

**CONFUSED CATEGORIES, SITUATIONAL RACES, AUTHENTICITY AND  
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: HOW YOUNG  
BRAZILIANS MANAGE THE BOUNDARIES OF RACIAL IDENTIFICATION**

by

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B.A., University of Maryland, 2010

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
(Sociology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)

September, 2014

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## **Abstract**

Brazil's vision of race has been changing. In contrast with its former tendency to avoid static racial identifications and discussions of race, the country is pushing toward clearer racial definitions in order to institute racially targeted programs, such as racial quotas for Non-Whites in public universities. Using in-depth interviews from 19 students who entered university through racial quotas, this paper explores how these students envision fixed categories for themselves, how they deal with these categories in different situations, and what they think the implications of these shifts in racial understanding will be. The study shows that the racial categories proposed in legislation often do not represent the way students see themselves; indeed, they may not feel that racial categorization is something natural to their existence before applying for university. Respondents often feel discomfort dealing with the idea of categorization, as well as with the meaning of each category, and as a result they sometimes appropriate and redefine the categories. They speak of being reminded of their racialized bodies when contrasted or compared with others or their environment, and they demonstrate that race is a very flexible concept in their minds, varying in different situations. As well, their perceptions of race implicate ideas about social class and even personal aesthetics that are easily mutable. In trying to come to terms with the idea of race and how to bound it to something they can understand and grasp, students come to dispute the authenticity of racial claims. These disputes over how someone's race is authentic may provide a space in which new meanings of race and racial categories can be created.

## **Preface**

The University of British Columbia Behavioral Research Ethics Board has approved this research, by the title of “Race and Affirmative Action in Brazil” and certificate number of H13-01461.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I offer my enduring gratitude for all of those who helped me to complete this endeavor. I offer a special thanks to my supervisor, Wendy Roth, who helped me in each stage of this project, and to my committee members Gillian Creese and Stanley Bailey, for their great suggestions and guidance. My acknowledgement also goes to my fellow peers in graduate school, my family and my partner, for without their love and support I could never have gotten through it all.

## **Dedication**

*To my cohort*



## Chapter 1: Introduction

The unique characteristics of racial conceptualization in Brazil have made it an area of scholarly intrigue, challenging ideas derived from other places, such as the United States, where the concept of race has also been extensively studied. Many race scholars have written about the peculiarities of the Brazilian racial experience, exposing how much miscegenation has been taken as the norm for how people understand themselves racially, and observing that Brazilians faced far less pressure to define themselves in binary or mutually exclusive racial terms<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, the literature points to social ideologies that predominantly dismissed race as a major component of social organization for most of Brazil's modern history (Bailey 2009; Telles 2006). Entering the twenty-first century, however, this way of conceiving race was challenged by a growing awareness of racial inequality. As a result, the Brazilian government has recently begun implementing a radical policy of affirmative action with racial quotas, aiming to increase the number of Brazilian non-Whites in federal universities. However, in order to institute racially targeted policies for Brazilians, there becomes a need to distinguish who is able to fit into different fixed racial categories, which is not a simple matter in a country where racial mixing has gone as far as it has in Brazil.

The population of Brazil arrived at its current racial make up with a history of European colonization, the importation of over half of all the slaves brought into the Americas (Sansone 1996), encounters with indigenous populations, many waves of migration since the 1500s, interracial marriage and widespread rape by colonizers (Freyre 1933). Today, the boundaries of people's classification into different races generate much

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<sup>1</sup> The word miscegenation has a wholly positive connotation in Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Since in the Portuguese language these terms are differentiated by gender, for simplicity,

debate and controversy. For 43.1% of the population, or almost 85 million Brazilians, who declare themselves as “Pard@” in the census (IBGE census 2010), meaning roughly “Brown,” there is a tension in reconciling Pard@ as a category with people’s self-understanding, and with the fact they may also consider themselves either White or Black depending on the context<sup>2</sup>. There is also a tension between the simultaneous appeal of, and aversion to, self-categorizing as Black - Pret@, in the census and most official documents, or Negr@, in most popular discourses. Debates over who is Black and what it means to be Black in Brazil are thus ongoing (Dos Santos 2006).

The present study explores how the process of choosing and maintaining a racial category happens in the lives of a sample of Brazilian people today, in light of the implementation of racial quotas in universities. The sample consists of young Brazilian students who have entered a Brazilian Federal University through affirmative action. These students, who have been directly affected by this new policy, and thus have engaged closely with the racial categorization processes, were able to offer insights into how “new” boundaries of race are implemented or re-arranged in Brazil, and how this affects their lives. This empirical search for the dimensions of racial boundaries may in turn assist us in understanding how race is influencing life in Brazil today.

One important focus of this research is to observe how Brazilian students engage first-hand with issues identified by Brazilian race literature, such as the lack of consensus over how to fit a person of mixed phenotypes into a racial category, and how race operates differently in various contexts (Bailey 2009). A lot has been written about

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<sup>2</sup> Since in the Portuguese language these terms are differentiated by gender, for simplicity, the “@” suffix indicates that the word may be used as either feminine or masculine. For instance, in Portuguese, a White woman would be “Branca” and a White man, “Branco.”

Brazilian racial categorization by looking at datasets from a quantitative research perspective. However, the present study tackles the need to investigate the issue qualitatively, through the personal narratives of the respondents. The exploration of these personal narratives may enhance our understanding of how the "boundary work" around race develops into real life attitudes and behaviors for these students. Having these conversations with students who have engaged in racial categorization through the lens of affirmative action, rather than looking at responses of questions about racial categories through the census, is significant because affirmative action has lent great practical consequence in the lives of people who engage with this type of categorization.

This research addresses the following questions: (1) how do students feel about the idea of having one fixed racial category to define themselves? (2) To what extent do they feel that the categories on the official forms are representative of their racial self-understanding? (3) Does their racial self-identification shift in different situations, and how do they use different racial categorization in different contexts? (4) How do material benefits attached to their identification as Black or Brown influence their perspectives on the meaning of these categories? For Brazilians, the need to deal with different ways of engaging with racial categories is a pressing issue, and so this study may enable a fresh look on how race is “created” – or socially constructed and reconstructed in Brazil.

## Chapter 2: Race in sociology today

### 2.1: Race in sociology today: an overview

The meaning of race has been intensely debated in sociology. Sociological explanations have long rejected conceptions of race as a natural or biological trait. Today, scholars argue that race is neither a biological trait nor a fixed characteristic of a person. Concepts of race are context-specific and historically contingent, varying in place and time. Therefore, social scientists have come to question the idea of race not only as a natural trait, but also as an analytical tool for looking at different groups of people (Brubaker 2004). Winant claims that race is “a concept that signifies and symbolizes socio-political conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies” (2000: 172). This definition is helpful because it highlights that, despite all the conceptual debates around the issue, race continues to play a major role in determining social hierarchies, and that it is ostensibly a visible and acknowledged issue for most, if not all people.

Definitions of race in sociology are further complicated by contemporary manifestations of racism. Although overt racism and discriminatory attitudes are no longer institutionalized or supported by the majority of citizens, the issue of structural racism remains pervasive (Bonilla-Silva 2009)<sup>3</sup>. Winant (2000) further argues that sociology needs a more effective race theory. More appropriate comparative and historical perspectives would enable a deeper understanding of the micro-macro linkages shaping racial issues, while recognizing the pervasiveness of racial politics in contemporary societies (Winant 2000: 169). Both Brubaker (2004) and Winant (2000)

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<sup>3</sup> Bonilla-Silva (2009) speaks of the United States, but Bailey (2009) shows that this is true in Brazil as well.

emphasize the need for a deeper understanding of the interaction between race, the development of the modern world, capitalism, as well as the legacy of slavery and racialization in order to understand the structures of racial inequality today.

## 2.2: Race in sociology today: discussions of categorizations and the “cognitive turn”

In contesting the conceptualization of race, Brubaker singles out the problem of “groupism,” or the “tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis”(2004: 7). This critique is grounded in what Bourdieu calls “our primary inclination to think [of] the social world in a substantialist manner” (Bourdieu 1989: 16), tending to amplify the little we know about things, people and issues into ‘things’ in themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to challenge the idea that the forms of identification for people that share the same racial traits are always cohesive, and contest the implication that the “group” functions as a “seemingly unproblematic, taken-for-granted concept, apparently in no need of particular scrutiny or explication” (Brubaker 2004: 7). According to Brubaker, this tendency has withstood decades of constructivist theorizing in the social sciences, hampering studies of race and ethnicity.

In light of these challenges in conceptualizing race, Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov speak of a “cognitive turn” in sociological studies, which understands race not as “a thing in the world, but as perspectives on the world,” and in ways of identifying oneself and others (2004: 45). They suggest that the reality of “race” does not depend on the existence of “races” (2004: 11). Rather, background knowledge, embedded in daily routines and practices, informs the way people come to classify themselves and others. In

other words, people tend to associate distinct traits with certain categories, and so they place the entire identity of a person into a certain category because specific traits.

In taking the ideas of this “cognitive turn” into consideration, there is the recognition that it is often erroneous to distinguish between certain groups of people as one race or another without expecting misconstructions. Even though this process is one of individual mental cognition and recognition, it relies on cues of a society’s cultural understandings, which also vary in place, time and context. In the Brazilian context, for instance, one would need to take into account not who is White or Black to better understand how race operates, but the source and location of cues for Blackness and Whiteness in the way people are categorized. Such as what makes one understand oneself as Black and where the distinction lies. This way of thinking about race is especially helpful in a context like Brazil, where racial categories and a sense of bounded groupness seem to be quite distantly related (Bailey 2009).

This way of seeing race is supported by studies that have displayed just how much human understandings are dependent on categorization and processes of mental information storage. Brubaker (2004) and Bailey (2009) both draw on research (such as Tajfel and Turner, 1986), which shows a strong human tendency to mentally group people into previously cognitively constructed categories. These categories are registered as different schemas that make it easier to access cognitive information and make sense of who “others” may be. Schemas help people to process information, serve as mental recognition devices, organize things hierarchically, and serve as ‘slots’ to be filled with contextual cues. In this way, schemas bridge the mental with the social, extrapolating the individual to the collective (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamov 2004). Racial schemas are

the different sets of ordered racial categories and the rules of what they mean, which come to inform people's understandings of racial classifications (Roth, 2012).

Racial schemas and racial categories come to play a large role in how people make sense of their lives. Because race or ethnicity is something visible and socially relevant, racial and ethnic schema become hyper-accessible – easy for the processes and retrieval of information in people's minds (Hirschfeld, 1994 in Brubaker 2004). Given this context, race can be recognized as a major form of social organization, even though it is not something that exists “in the world.”

