist society influence individual behavior. In our society, there are social spaces in which Black people transit since childhood, where such representations reinforce stereotypes and intensify the experiences of Black people with their hair and their bodies. One of those spaces is school (Gomes, 2002).

Santana et al. (2019) in their research in early childhood education, also demonstrated the pursuit of an ideal concept of beauty transmitted to children through stereotypes and social interactions during play, with an example of this being the conflict experienced mainly by Black children in relation to their curly hair and dark skin. According to Cruz (2014), sexism and racism reveal themselves together in discrimination based on color but are strongly complemented by discrimination against curly and kinky hair. The power of White aesthetics is related to the naturalization of racial inequalities, as aesthetics are one of the social markers used by the dominant racist culture, since beauty is White.

Conclusion

Qualitative research often exclusively relies on interviews as the primary data collection method. In this study, an original procedure was used, in which children's conversation was stimulated by inviting them to participate in a collective game designed to raise the topic of racism through objects made available to them. The researcher, who participated in the session to film the children, remained attentive to join in the conversation and ask some clarifying questions, always in tune with the dialogue that was already taking place among them. This aspect is innovative in view of the phenomenon under study – racism – in the age group examined, 9 to 11 years old, being susceptible to intellectual control by children, concealing racist attitudes to align with current moral values and expectations. Despite the conspicuousness of the situation, with a Black researcher present for recording the session, it was possible to observe indications of racist attitudes or identities formed in a structurally racist society! Child's play is an activity that allows the child to protect themselves from moral judgments, in that there is a simulacrum – characters that are not exactly "me". The act of playing allows the child to "slide" from the imaginary to the real and reveal to others aspects of their judgments and concepts. Play can therefore be considered as promising investigation spaces to observe content that escapes the cognitive control of the situation. Therefore, the data collection procedure seemed relevant in investigating children above the age of seven, when this control begins to be used by the child.

The interaction episodes could be analyzed from the perspective of ethnic-racial relations with regards to belonging, self-esteem, prejudice, and aesthetic-body standards raised in girls' conversations in a play situation. It was observed that 9 to 11-year-old children, with developed cognitive abilities, capable of suppressing explicit expressions of racial prejudice, expressed beliefs and values rooted in the structural racism of the macroculture with some uninhibitedness.

Qualitative studies are relevant to investigate ongoing developmental processes, pointing out transformations or ways of conceiving a social phenomenon at a certain stage of life. However, their results are restricted to the investigated groups and situations and, therefore, have limited scope, suggesting the need for more research that articulates their findings, making them denser.

It is still taboo to talk about racism with children, even though all of them are affected in their developmental processes in a society hierarchized by racial markers. The present work provided a reflection on notions of White supremacy and devaluation of ethnic-racial diversity, especially regarding curly hair which is typical of Blackness, present in ethnic-racial relations in the Brazilian context. It can be affirmed, based on the concept of intersectionality, that Black girls face a triple form of oppression: for being children in adult-centric societies, for being female in patriarchal macho societies, and for being Black in societies that legitimize racism and White hegemony.

To promote anti-racist education and combat racial inequalities, it is necessary to develop educative strategies that address the symbolic and material privileges of the White group with children, challenging the idea that racism is solely a problem of Black individuals. Given that racism structures social relations from an early age, continuous anti-racist actions are required to deconstruct hierarchical power relations from early childhood.

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