External categorization versus internal identification amongst social actors may also clash. Jenkins (1996) argues that there is often incongruence between the ways people identify themselves racially and the ways they are labeled and categorized by external forces. He argues that strong group boundaries are likely to exist where people's self categorization is coherent with the way the institutions govern official categories. This also challenges the idea that categories can be understood as real groups. In the case of Brazil, for example, Bailey (2009) shows that there is often little consistency between the categories designated as races and how Brazilian people view themselves.

Moreover, there are tools of classification utilized by the State and other institutions, such as academic institutions, to fashion racialized knowledge. The reification of racial categories is an issue for social scientists, as it is central to the practice of politicizing ethnicity. Wimmer (2008) argues that “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” – governments, media, education and other institutions are active players in creating racial schemas and naming racial categories, and are thus important arenas for understanding race within a society. These tools can be seen as the ways in which

governments make up population censuses, social policy, legislation, etc. They come to inform the language and the social scripts that people have to understand one another.

However, even though institutions create racial labels, the categorized are also habitual categorizers (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamov 2004). People have leverage to maneuver and make sense of racial categories, even though the State retains a stronghold on how ideas about race will be presented<sup>4</sup>. Because of this, it is important to consider the component of reification of racial meanings in revisions of literature about history and race in Brazil. The government, through the implementation of policies of affirmative action that require people to place themselves in one racial category, is pushing an idea that contradicts folk understandings of race. Although affirmative action takes on an important role in informing the discussions around race and categorization for people, there is no certainty that Brazilians will adopt the notions of race and the categories that are offered by this policy, even if this policy makes these categories relevant for people's lives in new ways. This highlights the importance of looking into how affirmative action works as a tool that comes to modify understandings of race in Brazil.

When looking at the ways race comes to shape social reality, it is also important to think about how people's racial categorization of others and themselves are linked to structural racism, and how sociology should approach this connection. Loveman argues that, "the central problem of the various approaches to the study of racial phenomena is their lack of a structural theory of racism" (1999: 465). This position delegitimizes treating racism as a psychological, individual phenomenon or a free-floating ideology,

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu (1989) also speaks of the symbolic power of the State in creating ways of understanding categories. He observes that the State is the most powerful agent in establishing groups and collectivities.



emphasizing the need to examine race's structural grounding and historical legacy.

Loveman proposes an analytical framework that focuses on the process of the construction, maintenance and decline of group boundaries, and their influence on race and social behavior.

Finally, a focus on the study of how groups and categories operate in racial reality has also brought about a discussion about racial authenticity, or what each racial category should "be like." According to Monahan (2005), discussions over the genuineness of one's racial identity and membership are related to growing discourse over racial ontologies. He asserts that racial authenticity entails confrontation with people's own roles as individuals and as part of larger social bodies in maintaining the reality of race. Monahan argues that accusations of inauthenticity can become strong political attacks against racialized minorities, as no one wants to understand oneself as a "sell-out," and that these perceptions have real life consequences. For instance, Bonita Lawrence (2003) speaks of accusations of inauthenticity as tools used to marginalize Indigenous populations in North America. Vasquez and Watzel (2009), on the other hand, speak of claims of authenticity as tactics of resistance realized by marginalized minorities themselves, who can use the rhetoric of authenticity to positively represent themselves against "mainstream," or White, society.

In taking into account the important debates of race in sociology today, the present research examines Brazilian students who entered university through affirmative action's responses to the new ways of thinking about racial categorization and thus to the movement of social boundaries around their lives. When this type of social boundaries are created, the result is often a heightening of conflict between the separated parts and

additional inequality in the distribution of resources, but this process can also promote the chance of mobilization for social change (Tilly 2009). A comparative sociology of racial group-making should focus on the historically contingent relationship between processes of categorization as forms of social closure, the construction of collectivities, as well as marginalization and social exclusion by the enactment of boundaries. There is a need to focus on practices of division in order to know how the fiction of racial divisions and inclusion is actualized (Bourdieu 1989).

## Chapter 3: Race in Brazil

### 3.1: Race in Brazil: an overview

Having established the state of race literature in sociology, I now turn to looking at race literature in the context of Brazil. Brazil's population is about 190.8 million people (IBGE census 2010), including the largest Black population outside of Africa (Dos Santos 2006). Brazil also has a comparatively recent history of slavery, which relied on Transatlantic trade with Africa, and was only abolished in 1888. Extreme forms of social and racial inequality still exist, with Black Brazilians faring significantly worse in virtually every social indicator (Sansone 2004). Moreover, racial mixing and the ideologies that accentuated blurring boundaries of racial categorization, such as the "myth of racial democracy," have been continuously reinforced in most of Brazil's history.

Many scholars describe one of the most important racial ideologies present in Brazil as "the myth of racial democracy." The myth of a racial democracy may be regarded as the moral code corresponding to strong racial mixing (Bailey 2009), based on the assumption that since Brazil is such a racially mixed country, race does not play the same role in social relations as it does in places where people are more divided along racial lines. This idea stems from Freyre's (1933) assertion that historical miscegenation would yield a "meta-race" – an idea that though today seems tactless, at that time was quite radical in challenging the idea of White racial supremacy. The idea that in Brazil one should not pay attention to racial divisions persisted, celebrating miscegenation and rejecting overt racial boundaries between people. Still today, scholars question whether this myth has been the main obstacle to improving the life conditions of Brazilians of

color, or if there is, in fact, an advantage to denying race as a social divider, providing a more solid basis for Brazil to overcome racism (Bailey 2009).

The work of the myth of a racial democracy is quite apparent in Brazil when looking at the history of government legislation, and especially when compared to countries such as the United States or South Africa. While all of these three countries have had a history of European colonization and subjugation of Black populations, only in Brazil is there no record of institutional segregation policies based on race. In Brazilian history, no legislation assigned specific rights or benefits to racial categories for Brazilians. Marriage and voting, for instance, were never affected by racial policies, although the idea of whitening future generations through miscegenation was always present (Telles 2006a).

In Brazilian folk understandings of race, Bailey reminds us that Fry (1994) shows the myth of a racial democracy to be so strong, that even positive racial identification is viewed with antipathy. Nevertheless, Bailey (2009) also identifies the manifestation of this “myth” as a normative ideal, rather than the practiced reality. Brazilians do see race and color, recognize racism, and organize society accordingly. What is *more* evident is the lack of requirements for categorical differentiation for mixed people, and the lack of a sense of groupness or conflict amongst those who share the same physical traits related to race.

Recently however, different discourses around the need to address racial inequality – and thus discourses on racial categorization – have become more prominent in many aspects of Brazilian society. There has been a debate about whether or not Brazilians with predominant Black phenotypes should be strengthening their racial

subjectivities and tagging themselves specifically as Black Brazilians. On the one hand, there are those who believe that strengthening the racial subjectivities of Black Brazilians is essential to fighting racial inequality in the country. This view denounces the myth of racial democracy as an impediment for achieving racial equality, and points out that this may be the main reason social movements and activism have seldom focused on race in Brazil. On the other hand, those who oppose the idea that racial boundaries should be strengthened argue this separation to be detrimental to social relations and “un-Brazilian” (Bailey 2009). It also argues that the idea of strengthening racial boundaries is reminiscent of the civil right fights of African Americans in the United States, and hence it is a form of cultural imperialism, because it does not consider Brazilian social realities, while it takes the US experience as universal (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999).

Because of the lack of consensus among Brazilians about how they classify themselves racially, the debate over “who is Black in Brazil” continues (Dos Santos 2006). Bailey, Loveman and Muniz (2012), for instance, have successfully demonstrated how, when reporting their races on questionnaire check boxes, the same Brazilians may shift from the majority reporting their race as White, to the majority reporting their race as non-White, depending on the classification schema employed. They report that given the chance, many people will opt for a seemingly lighter, or “less Black” category. Sansone, criticizing American-derived notions of Black and White racial polarity, argues that places such as Brazil are characterized by immense fluidity in the conceptualization of race, such that Brazilians “embrace [...] these fluid ‘mestizo logics’ because they emphasize contingency rather than essentialism in ethnoracial matters” (1996: 177).

Sansone argues that Blackness itself varies with the social context, and that its meaning varies in different settings, interactions and contexts.

### 3.2: Race in Brazil: the processes of racial identification

Racial identification has not been a chief concern in Brazil until quite recently. The Brazilian State started conducting a population census in 1870, eighteen years before the emancipation of slaves. At that time it asked about skin color, not “race.” Since 1940, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), which is responsible for the census, has employed the categories *Branc@*, for White, *Pard@*, for Brown (or mixed, however it may be interpreted), *Pret@* for Blacks, and *Amarel@* (literally, the color yellow) for Asians and their descendants. The Indigenous category was added in 1991, and was formerly considered a sub-category of *Pard@s* (Bailey, 2009). However, *Branc@* and *Pret@*, or White and Black, do not mean to imply racial purity, and it is much more connected to evaluation of phenotypes (Bailey 2008). In the 2010 census, 47.3% of the Brazilian population self-reported as *Branc@*, 43.1% reported being *Pard@* and 7.6% reported being *Pret@* – with about 11 million people reporting in this last category (IBGE, Census 2010).

But Brazilian colloquial racial terminology is more complicated than what is presented on the census. The term *Negr@* also means Black, but it is not used in official documents. Sheriff (2011) points out that, although there is some stigma attached to the word *Negr@*, its use in popular discourse is on the rise. When illustrating the racial situation in Brazil, however, besides the official nomenclatures, researchers often cite Harris (1970), who found that when Brazilians classified their race on their own terms,

hundreds of terms outside of the established census categories were used. Telles (2004a) later clarifies that only about a dozen terms were used by a significant number of people. However, this still highlights the variety of self-identification terms and the dissonance with those presented in the Brazilian census.

Unlike in other places where ancestry has played a major role in racial classifications, Bailey (2009) refers to studies indicating that 80% of Brazilian respondents who self-classify as Brown acknowledge White ancestry, and 59% of those self-classifying as Black acknowledge having White ancestry. On the other hand, only 37% of persons self-classifying as White acknowledge having Black ancestry, while 80% of respondents in the Brown category acknowledged Black ancestry (2002: 429). These findings suggest that ancestry may have little significance in people's determination of their race in Brazil. Similarly, Harris (1970) has similarly supported the idea that phenotype overrides descent as a determinant of identity in Brazil. Based on this principle, full siblings can have different racial identifications depending on their phenotypes.

At the intersection of race and cultural practice, Bailey (2002) carried out a study that questioned whether respondents believe there is a difference between the customs and traditions of Black Brazilians and those of the rest of the population. According to Bailey, most Brazilians claim that those classified as Black do not differ from the rest of the population regarding customs and traditions, including reports of those who classify themselves as Black (2002: 429). Sansone (1996) also suggests that the idea of a Black culture is something difficult to tease out from Brazilian culture in the general sense. Although Black Brazilian culture may draw on some aspects of a culture derived from

Africa, the differences between this and the culture of Brazilian Whites is not as acute as differences between Black and White cultures in the United States.

Outside of the official categorical terminology, the racial term “Moren@,” which colloquially means Brown or mixed, has also been widely studied in Brazil, and debates over its adoption as an official category to replace the term “Pard@” have caused much controversy, as it is a widely used and preferred term by many (Baran 2007; Bailey and Telles 2006; Sansone 1996). Bailey (2009) suggests that when the term Moren@ is offered to Brazilians for racial self-classification, the number of people who classify themselves as Black or White significantly decreases, as many respondents choose Moren@ instead. The problem with Moren@ is its lack of specificity, allowing for a wide-range of people to identify with it. Bailey and Telles (2006) point out that not only dark-skinned persons can use Moren@ as a racial definition, but very light-skinned people with brown hair can use the term as well. In this way, its utility as a racial classification for public policies is impractical.

Other aspects that seem to affect one’s racial identification are gender also seems significant in the Brazilians’ process of racial categorization. The term *Morena*, or *Mulatta*, for instance, may also carry an implicit sexual connotation to it, since as a lay term and in music lyrics, it is often used for flattery. Bailey and Telles (2006) suggest that there are gendered effects related to classification. In an exercise where self-classification of respondents are compared with those of the interviewer, even when women choose to self-identify as Black, or *Preta*, interviewers are unwilling to categorize women as such. This suggests a societal aversion to the term that is more salient when applied to women. Additionally, a study by Francis and Tennuri-Pianto (2011) demonstrate that being male



is associated with lighter racial self-classification, and being female with darker self-classification, for students applying for school admissions through affirmative action in the University of Brasilia.

When measuring the influence of people's education on racial identifications, Bailey and Telles's (2006) findings include a negative correlation between education and the choice to identify with the term *Moren@*, while the opposite is true for *Negr@*. It seems that highly educated persons with Black phenotypes are more likely to take the stand of adopting a *Negr@* identification than a "less Black" term, such as *Moren@*. Schwartzman (2007) highlights other ways in which racial classification is affected, reporting results from a national household survey suggesting that highly educated non-White parents are more likely to classify their children as White than are comparable less-educated non-White parents.

After a series of studies that focused on how Brazilians deal with responses to racial categorizations on questionnaires, Bailey (2009) argues that the racial classifications proposed by the census (and affirmative action forms) do not compose racial "groups," because they are not collectives that have a "sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded and solidarity" (2009: 48), entailing identity, commonality and connectedness. These classifications can be better described as "categories", or "collective of individuals whose nature and composition are defined by the categorizer" (2009: 47), denoting more flexible boundaries and not the same sense of group identification. Bailey argues that no racial schema he examined in Brazil really shows "groupness" within their categories (2009: 63). He thus claims that, while most race literature assumes that racial groups are robust, in Brazil, these are not strong organizing

structures in how individuals see themselves in relation to the rest of their society.

Although Brazilians may have trouble defining the boundaries of racial classification, they are indeed aware of racial inequality. In researching Brazilians' views of racial stratification, Bailey (2002) finds that Brazilians saw Black disadvantage as a product of discrimination, with no significant difference between respondents identifying as Black or White. Moreover, whether or not the myth of a racial democracy plays a role in how people understand their own race, judgments based on skin color do exist on a continuum, with darker skin being considered unflattering and associated with low status traits such as lack of education, criminality, violence, and sexual promiscuity. For instance, Sheriff (2001) points to many components of common language in Brazil as reinforcing Black stereotypes, such as having "bad Afro hair" and "good White skin," which continue to permeate popular vocabulary.

Bailey (2002, 2009) also shows that Brazilians who declare themselves Black and White recognize racial inequality alike. Most Brazilians he surveyed not only acknowledged racial inequality in Brazil, but they showed willingness to address it. Bailey carried out a study that shows a high percentage of self-declared Brazilian Whites regard racism as the reason for Blacks being in a disadvantaged position. The same study shows that a high percentage of these respondents said they would be willing to join social movements for racial equality. Self-declared White Brazilians also agreed that there is discrimination because Brazilian Blacks are poor. However, they often linked racial inequality to a problem of class inequality, rather than emphasizing the issue of race. As Bailey (2014), Sansone (2004) and others have noted, Brazil's history of extreme social hierarchy and reluctance of its society to imagine itself in purely racial

terms has produced a strong conflation between race and class in the country.

To understand how Brazilians seem to recognize the pervasiveness of racial inequality and yet avoid engaging in discussions of racial categorization, Bailey (2009) offers another way of thinking about the myth of a racial democracy. Instead of agreeing that this myth legitimizes oppression by allowing a way of denying that racism exists, Bailey suggests that the myth may be “a deep seeded desire for a society that is not segmented along racial lines, and that could be essentially equal” (2009: 93). This approach presents the myth as a utopian ideal that underlies a way of thinking that is specifically Brazilian (Bailey 2009). While there is no consensus as to the exact consequences of an ideology such as the myth of a racial democracy for social equality, the visible result is the suppression of the boundaries of racial categorization, and as this study shows, discomfort and confusion when these are enforced.

### 3.3: Race in Brazil: a “paradigm shift”

In the academic realm, the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes fostered the debunking of the myth of racial democracy in the 1970s, promoting a phase for Brazilian engagement with the concept of race that Bailey (2009) calls the “racialist” phase – when the focus of inequality studies are placed on race. And over the past twenty years, the State has shifted its approach to race and its discourse in mainstream media and legislation. Recently, the idea of distinguishing races amongst Brazilians has been propagated by an ever-growing body of legislation, institutions and media showcasing. Some scholars point to a recent “paradigm shift” in how Brazilians think about race (Bailey 2009).

Bailey (2004, 2009) locates the impetus behind this shift towards race acceptance in several different historical circumstances. First, with sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency (1995–2003) and that of his successor, Lula da Silva (2003–2011), the Brazilian state dramatically changed course and embraced race-centered discourses and race-targeted policies, acknowledging a deep-seeded condition of racism and inequality in Brazilian society. Second, during the same period, the Brazilian Black movement gained significant visibility and legitimacy, resulting mainly from its participation in the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (Bailey, 2004: 733). Finally, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new generation of studies, drawing on the work of demographers and social scientists, produced data highlighting the extent of racial division in Brazil (Bailey 2009: 32). These developments have provided a new context for Brazilian racial dynamics. (Bailey 2004, 2008, 2009; Sansone 2004).

### 3.4: Race in Brazil: the introduction of affirmative action

Since 2001, different universities in Brazil have reserved a percentage of incoming student spots for Non-Whites and/or low income students who have studied in public institutions during high school. These have been historically underrepresented in the Brazilian high education student body. The federally funded public universities of Brazil are the very best in the country, and are completely free of charge for admitted students. However, because of great competition for spots and an arduous entrance exam, the *vestibular*, most students who are admitted into the federal universities have had the privilege of attending private schools for early education, as the early education Brazilian

public system is widely recognized as sub-standard (Dos Santos 2012). This situation has led to a great class and race divide in admissions to federal universities.

The implementation of affirmative action with racial quotas in Brazilian universities was a milestone in the history of civil rights in Brazil. It recognizes the immense historical debt the country has to Negr@s and non-Whites in the country, and goes against very deeply ingrained ideologies, such as the myth of a racial democracy. It also makes visible the fact that Brazil has a racial problem to address, in a way that affects virtually every household with potential university students. Moreover it stirs up the discussion of identity and self-affirmation, challenging racial understandings to their very core.

Two state universities in Rio de Janeiro pioneered in having specifically racial quotas in 2001. In 2004, the University of Brasilia was the first federal university to institute racial quotas. Some have argued that affirmative action legislation was passed rather rapidly, taking many people by surprise, and without much debate with the larger society (Meggie and Fry 2002; Htun 2004, Tavolaro 2008). Although many voiced up concerns against the policy, such as that Brazilian understandings of race and miscegenation make this policy unfeasible, that it is a paternalistic policy, and that it is necessary to improve the educational system as a whole (Meggie and Fry 2002), affirmative action with racial quotas was soon adopted in many other Brazilian universities. In 2012, a decree by the National Congress proclaimed that every federal university is to reserve 50% of all its spots for affirmative action. From these spots, a percentage must be reserved for potential students who declare themselves Pret@s,

Pard@s or indigenous<sup>5</sup>. The criteria to decide the exact number of spots for racial quotas takes into account the demographic composition of the IBGE population census and each university decides how to select the potential students (Directory Commission of the Brazilian Congress 2012)

Brazilian universities have investigated different ways to decide who can be a beneficiary of racial quotas. For instance, the universities of Rio de Janeiro, at first, considered for racial quotas potential students who declared themselves Pard@s or Pret@s. But realizing the potential ambiguity between Pard@s and Branc@s, they changed the legislation to have potential students declare themselves specifically as Negr@s in order to be able to be considered for the racial quotas (Bailey 2008). The University of Brasilia, besides self-declaration, asks students to be photographed in the process of application. The photos are analyzed by a school committee, and if there is any doubt as to whether the students are in fact “Negr@s,” they can be called in for an interview with the committee, which is composed by social scientists, student representatives and representatives of the university’s Negr@ movement (Bailey 2008). Nevertheless, according to Meggie and Fry (2002) and people formulating the law are aware of the contradictions of miscegenation, and left out “objective” criteria and mostly relied on self declaration. Today, most schools that have affirmative action with racial quotas rely on the student’s declaration, as opposed to pictures or interviews. Bailey (2014) also points out that while solely race-based quotas triggered numerous lawsuits from displaced students and made universities reluctant to undertake the policy, whereas

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<sup>5</sup>Social quotas for students who completed high and middle school in public institutions and whose household income’s does not exceed one and a half minimum wage salaries were also instituted.

a class-and-race approach that also considered family income and early public education has received greater support and been uptake at many universities.

Some have posited affirmative action policies implemented in Brazil as happening in a context of “cultural wars” over how Brazilians should account for race (Bailey and Peria 2010). On the one hand, various activists pushed for this reform, which is considered to be the greatest move to address racial problems of inequality in the country (Dos Santos 2012; Bailey 2009). But there was also a strong backlash from those who believed that a rigid classification system does not work within the Brazilian mindset, and that it is a form of “cultural imperialism,” which universalizes the United States’ racial experience as the default path in the struggle for Black people’s rights (Bourdieu and Waquant 1999).

In light of this important context of Brazilian racial understandings, this study sheds light on how Brazilian students who entered university through the process of affirmative action are dealing with changes to their personal conceptualization of race. It does so in a number of ways. First, by showing how students have reacted to the fixed set of racial categories presented by the affirmative action policies, and how they compare this understanding to their existing conceptions of race and categorization. It also shows how different situations affect their understanding of race, by shedding light on the social cues that trigger these understandings. Finally, this study shows how affirmative action, in providing a space where racial categories can be scrutinized, may lend a new way for Brazilians to re-interpret the racial schema and the categories they use – creating new ways for Brazilians to understand themselves in a racialized fashion.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

To understand how Brazilians manage the way they think about their race, I conducted 19 in-depth interviews with Brazilian students who entered university through affirmative action at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), in the Northeastern region of Brazil, a region that carries the legacy of a colonial plantation economy and robust racial miscegenation. In narrowing down the scope of this research, the focus is on the relationship Brazilians have with the legacy of Blackness, as less than 0.28% of Brazilians identify themselves as Indigenous, 1.1% as Asians and 0.07% as others (IBGE, Census 2010), so these categories have been excluded for my research. Most Brazilians fall into a “Black to White” continuum – even if the darkness of Brazilian people’s skin may not be entirely derived from Africans, but also a mix of dark skinned Portuguese or Indigenous.

The student body of UFPE is about 36.000, and the university is one of the best regarded in the region. UFPE has had affirmative action with social quotas since 2004, and they institutionalized the system of racial quotas in 2010, establishing that 50% of all its spots would be reserved for students who attended high school fully in a public school, and from these, about 62.4% of the spots are reserved for Pret@s, Pard@s and indigenous (UFPE 2013). In the process of admission through quotas at UFPE, however, unlike in the universities of Rio de Janeiro and Brasilia, potential students are only asked to self-declare their race in the admissions questionnaire, which can only be done in person, at the moment that the students apply for the entrance exam *vestibular*. UFPE does not state whether and how they sort out students they think may misrepresent Pret@s and Pard@s for racial quotas.



UFPE is an appropriate choice of university for analyzing issues of race because of the high number of dark skinned and mixed-race students, but also because unlike Bahia (the state with the highest Black population), Pernambuco is not the typical illustration of a “Black” Brazilian state, where many, if not most studies of Afro-Brazilianness have focused. The discourses of race in Pernambuco reflect much of Brazilian mainstream ideology, while accounting for a population that is very mixed.

For the purposes of this study, students were prompted to speak about their experiences in choosing a racial category in the application for affirmative action, as well as what in the process informed their decision. It would be difficult to uncover these deeply personal lived experiences without allowing respondents to speak about these experiences directly. Hence, using of interviews as a tool for accessing the lived experiences and observations of others is particularly fruitful. Interviews can expose inner subjectivities and allow a window into other people’s perspectives. Most of the research on the subject of racial identification in Brazil relies on quantitative data sets that provide limited opportunity for respondents to reflect upon these experiences and on how they have come to understand the racial schemas and categories they utilize.

Interviews were conducted from May to August of 2013. In the process of applying for admission through affirmative action, 10 respondents had declared themselves Pret@s and nine Pard@s. I strove to obtain a diverse sample of students, conscious that it would provide a better representation of the school’s student body. The sample was almost evenly divided by gender, and respondents’ fields of study covered a range of 16 different disciplines (for a detailed breakdown of the sample, see Table 1). To recruit respondents, I placed posters in the main buildings around campus, offering a

small monetary compensation to incentivize participants. Nevertheless, many of the respondents refused the compensation, saying that they were actually interested in the conversation and wanted to be helpful. All of the student respondents were between the ages of 19 and 26. Even though there was an expected homogeneity in social class because they were all students who entered university through affirmative action, some of the respondents came from relatively better-off backgrounds than others. The difference ranged from students coming from a low-end working class background to a lower-middle class background<sup>6</sup>.

I prepared a guide with interview questions, but during the interview process I changed or adapted many questions, as the interviews were carried out in Portuguese. The research project was originally constructed in English, so there was a process of acclimatization to the correct colloquial terms to use in Portuguese for discussing these issues, as some of the questions proved to make little sense in their original conception and others emerged from what respondents had to add. Questions and themes that seemed important were added along the way. The first few interviews were thus a very reflexive moment for me to solidify the final set of questions.

At first, I was concerned by the fact that the quotas through which these students gained admission to UFPE were not merely racial quotas, as it is the case in some Brazilian universities, such as the Federal Universities of Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro. The students had to have studied high school in public universities as well. However, I think it is actually an interesting intersection for analysis, because students may not feel that their

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<sup>6</sup> I identified these class understandings with students talking about their parent's occupation, the neighborhoods they grew up on and whether they had attended private schools at some point in their lives.

racial identification was the only factor determining their acceptance, but rather, it was a part of it. In this way, students may feel less compelled to defend the racial categorization system that got them into the university, but had to engage with it nonetheless. I believe that this made them more comfortable in talking about their concerns with the racial classification system presented to them in the forms.

I made a special effort to emphasize to the respondents that this research is not scrutinizing the affirmative action policies themselves, but rather, is concerned with the ways in which Brazilians make sense of what they understand race to be when taking part in such programs. Further, I approached students who have, as they sometimes reported, faced criticism for “entering the university because of their race.” I was aware that I was coming from a position some may interpret as a position of privilege, since I was a student from a well-regarded university of North America, and I am quite fair skinned compared to some of the respondents. To offset any perceived judgment, I always made sure that I explained that I really valued their experiences and recognized their merits in entering a university I highly admire.

Before beginning the interviews, I always commented on how I thought that I was White growing up in Brazil, but moving abroad, at age 16, had the effect of making me view myself as, “Latin American.” When the conversation permitted, I often asked the respondents how they would classify my race, which resulted in puzzled looks and diverse responses – the most common one being “Mixed Brazilian.” I believe that by starting the conversation by explaining my racial experience abroad, the students understood that there were things about the Brazilian experience that were not obvious to me and that they could help me to understand. I found that all of the respondents were

open about the questions I was asking, to my position as researcher, and seemed sincere and self-reflexive. All of them seemed to be comfortable and enthusiastic about the research topic, allowing conversations to flow very well.

I started each interview by asking students to speak of situations that have shaped the ways they view racial categorization in their lives, as well as situations that challenge their racial self-identification. I asked questions such as: “Do the set of categories offered by the university admissions form match up with the way you conceptualized racial categories before you saw the form?” and “Are there situations in which you feel your racial identification is challenged?” This is an important inquiry because it shows the processes through which people “push and pull” at racial boundaries, exposing them to situations where these definitions become relevant for their experiences. By understanding how people have to confront these issues, we can understand where the boundary-work of race is the most significant for people’s lives. The empirical question then becomes: what in the social environment stimulates or suppresses the evaluation of categories and the understanding of categorization itself? This question opens up a window for understanding how students experience the consequences of being racialized.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents<sup>7</sup>

<i>Name</i>	<i>Race identification</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Major</i>
Camila	Preta	Female	Tourism
Juliana	Preta	Female	Actuarial Sciences
Manuela	Preta	Female	Education/Pedagogy
Marília	Preta	Female	Social Sciences
Natália	Preta	Female	Social Work
Júlia	Preta	Female	Social Work
Carla	Preta	Female	Education/Pedagogy
Gilson	Preto	Male	History
Felipe	Preto	Male	Engineering
Marina	Parda	Female	Civil Engineering
Carolina	Parda	Female	Biomedicine
Raiane	Parda	Female	Pharmacy
Renata	Parda	Female	Social Work
Gabriel	Pardo	Male	Biology
José	Pardo	Male	Psychology
Lucas	Pardo	Male	Philosophy/Law
Pedro	Pardo	Male	Geography
Thales	Pardo	Male	Political Sciences
Hugo	Pardo	Male	Geology

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<sup>7</sup>Names of the respondents have been replaced by pseudonyms

## Chapter 5: Negotiating with fixed categories

As many scholars have noted, the common sense, or folk understanding of racial schema in Latin America relies on a continuum between light and dark, rather than on mutually exclusive categories (Sansone 1996; Roth 2012). While people may hold more than one racial schema at a time, and different racial schemas are not mutually exclusive (Roth 2012), I find that the respondents do understand the reasoning behind the push for the conceptualization of a racial schema that supports fixed categories, and may even support this way of thinking. The census schema of racial categories has existed for a long time, but only now they have come to have practical life impact in Brazilian's lives, with race-targeted policies. Still, the respondents feel confused and disenfranchised about using the categorization schema presented in official forms and in engaging with the categorization for themselves, in light of the conflicting messages about the meaning of race during the “paradigm shift” that has been happening in Brazil.

The present findings suggest that, for most of their lives, students have not felt they had to define the boundaries of racial categories – to have to outline what makes them a certain race or what makes one race what it is. Many respondents, who self-declared as Pret@s and Pard@s, said that until they had to think about getting into university, choosing a race for themselves was never very important. For instance, Carolina says:

*The first time I felt pressure to classify my race was at the vestibular [university entrance exam]! Until then, nobody had ever asked me “tell me what your race is!” So I didn’t know how to respond in reality... When it was time to apply [for the vestibular] and there was that racial questionnaire and the quotas... So I gave it a thought, and I realized that I am Parda, right? It was like that.*

Like Carolina, when asked what about being pressured to define a racial identity for themselves, most respondents talked about the process of applying for universities as the time when racial classification issues came to be important in their lives. Eleven respondents identified university preparatory exams as the first time that they had to “define themselves racially,” as they had to check a race box in the questionnaire with their personal information<sup>8</sup>. Other respondents speak of times when felt discriminated against or when they have traveled to places where people look to have a distinguished race as such times.

Bailey and Telles (2006) suggest that Brazilian youth may tend to embrace racial ambiguity more, while the emphasis of racial differentiation takes more importance as Brazilians engage with the realities of the job market. With affirmative action, the reality of competitiveness to enter university becomes apparent and comes to implicate race. During this period of entering adulthood, and especially during this time of a government push for racial policies with more defined racial categorization in Brazil, these students have come to encounter different discussions, opportunities and impositions on the discourse of race, distinctiveness and categorization. For instance, Thales says:

*When I was younger, and in public schools especially, there was never that discussion [of race classification and racism]. And without this discussion nobody notices the differences, especially because we are young. I think back to it and there is something nice about it, because there were blue-eyed people, pale people, there were Negros, but everyone lived like they were the same. But when you move to a private school, I mean, here at UFPE, it's different. I don't know whether to laugh or to cry, when you realize what the reality is, when you see people talk about it. Recently I saw a girl in class say that there was no such thing as Pardo and Negro, and that everyone was equal, there was no*

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<sup>8</sup> Only one of the respondents recounts filling in census forms in the past – a task that was usually left to their own parents, or the head of the household.

*such a thing as “this racial thing.” I wish that there wasn’t, but that is not our reality.*

Further in the conversation, Thales continued: “Now, if you ask me if I think it’s important to check my race as Pardo, I am going to say yes. Yes, because it helps researchers to compare where people are at.” In these passages, Thales illustrates that even if growing up in a context without much pressure to define specific differences in the continuum of racial classification, students who apply for governmental racial quotas need to engage with discussions about race that contradict existing ideological understandings of what race may be, as they need to be able to choose a racial category for themselves while living in an environment that may discourage them from doing so in other contexts of their lives. Thales also shows that these deliberations about racial identification often become a crucial point where many students begin to dwell on ideas of an “official” racial schema, in which they have to choose only one race identification for themselves.

Many of these students, however, when finding themselves in the situation of checking a questionnaire box of racial identification, feel conflicted as to how they should address racial categorization and self-assessment. Their acknowledgement of miscegenation and lack of strong socially defined racial boundaries to rely on can make this a difficult decision. For instance, Juliana says:

*We are all mixed [in Brazil], right? We don’t feel the obligation to say: “I am Negro”, “I am this”, or “I am that.” We are what we are. But then, there are certain situations where you are required to say what you “are,” as if it really meant “to exist” that way. Like when responding to the admissions form. At that time you have to declare yourself “this or that.” That is going to make you think about yourself, and that is not easy.*



The majority of the respondents reflected Juliana's view about racial classification. At certain points in their lives, they felt conflicted about the idea of abiding by and recognizing themselves within a racial schema that assumes fixed pre-determined racial categories, when there might be trouble in deciphering what each category means precisely, or whether they are fit in one of them. Or for instance, they may have conflicting views about what it means to be the race they consider themselves to be within their family, or they may be afraid to contradict the race presented in their birth certificate<sup>9</sup>.

Even though these students may have decided to self-identify in some way, sometimes they come across situations and people that inform them differently. They are also conflicted about the very idea of categorizing itself, as there are mixed messages they get from their society – that racial classification is bad and un-Brazilian, but that it may also be a necessity to fight racial inequality. These findings fit in with the literature that shows how Brazilians draw from many social cues when defining their racial identification (Bailey 2009; Francis and Tennuri-Pianto 2011; Schwartzman 2007). But interviews reveal that during this process the respondents also felt confusion and some anxiety over the uncertainty of what they could draw on to decide about their racial classification.

The majority of the respondents reported that choosing a fixed racial category in the way the official forms asked felt unnatural. Thales, for instance, states very clearly: “I

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<sup>9</sup> Brazilian birth certificates showed a person's “color” until the new constitution of 1988 refuted this policy. The policy took a few years to dissipate, and so some of the respondents still had their “color” registered on their birth certificates.

*never wanted this race thing to exist. I didn't want to have to classify myself. I think this is dumb. It's too bad when you realize what is reality.*" Further, Raiane says:

*Well... what I want to say is that my race... skin color... it's Brazilian! It's too difficult to name a specific race. It stems from what each person thinks. Each person will think it differently. I never wanted to bother with this. I hate labels. I try to steer away from being categorized as much as I can. But with the quotas, it's clear that I cannot! All I want to tell you is that I am not Branca and that I did not come from a wealthy family.*

Finally, Lucas insistently declares that the only race he really considers himself to be is "homo sapiens." He says that he marks himself as Pardo on the forms because he "has to use it", but does not consider it "existentially" as a reflection of himself. There was acknowledgment that the students needed to engage with the categorization discourse, and the fact that there was a racial hierarchy was an upsetting realization.

As students are exposed to these situations that compel them to abide by a racial schema of fixed categories, as well as the various (political) discourses, they may start shifting their understanding of race and categorization. Gilson, for instance, says:

*I took a "U-turn" with my racial identification. At home, my father always emphasized that we were Negros. He looks like me, just a bit darker. So we always said Negros. Later in life I saw other definitions, because I had to respond to socio-economic questionnaires. So, there was Negro, Pardo, no Moreno, right?<sup>10</sup> And then there is Amarelo and Branco, and what not. I always said I was Negro to people, but then I started to ask myself if it was right, or if I was dark enough, and I knew others disagreed. There was a moment when some friends said: "No, no – you are Pardo!" So I responded like that once. Pardo. Moreno. But for affirmative action I put Negro, because I consider myself Negro, in fact, and then I knew this was also political.*

Some of the students opt to adopt a fixed racial identification and defend their decision,

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<sup>10</sup> Gilson uses the word Negro and not Preto when referring to the census schema.

such as Gilson and Thales. Others, although ultimately using the official schema in applying for racial quotas, still maintain that pushing people into choosing racial categories is not beneficial; they perceived of the categorization system they had to go through as bringing about a painful recognition. Raiane, for instance, says:

*Classification is pure bureaucracy. I think that Brazilians have always been a mixed people, regardless of the century we are in. We are welcoming of everybody. There is prejudice, but it is not generalized. Brazilians are mixed people that welcome others regardless of their race. And then these categories will separate everyone. I don't think that this will be good in the future. But we have to do it, right? For right now, even though it's not good.*

In this passage, Raiane illustrates quite well the hold the myth of a racial democracy has in her social imaginary. She says that all Brazilians are mixed and prejudice is not generalized. She says she “has to use” the categorization schema in official forms, but that is not the way that she sees herself in her life. Likewise, she shows her struggle to reconcile her personal ideas about race with its representation in affirmative action.

Though it is not possible to generalize about what causes these students to be for or against having an official racial schema with fixed categories in Brazil, there are some factors that seem to mediate the opinions of these students in this study. For example, students with darker complexions seemed to be more favorable to adopting a fixed category. Students who had participated in social movements were also more likely to be supportive of this endeavor, as well as students who were studying in the field of humanities or social sciences. It is possible that students who are darker and feel they have less leverage to “choose” a racial identification find the concept of fixed categories less ambiguous. In addition, challenging the idea of racial democracy has been a focus of much social activism and academic discourse in Brazil, if only to explain the

implementation of affirmative action policies. Hence, students who have participated in social activism or have majors in the humanities or social sciences may be more prone to be supportive of the push for fixed categories.

What seems to be general across all interviews is that the categorization discourse is introduced to these students later in their lives. And that for most of them, a pre-determined racial schema with fixed categories was not the “natural” way they conceived of themselves before they had to engage with this discourse. However, because categorization is unavoidable for students seeking admissions to the university through affirmative action, once engaged in this discourse, students often struggle to reconcile their different conceptualizations.

## Chapter 6: Situations informing racial categories

When it comes to how different situations change the way these students assess their own racial identification, relative comparisons with the people around them played a large role, as well as the types of environments they found themselves in. Moreover, students also speak of the fluidity of race as something one expresses aesthetically at the moment. Through these two assessments, it is evident that ideas about social class strongly influence ideas about racial categories, as these students see race and class as very tied together.

The idea that people will classify themselves in relation to others around them, or that people tend to compare their phenotypes with others in order to localize themselves in a racial schema was widely expressed by the respondents. Some said they did not feel aware of their race in social situations until they were exposed to people who were “really” Branc@ or Negr@. That corroborates Sansone’s (2004) argument that in Brazil, a racial or ethnic identity is something that is only mobilized in certain situations, but often omitted from social interaction.

Students also discussed being mixed, or Pard@, in certain contexts, almost as if such a categorization was “being race neutral” in the context they lived in. They supposed that one’s race is visible and accessible in Brazil if one is really light or really dark, but one’s race may go unnoticed if it falls somewhere in between. Three of the respondents spoke of encountering this experience at university when meeting students from Europe and Africa. They perceived these foreign students as having “one race,” whereas they felt “neutralized” by their mixed heritage. Marina says: *“I think that there are only “real” Negros in Africa, aren’t there? People of the color black. And here at UFPE too, right?”*

*There are a lot of people from outside. A lot of people with outstanding skin color, which is not common here.*” Marina meant that African students at UFPE have an easily distinguishable skin tone that made it “obviously Black,” whereas many Black Brazilians may have less distinguishable phenotypes. Similarly, Carolina said: *“We are miscegenated, right? We have no obligations to discern if we are this or that. People from other countries may.”* This process of comparison with others who have more extreme racial markers brings about reflection about their own racial circumstances. For instance, Gilson says:

*I had always considered myself Negro and not Moreno... but now I hang out with real Negros and I have come to accept it. They are darker, more black, more bluish<sup>11</sup>. I realized that it is not just about what I feel.*

Marina, Carolina and Gilson speak of how the ambiguity of their phenotypes was made more obvious through comparisons with others who had more distinguishable racial markers.

Reflections on their immediate environment also influenced how respondents felt about their racial identification. When asked if they ever feel more “whitened or darkened,” most of the respondents talked about the environment and places they go as having a definite effect on how they assessed their racial identification. Many said that when they were in a position in which they felt somewhat empowered, such as in a nice hotel or restaurant, they felt “more Branc@.” Whenever they felt discrimination in any form, such as being denied entrance to a concert or participation in a certain activity, they were reminded of their “Negr@ part” For instance, Marília says:

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<sup>11</sup>It is a common slang in Brazil to refer to someone who is very dark as “almost blue.”

*I feel [more whitened] whenever I am occupying a space of inclusion. When I don't have access to something – like I previously said – I couldn't get into a concert, I feel more Preta. When I have access to something I feel... that I might have been classified as more rich or more Branca than someone else, you know?*

Carla adds:

*[I feel more dark] When, sometimes, I go to some distinguished places, such as the theatre here at UFPE. When I came last time, around me I could only see really people really Brancos. Everyone fancy and groomed. I commented to my friend that I felt like a fish out of water, so out of my reality, so different than everybody.*

Marília's and Carla's statements highlight how different social situations inform them of the boundaries and cues of how to identify racially. These findings suggest that these respondents do not conceptualize race as only about how they feel in terms of their identity, but also what has been levied as a racial marker in the environment. In conceptualizing themselves, these students may not think about racial categories as salient in their lives at all times, but that is not to say that race does not exist in their understandings of the social world. These students, though not engaging with fixed racial categories, understand and “feel on their skin” the implications of racialization.

Carolina, for example, was one of the most fair skinned respondents. During the interview, she argues: *“I think...for example, when I am in an environment where there are only rich people, I feel more like a Parda. Even closer to Preta, really. But if I am amongst the general population, I feel normal. Totally Brazilian.”* For Carolina, what is “normal” in Brazil is to be of an unidentified mixed race. When speaking of race, students usually reassured me that they knew some people “cannot escape it,” but that nonetheless, for the people who fall in between, which is a great number of Brazilians,

there is an option of keeping that boundary flexible in most of their social contexts. That was especially within Pard@s and Pret@s, which, even though being classified as different racial categories, enjoy the benefit of affirmative action. Students were much more cautious when talking about the differences between Branc@s and others.

Just as some situations brought about feelings of exclusion, others brought about feelings of inclusion. Some students, highlighting the flexibility in Brazilian racial terms, also speak of different situations and people bringing about a momentary sense of belonging to a certain racial grouping. Some students, such as Renata, a self-declared Parda, say things such as:

*For instance, if I go to a place frequented by Brancos, I could feel welcomed as well, I don't feel too different. And If I go to a place with more Negros, for example, where they are playing "Maracatu" drums, I feel like I can wear a "Negro flag," I can feel Negra, you know?*

Although there are different outcomes of exclusion and inclusion in different situations, what is common is that when put in these circumstances of comparison, the students are reminded of their racialized bodies. These different circumstances raise awareness of the racial boundaries that previously in the background of their consciousness.

In addition to the situational comparisons discussed above, students also frequently deliberated the relational aspect of race in terms of situational aesthetics, or how a person's appearance at some specific moment influences their racial classification. Instances detailing the way people dress and carry themselves were commonly described as race markers. Camila, for instance, says she spent her life being addressed as Morena, Mulatta and being teased for being "Afro-beige" by her friends, because she saw herself as "definitely Negra," but she described her skin as "somewhat fair." When she decided



to start wearing her hair naturally, as Afro hair, she said that “everything changed,” and people could no longer deny that she was a Negra.

At some point during the interviews, more than half of the respondents mentioned the amount of sun one gets as affecting one’s race. They spoke as if the amount of sun one were exposed to, and hence the fluctuation in melanin production in their skin, influencing its shade, causes a fluctuation in their race entirely. Lucas, for instance, says that his mother is “*Branca – but not really – because she takes in a lot of sun.*” This aspect of how these students evaluated race in Brazil may seem odd to those familiar the more rigid racial boundaries in the context of the United States. For instance, in an North American context it would seem rather unusual that someone could ‘quit’ being Black because they started to work indoors and were no longer exposed to the sun. This finding emphasizes just how deeply these students have an understanding of race as situational, and shows where these boundaries come be important for the recognition of their identity. Gabriel, a geography student who considers himself Pardo (but says he is able to consider himself Negro in certain circles), states:

*I remember one time, I was at the beach in Boa Viagem [an affluent neighborhood], and I thought of myself as Negro comparing the others at the beach. I was thinking of how I was Negro, and most people there were White. And then a guy who wanted to sell kites approached; a poor and Negro guy selling kites to people at the beach. I said something about his hair, that looked similar to mine, and he joked back: “you crazy, boy? Your hair is full of bourgeois curls.” He said it like this. And I realized that for me, it’s different. My hair is well taken care. I don’t have the same “marginal face” I had as a child, running around the sun all the time. I am more White. This perception of class whitens you. Very much so.*

Hence, fluctuation of melatonin, hairstyles and textures, as well as other things that people can change, becomes very relevant to how race is perceived in Brazil. In turn, race gets linked to specific contexts and situations that are volatile.

The idea that a lack of sun exposure can be “whitening” suggests that students’ understandings of race and racial categorization were deeply informed by associations with social class (since hard laborers do not generally work indoors). Respondents tended to see *Negr@* as correlated with disadvantage and poverty and White with wealth and privilege. Sansone (1996) has emphasized how closely racial stratification is connected to understandings of class in Brazil, where people commonly conflate the two. He notes, for instance, that during his time doing ethnographic studies in Bahia, people in the communities he studied were often quick to defer to class, or to “being poor,” when speaking of any kind of discrimination. He notes that discussions of victimization by racism were rare, even though they all acknowledged racism as a pervasive problem. Moreover, Sansone also says that in all of his years of research, he never witnessed conflict between people start because of racial tensions; rather, the discourse revolved around distinctions between the “worker” and the “vagabond,” the “marginal” and the “good citizen,” often implicating people on different ends of a racial spectrum.

In thinking about how social boundaries originate, operate and affect social life (Tilly 2009; Lamont and Molnár 2002), and questioning why Brazilian racial boundaries are conflated with the idea of class, one can take into account how the Brazilian State informs social class boundaries. The Brazilian government measures social class by accounting for education, income and wealth, which determines if people fall into class A, B, C, D or E – with class A being the wealthiest and E the poorest. This scale is also

utilized in popular discourse on class, making class boundaries visible and accessible through language and legislation.

Having access to these terms, which are further legitimized by legislature, may give people an opportunity to obfuscate uncomfortable boundaries around race. Common conceptions of social divisions in Brazil typically highlight the *favela* (slum) / city dichotomy. Brazilians will often refer to destitute Blacks who live in slums as “marginals”—an implicitly racialized term that is widely used and recognizable. While slum populations in Brazil are certainly darker on average than others, the term “marginals” does not explicitly state this fact.

These findings suggest that race is a concept that can be engaged with differently based on existing situational realities. They show that some people in Brazil feel that they can appropriate the idea of race to fit the way they think their reality operates. Perhaps this is also evidence of the power of the myth of racial democracy in the Brazilian mindset. However, this reality is troubling, considering the implications that the neutralization of racial identification has on the people who cannot escape being constantly racialized, such as very dark Black Brazilians. There is a large part of the Brazilian population that looks racially mixed, but there are also those with more distinguishable phenotypes. This contradiction exposes the difference between being physically Pard@ and being able to categorize oneself as such – speaking to the trouble of the interpretations and appropriation of racial categories.

## Chapter 7: Classification and category puzzlement

Perhaps the most intriguing conversations about the racial categorization system on affirmative action forms centered on students' confusion over how to assign categories to themselves and others, and sometimes bewilderment about what the categories themselves meant. Although sometimes a product of confusion, students also purposefully used different racial categories deliberately—sometimes in conversation, but also while check-marking questionnaires with racial categories in contexts other than the university's affirmative action. This is fascinating, especially considering the lives of these students have been so drastically affected by the check box for entering school through affirmative action. Yet, the use of the categories by these students occurred in ways often unanticipated by the designers of the forms.

The students also recognize the political implications of using different racial categories. For instance, some students, like Marília – who considers herself Negra (but is rather light skinned and may not be conceived as such by others, as she herself conceded), refuses to use Pard@, arguing that: *“The term Pardo is the denial of Negro. They want to say Negro without saying it. They want to enclose Negros in yet another box... “Blackness” is a ghost haunting the Brazilian population.”* Bailey (2009) extensively reviews the debates within Negr@ movements in Brazil, which seek to establish a binary Black and White taxonomy for Brazilian categorizations by arguing that Afro-Brazilianness needs to be acknowledged and not concealed by different terminology. A counter argument, however, is that this would exclude a large part of the population which is not White and does not enjoy the privileges of being White, but their skin tones may not be dark enough for them to be considered Negr@. Moreover, there is

a part of the Brazilian population with strongly reminiscent Indigenous phenotypes and Brown skin that may feel the label Black is inappropriate.

One of the troubles expressed by some of the respondents was that when check marking an official document for a racial category, onlookers could see it, disagree with them, and try to delegitimize their racial self-affirmation. Two students reported that during the time they were check-marking the racial identification box in the affirmative action process, having possible onlookers calling them out on “being wrong” was a source of much stress. Hugo says: *“I looked around all the time [when filling out the form]. I was afraid someone would see it and disagree with me, call me out. Say I was not “Negro enough.”*” This private concern about contradictions shows that these students fear that they are asked to have “true answer” for what their race is; an answer they may not hold or be entitled to decide, even though it accounts themselves and their bodies.

Another concern among respondents involved the potential for a contradiction between the race they marked on the university admissions form and the race that was registered on their birth certificates. Pedro said he considered him Negro, but since he had Pardo on their birth certificate, he had gotten through affirmative action as Pardo. Others said they considered themselves Negr@ and had entered university through affirmative action as Pret@, but had Pard@ on their birth certificates. Pedro states:

*It's like I told you, I feel one way, but I face a contradiction for following a policy of – ah, I am registered this way [contradictory to what he feels]. I was afraid; I was afraid because I had thought of putting down Preto, in the year I got in [to school]. But there could be a time they would ask for my birth certificate. They would look, see it was different, and I could be rejected because of the contradiction.*

Pedro told me at various points during the interview that he felt very close to his Afro-Brazilian roots. He spoke of participating in Afro-Brazilian religions, musical culture and social struggles. Nevertheless, here he laments that he entered university as Pardo, afraid of contradicting his birth certificate. Although the act of check-marking his race as Pardo had no practical consequences, Pedro seemed upset about encountering this type of contradiction, emphasizing that discourses of what race really is in Brazil are, as he states *“confused and all over the place.”*

Hence, what is written down on personal documents proved to be yet another source of stress for the students that had to apply for affirmative action and had trouble discerning if there is a “correct” way of conceptualizing racial categories. Natália adds:

*I have a friend that took the vestibular at the same time I did. We went to school together, and he wanted to try to get to university through affirmative action. But he didn't, because on his birth certificate it said “Branco.” But he is dark, you know? But in his register there was Branco. I don't know where it came from. But the people at the registering office, they will do that.*

Natália's friend's case is even more concerning, because there were indeed practical consequences with this confusion over race having a “right or wrong” answer. This shows that the confusion some students demonstrated over how to work with the official racial schema of categories can have strong and lasting consequences. Some respondents considered that the people who marked their race at birth must have thought differently about race compared to its conception today, while others had no idea which race was marked on their birth certificates if there were any. Issues of contradiction with official documents and the students' identification were a recurring theme throughout the interviews.

Another recurring issue that was surprising was that many of the students were using the category Amarel@. The word Amarel@ literally translates to the color yellow, and is the official option for racial categorizations of Asian, or those of Asian descent. One third of the respondents reported considering the idea of marking themselves as Amarel@ at some point, or thinking of somebody else as such. This was because Amarel@, or yellow, looked closer to what they saw certain skin color to be, rather than the colors black and white. Marina, for instance, says that she had marked herself Amarela recently, at a job application. As she spoke she looked at the color of her arm, as if looking for confirmation that she was right – it looked more like the color yellow than the colors black or white. This consideration of marking Amarel@ is a poignant illustration of the confusion over what official categories intend to capture.

When it comes to these students reinterpreting racial terms, some of the respondents who used Amarel@ did not seem to be obviously aware that it meant Asian. However, some respondents said they knew it was Asian but they thought of appropriating the term nonetheless. Social science student Marília, who seemed very aware of Brazilian racial discourses, used Amarel@. She said she thinks of her mother as Amarela, because she is neither Branca nor Preta, and she refuses to use Pard@, as previously mentioned, because she think it is the denial of the Negr@. These findings emphasize the extent to which racial categories are created and maintained, but also how they can be appropriated. Further, Manuela says:

*I have seen people say: “I am Amarelo”, and I have asked: “Why did you say that?” and they say: “because I am not branco or preto [as in the colors], right? There is no Moreno and Pardo is really ugly!” and I responded... “if Pardo is ugly, Amarelo is what, not ugly? Are you serious?”*

Students' use of Amarel@ in the categorization discourse appeared to be an attempt to escape a Branc@ to Pret@, or Black to White continuum, with categories that they do not want to use. They felt uncomfortable with the designations presented and they sought an exit. In this way, Amarel@ presents an opportunity to subvert a system of categorization they do not identify with.

The appropriation of the Amarel@ category may also show people's dislike for the Pard@ category. Bailey (2009) and others have reported that many Brazilians do not relate to the Pard@ category, as it is not a term that people typically use in their everyday lives. The students held this view for diverse reasons. For instance, Manuela says:

*When I think of it being a choice of identification to someone, I think this word [Pard@] is so strange. Because it seems like something far from a color. It is not yellow, not white, not black, not a color. It's something that has no logic, no grace – it is this – absolutely graceless.*

Carolina thinks of Pard@ as: *"A strange word. We don't use it colloquially so it is weird, really, really weird."* And Felipe adds: *"I don't even know what Pardo means. I have no idea what a person needs to be Pardo. Pardos have no history!"* Most of the respondents did not like the idea of classifying themselves as Pard@, and the ones that said they did not mind expressed that it was necessary to have a term to encompass their miscegenation, but that they thought that the choice of wording was odd. Hugo, for instance, says: *"I didn't mind. I needed something that was in between Branco and Preto, and they gave me Pardo."* In nearly all of the interviews, I recognized the most discomfort with the word Pard@.



Finally, it is important to address tension between identification with Pret@ versus Negr@. Bailey (2009) and others have claimed that Pret@ means Black, as in people with very dark skin and very discernible African phenotypes, while Negr@ in Brazil would mean everyone is considered Pret@ or Pard@. While this informed my initial mentality when entering the research project, the respondents used both terms interchangeably to mean specifically Black. Two of the respondents did not even remember they classified themselves as Pret@ and not Negr@. When I asked how they felt about marking Pret@ and not Negr@, most of them said they saw no difference. However, upon further inquiry over which one they preferred, neither of them said Pret@, which is more specifically the name of the color in the Portuguese language. This may corroborate Sheriff's (2001) assertion about the growing of acceptance of the term Negr@, which has been quite stigmatized. This may also speak to the fact that there is a growing awareness of Afro-heritage pride in Brazil. It is interesting to note that the differentiation between these two terms may not be as sharp as previously specified in the literature. However, this may also highlight regional differences in the way this issue is addressed.

These findings show that in adopting racial categories, these respondents often deploy such categories strategically, bending them for their own purposes. These findings corroborate Brubaker and Cooper's assertion that students, like other people, "may adhere nominally to "official classificatory schemas while infusing official categories with alternative, unofficial meanings" (2004: 35). So, while "the state is a referee, albeit a powerful one, in the struggle over this monopoly" (Bourdieu 1989: 22) of racial categories, if there is no compromise and cooperation between official schema and

general conceptions, there is not one deliberate path racial designations could turn, and no way of knowing the consequences of social policies. The findings presented suggest that the official racial schema of affirmative action and other governmental documents often do not represent the ways in which the students see themselves, and that the ways these students do see themselves in relation to their race is informed and transfigured in different contexts. Further, the process by which these students engage with different discourses around the meaning of race and racial categorization for their lives is one of discomfort and some uncertainty.

## Chapter 8: Material benefits influencing the idea of race

Bailey (2009) proposes low category loyalty among Brazilians, such that when reminding people of the material benefits of a certain category, many more people would choose that racial category on a form. This was an issue of much concern to the students. Some commented on having felt like targets of accusations, as if they were taking advantage of the affirmative action policy and taking someone's spot at the university "just because of their race." One of the main arguments against affirmative action policies that these students pointed out in the conversation is one of meritocracy. For instance, Júlia says:

*It is so strange. Sometimes I feel others think that I am less than them. It's different to get in [to the university] through quotas than it is to enter the normal way. You know you are entering with merits that are yours, but others may not think that way. They will say that because you were born with one color, because you were born dark, that is why you get in. It's strange. It is so strange to have to declare yourself Negro to be able to get something.*

The way that Júlia felt about the meritocracy discourse is a recurrent issue that affirmative action brings in many places, but in Brazil this situation is exacerbated because there is low consensus over who fits in which category and who deserves the benefits of social policies.

The problematic consensus over how to fit Brazilians into racial categories is illustrated by the high flexibility in terms of racial identification. Almost all of the respondents replied positively when asked if they thought there was flexibility in racial definitions in Brazil. Manuela says:

*Yes there is, obviously [flexibility of racial definitions]. I think there is. Because the issue of race is very personal, it is very much a matter of self-definition. There is nothing that obligates you to*

*say if you are Branco, Pardo or Negro. There is no exam to determine that, you see? No documents to say that. Well, some documents may, but it is no a certain thing.*

Gilson adds:

*I think that there is this flexibility. Even with what I have been talking about, of considering myself Moreno, Negro, this or that. I think that there are places in which some will see me as Negro, but if I say I am Moreno there will be no bad repercussion. I think that this thinking exists even with this consensus of race categories in the documents.*

From this flexibility stems anxiety and claims of legitimacy over racial categorization, as attaching material benefits to certain categories may have the power of drawing people to that identity at that time.

In addition to concerns over the stigmatization of their acceptance through affirmative action, many respondents, especially those most committed to Negr@ movements and/or its ideas, suspected that young people are not really adopting a Black racial identification because of a strengthened perception of their heritage and “Black consciousness.” This issue also drew unease. For instance, Marília, states:

*Many began to self-identify as Negros because they would have access to certain things. But if they don't need access they will continue to be in a limbo. They say that 'even if someone else classifies me as Negro, I don't feel Negro... I don't want to be Negro. But I will do it.'*

In this instance, Marília, who is a social science major and well engaged with the discourses of Negr@ movements in Brazil, shows concern that people will only identify themselves as Black in order to benefit from affirmative action policies. For her, being Black entails a stronger commitment. She also says:

*Declaring yourself Negro was bad... and now it may not be as bad, right? After ten years of the Lula government, of more social*

*policies... but it is still very cruel. It is cruel that you do not assume the identity [as Negro] because you belong or because you have incorporated that identity... it is only because you get a bonus with it.*

Marília is showing concern that the push for categorization will not yield a self-awareness of group belonging to the Brazilian Negr@ population, that the act of check-marking a racial box and participating in a social policy was not actually creating a sense of collective identity. Although Marília declared herself a strong supporter of affirmative action, she believes that instating this policy without a larger discussion about the consequences of race in Brazil would not yield a good result for the fight for racial equality. Bailey (2008) states that the drafters of affirmative action intend for the policy to provide a context for people to strengthen their racial subjectivities. However, some students demonstrate disbelief that this will occur because of the policy of affirmative action alone.

Some students seemed very anxious about the legitimacy of who can claim a race that is tied to a social policy, the rationale of the people claiming to be of that race, and whether or not those who benefit from the policy also have the desire of strengthening their racial subjectivities. These students see a benefit in classifying themselves at the darker end of a racial scale. However, this is a different ideal than the more “obvious” benefits accruing from identifying with the lighter end of the range of possibilities. Here, the advantage of self-identifying as Black ensues from a specific context, and the question becomes whether or not these labels will carry on into different aspects of their lives, when the advantage is no longer so obvious, or it even becomes a drawback. For instance, Juliana states: *“I think this situation is really wrong. This thing of declaring*

*oneself Negro for the benefit of it. We need to say “I am Negro” and not to gain something back. For one to declare oneself, in front of society, we should really feel it.”*

These concerns of whether or not the push for racial categories will strengthen racial subjectivities remain to be tested. Nevertheless, it is evident that incentives in the form of material benefits become mechanisms through which racial boundaries are strengthened and disputed.

Concerns over the legitimacy and authenticity of claims to racial categories are yet another source of anxiety. Students may not inherently relate to the racial categories being presented to them on official forms, but once again, this is not to say that they do not see that race is a reality with practical consequences. Students demonstrated that while they thought that one could name their racial identification in different ways, flexible to the situation, there is indeed a more rigid hierarchy in how race operates. Thus, the issue of validity of claims to “be” one race or another and whether or not these claims are authentic comes to play a role in the discussion of racial identifications.

Authenticity, being contingent and contestable, according to Vasquez and Wetzel, “allows members of marginalized racial groups to simultaneously challenge externally imposed racial hierarchies and strive for the dignity, value, and resources they do not otherwise obtain” (2009: 1559). Nevertheless, Vasquez and Wetzel discuss discourses of authenticity within the Chicano and Native American communities in the USA. They show that these communities rely on discourses of strong tradition and commitment to their communities in order to show more value on themselves over “mainstream” or White American society.

However, as previously mentioned, Black Brazilians do not appear to have different cultural traditions than other Brazilians. Sansone (1996) shows that aspects of Black Brazilian culture such as capoeira dancing, musical traditions, cuisine and even Afro religions have been virtually incorporated as “Brazilian” by media showcases, so there is not a discourse on specific Black Brazilian traditions which Brazilian Blacks can rely on. The sense of authenticity that students demonstrate to find important seem to lie more on the engagement with an emotional connection to their identity as Brazilian Negr@s. For instance, Pedro says:

*Before the quotas, because we don't always assume that we are one race or another, for one to declare oneself Negro, we knew that they had the commitment to it, because being Negro in Brazil is not easy. Now it's not so easy to tell. It's a shame if quota students go in and out of the university and never really come to feel this commitment. To me, that would make a failure of the racial quotas. To have Negros who suffer as Negros, then benefit as Negros, but don't want to feel Negros, don't want to be there for the cause of all Negros. If that happens, they will come out more Brancos than they went in... They may be dark, but now have a university degree!*

Here, Pedro shows that his idea of Negro legitimacy involves a commitment to an “awakened identity,” rather than being tied to a certain cultural tradition. Monahan (2005) contends that to be authentic does not just mean to be genuine in nature, but to be sincere and trustworthy. As such, there is a kind of authenticity that has to do with emotional genuineness that is deeply related to racialization. To be inauthentic then is not only a matter of fooling others, but fooling oneself (2005: 40).

As racial classification is made necessary, this dimension, not of “who is Negr@” but of “how one is Negr@,” or “what it takes for someone to be Negr@” may come to play a growing role in informing the boundaries of racial categories in Brazil. A discourse

of authenticity and legitimacy may afford racialized Brazilians opportunities to re-evaluate what is Negr@, and thus create and institute meanings that represent this conception. The views expressed by some students about the legitimacy of the Negr@ identity may not be generalizable, but it may serve as an example of the dispute for racial authenticity lending an important service in redefining what means to be Negr@ in Brazil.



## Chapter 9: Conclusion

This study contributes to the body of literature seeking to uncover where boundaries that separate people into different races exist and how they are called on in different situations. It contributes to a sociological understanding of race that expands beyond the idea that people are inherently bounded to racial categorical designations, without ignoring the power of these designations in real life. These findings add to existing knowledge about how the conceptualization of race in Brazil has been changing, while illustrating how certain people personally deal with racial issues.

While the study is very revealing for the state of racial categorization in Brazil, it is also important to mention some of its possible limitations. Although the sample was collected to be as diverse as possible, its small size is not generalizable to all Brazilian students who have entered university through racial quotas. Even at UFPE, it is possible that those participants who contacted me for this research are particularly likely to be the ones who felt stress as they went through this process of racial self-identification, and thus saw the interview as an opportunity for venting these frustrations. Insights from affirmative action students at other Brazilian universities would contribute to an even richer understanding of how Brazilian youth are engaging with this racial discourse.

The findings support Bailey's (2009) allegation that, for now, the racial categories proposed in the government's official racial schema, which is also used in affirmative action legislation, do not represent the way Brazilians see themselves. However, the findings also show how the process by which the students come to engage with these categories is one that often evokes suspicion and confusion, and that the process of making the racial categorical decision "official" is sometimes filled with doubt and

anxiety. Student respondents may not feel that racial categorization is something natural to their existence before applying for university, and they may feel discomfort dealing with the idea of categorization as well as with the meaning of each category, which they sometimes appropriate and redefine. Students speak of being reminded of their racialized bodies when in contrast and comparisons with others, their environment, and this demonstrates that race is a really flexible concept in their minds, which varies in different situations, and which implicates ideas about social class and even personal aesthetics that are easily mutable. In trying to come to terms with the idea of race and how to bound it to something they can understand and grasp, students come to dispute the authenticity of racial claims. They recognize that attaching a material benefit to the meaning of a category can change people's relationship of racial identification with such category, so issues of what legitimizes a claim a category of Negr@ become an interesting arena where new meanings of Blackness in Brazil arise.

Existing research has proposed that policies and government-proposed categories do often influence individuals to form more tightly bounded social groups (Brubaker 2004; Jenkins 1996; Bourdieu 1989). However, the conditions in Brazil, where the idea of racial democracy has persisted for decades, and where so many people seem to genuinely oppose the separation of people along racial lines, present a case where this may not be the response to this policy. Many of the students interviewed for this project, for instance, continued to contend that although affirmative action was important, racial categorization was detrimental in the long run, and should be avoided.

Bailey (2008) articulates three possible consequences for the symbolic boundaries of race in Brazil after the institution of affirmative action and the push for stronger racial

boundaries: (1) that the institution of affirmative action type legislations will have no effect on how Brazilians understand their racial selves, and thus racial subjectivities will remain static; (2) that there could be a backlash effect, in that competing splinter groups would strengthen alternative categories; (3) or that this policy, as the drafters have envisioned, will yield a significant stage for race-making, or the transformation of categories into racial groups.

Though once again, the data here presented is not generalizable, from what was gathered, all three scenarios could be possible, some more likely than others. It is possible that racial subjectivities in Brazil could remain static. Many students felt that affirmative action legislation by itself would not yield a strengthening of racial subjectivities for Black Brazilians, and that giving economic and cultural capital to Negros could even make them “more White” if they lacked the commitment to a Negro identity to start with. Moreover, while some students seemed to be particularly invested in a Negro identity, such as Marília and Pedro, others who had also gone through affirmative action did not seem to really feel much different than the rest of the Brazilian population because of their race, or particularly Negr@, and emphasized that although they were admitted through affirmative action, they were also public school students. Raiane and Marina, for instance, demonstrated such stances.

Although backlash effects appear unlikely, the data show that the category of Amarel@, for instance, could be used by many to protest the received Black to White continuum. Bailey (2009) also shows that there are growing movements of Brazilians who call themselves Mestiços (racially-mixed), rejecting the labels of Pard@s, Pret@s and Negr@s, although their size and clout is dubious. The term Moren@ is also viewed

as a strong contender for an alternative categorical terminology. Nevertheless, there have been studies that show the decrease in use of the *Moren@* amongst the youth (Bailey 2009; Sheriff 2001), which may support the unlikelihood of this “backlash.”

Finally, it is also possible, and according to the literature, likely, that affirmative action legislations will fulfill the predictions of social scientists in setting the stage for a strengthening of Brazilians’ racial subjectivities. Student respondents spoke extensively about applying, entering and being in the university as a time they had to confront political discourses around race and be reflexive about their racial realities. Many, such as Thales, came to understand that racial categories are important tools for identifying social problems, and decided to embrace them. Studies that show a decrease in use of *Moren@* and a rise in youth adoption of a “Black and White” terminology to speak of themselves (Bailey 2009) may also lend support to this outcome.

I argue that affirmative action and other racially targeted policies will likely strengthen racial subjectivities in Brazil. Perhaps the process will take longer because these are policies of inclusion rather than systemic exclusion, which is one way to quickly awaken racial subjectivities (Jenkins 1996). Moreover, most affirmative action policies in Brazil are also embedded in recognition of social class distinctions, and not merely race. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the specific categories of *Pret@* and *Pard@* will become de facto racial groups. The strengthening in racial subjectivities seem to encompass a *Branc@* and *Negr@* idiom of understanding.

Yet, more research is needed to look into the consequences of this push towards more static racial categorizations in Brazil. As previously mentioned, the academic world in Brazil has become polarized by those who believe that strengthening racial boundaries

and subjectivities is going to prompt the struggle for social equality, and those who believe that strengthening racial boundaries will be detrimental for racial relations in the long run. I believe that this is a crucial and timely question. It would be important for social scientists to use longitudinal studies to investigate whether the strengthening of racial boundaries will lead to a society that promotes racial egalitarianism, or whether inciting these boundaries will resemble the “separate but equal” problematic, where separation was inherently hierarchical and fails to achieve social equality. Measurements could be created in order to compare societies’ different emphases on racial boundaries by studying the language of legislations, policies and people’s relation to racial categories.

These understandings about race in Brazil are important to better deal with issues of racial inequality. By comprehending how the boundaries of race operate, what social cues make these boundaries relevant, and how people react when facing newly instituted racial boundaries, there is a better chance of truly understanding the mechanisms that could bring about networks and the formation of groups in a context of solidarity and commonality, as well as to spur ideas that could bring about social change. It is important to look further than the realization that race is a social construction, and see how, when and where this construction takes place.

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## Appendix: Interview guide

Hello, and thank you for participating in this interview project. Your input is very much appreciated and I want you to feel free to speak your mind. Feel free to interrupt me or ask me any questions. Please feel free to skip any questions if you do not want to respond it.

I am interested in the ways Brazilians experience race in their daily lives. I think it is very important to understand the ways in which Brazilians think about and use race in their lives in order to address issues that may be implicated because of it. I am happy to hear from you as much as you have to say.

Please note that while I will be asking questions that regard affirmative action policies, I am not here to judge whether or not affirmative action is a good or bad policy. I am just using it as a way to getting to know how race people think about race in Brazilian society.

So, lets start.

### A. Background information

First, I am going to ask you a few background questions, and then we will move on to different sorts of subjects.

1. Where are you from originally?
2. Where is your family from?
  - PROBE: Have (you or your family) lived here/there all your life? How long?
3. What did your parents do for a living?
  - PROBE: Fully.
4. What is your parent's schooling like?
5. How was your school experience before college?
  - PROBE: School was private or public? If public, if the respondent has also studied in private at some point.
6. What was the racial composition like in [name of the school]? Do you see any difference from UFPE?

B. Race, the respondent, and Brazilian society

Now we will be talking a little but about how you see race in your life, and how you see race in Brazilian society.

7. How do you identify your race?
8. Have you ever given a different response?
  - \*PROBE: What? When/how did it change?
9. Has anyone who is close to you identified you as a different race?
  - \*PROBE:
10. What about people who are not close to you?
11. How else may someone perceive you?
12. What is the race of your parents?
  - PROBE: fully.
13. Do you think there are situations in which you feel more or less Black/Brown?
  - PROBE: What would these situations be?
14. What do you think race means?
  - PROBE: What do you think race has to do with? Appearance? Descent?
15. Do you know anything about your ancestry?
  - PROBE: Fully. Do you think it is important to know? Do you think Brazilian society finds it important?
16. Do you use any other terms to define your race?
  - \*PROBE: What are they? What do they mean?
17. Do you feel that race is classified differently by different people?
  - PROBE: Fully.

18. What about when it comes to your race specifically?
- PROBE: Fully.
19. Would you consider yourself a Moreno(a)?
- PROBE: Why? Why Not?
20. What you think it is the difference between Moreno(a) and Pardo(a)?
21. Can you be considered Moreno(a) by others?
22. (IF RESPONDENT IS BLACK) Can you be considered Pardo in other situations?
- PROBE: Fully.
23. (IF RESPONDENT IS BROWN) Can you be considered Black in other situations?
- PROBE: Fully.
24. What was the situation in your life in which you felt the most pressure to classify your race?
- PROBE: Fully.
25. Is there such a thing as “acting black” for you?
- PROBE: How? What do you mean?
26. Is there a situation that you feel more Whitened?
- PROBE: Which one? Why do you think that is?
27. Is there a situation that you feel more Blackened?
- PROBE: Which one? Why do you think that is?
28. If possible, try to describe, in as much detail as you can, any situations in which you may use a different kind of racial classification for yourself.
29. Do you think that there is stigma in identifying yourself as Black?
30. Do you think that there are stigmas in identifying yourself as Brown?
31. Do you feel like Brazilian society is changing in the ways it sees race? How so? Does it affect more people of which color?

32. (IF APPLICABLE) Try to describe where do you see the changes in how Brazil deals with race.

33. Tell me about what you understand race to be in the Brazilian context.

34. Do you think that there is any flexibility in racial classification in Brazil?

- PROBE: Fully.

35. Have you ever heard of the myth of a racial democracy?

- PROBE: Fully.

### C. Education and Affirmative Action Policies

Now we will be talking a little bit about your education.

36. Why did you decide to study at UFPE?

37. How long ago did you start?

38. What year are you in?

39. What is your major?

40. Did the affirmative action policies play a role in deciding which university you would pursue?

- PROBE: Why? Why Not?

41. Did you apply as a Black/Brown?

- PROBE: Fully.

42. When did you learn about affirmative action policies?

43. Can you tell me what were your initial thoughts when you first heard of it?

- PROBE: Fully.

44. When you heard of affirmative action policies for the first time, did you think that it was something that could benefit you?

- PROBE: Why? Why Not?

45. When did you learn that you could apply for affirmative action?
46. How was the process through which you ended up applying for affirmative action?  
How did you feel?
- PROBE: Fully.
47. Do you remember other people's input about it? Like, what your parents or your friends said? Do you think you could share a little bit of it?
- PROBE: Fully.
48. Has check-marking yourself Black/Brown when applying to the university made you feel a different race than before?
- PROBE: Fully.
49. Before applying to affirmative action, had you filled up a census form check-marking yourself as Black/Brown?
50. How natural did it feel to check mark yourself as Black/Brown when you applied for the University?
51. Do you think that you would have not labeled yourself as such if it were not for the affirmative action policies?
52. Do you feel more compelled to "be black/brown" after marking Black for affirmative action?
53. After you entered the university, are there still situations in which you feel that you could be considered a different race other than black/brown by other people?
- PROBE: Fully
54. Have there been situations in which you feel like you are of a different race yourself?
- PROBE: Fully
55. If you can imagine a situation in which this scenario is likely, what would it be?

D. Finishing up

Alright, we are just going to finish it up.

56. How old are you?

57. How old were you when you applied for UFPE?

58. Do you have any questions?

Alright. Thank you very much for your participation. Your input was very important. Again, your name will remain confidential, and if you have any more questions and concerns, you have the contact to find me.