

# O silenciamento de meninas/mulheres negras como representação da negligência escolar

*Luiza das Mercês SILVA<sup>1</sup>*  
*Gabriela Reyes ORMENO<sup>2</sup>*

## **Resumo**

Existem diversas formas de manifestação da negligência em relação às meninas/mulheres negras. Contudo, dentro do ambiente escolar, essas ações se apresentam por meio do silenciamento. O presente trabalho tem como objetivo identificar o silenciamento de meninas/mulheres negras enquanto representação da negligência escolar. A metodologia da pesquisa caracteriza-se como do tipo descritiva e aplicada com uma abordagem predominantemente qualitativa. A fim de contribuir com o tema, foi realizado um grupo focal com duas alunas negras do Ensino Médio, do Instituto Federal do Paraná. Como resultado, foi possível, a partir das falas das participantes, comprovar o silenciamento de meninas/mulheres negras como representação da negligência escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** Escola. Meninas negras. Negligência. Silenciamento.

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<sup>1</sup> Pedagoga. Federal University of Paraná.. 0000-0001-7697-5435.  
E-mail: luizaamercês@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Psychologist. Federal University of Paraná. 0000-0003-2803-9436.  
E-mail: gabrielareyes@ufpr.br

# The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence

*Luiza das Mercês SILVA*  
*Gabriela Reyes ORMENO*

## **Abstract**

There are various forms of neglect towards black girls/women. However, within the school environment, these actions manifest through silencing. This study aims to identify the silencing of Black girls/women as a representation of educational neglect. The research methodology is characterized as descriptive and applied with a predominantly qualitative approach. In order to contribute to the topic, a focus group was conducted with two Black high school students from the Federal Institute of Paraná. As a result, it was possible, based on the participants' statements, to confirm the silencing of Black girls/women as a representation of school neglect

**Keywords:** School. Black girls. Neglect. Silencing.

## **El silencio de las niñas/mujeres negras como representación de la negligencia escolar**

*Luiza das Mercês SILVA  
Gabriela Reyes ORMENO*

### **Resumen**

Hay varias formas de manifestación de negligencia relacionadas a las niñas y mujeres negras. Sin embargo, dentro del ámbito escolar estas acciones se presentan a través del silenciamiento. El presente trabajo tiene el objetivo de identificar el callamiento de las niñas/mujeres negras como una representación de la negligencia escolar. La metodología de la investigación se caracterizó por ser descriptiva y con enfoque predominantemente cualitativo. Para contribuir al motivo de la investigación del presente trabajo, se realizó un grupo focal con dos alumnas negras de secundaria del Instituto Federal de Paraná. Como resultado, partiendo de las declaraciones de las participantes, se comprobó el silenciamiento de las niñas/mujeres negras como representación de la negligencia escolar.

**Palabras clave:** Escuela. Niñas negras. Negligencia. Enmudecimiento.

## Introduction

Society is constructed from a sexist perspective towards women, many of whom have been and still are victims of psychological, moral, material, and sexual violence (BERNARDINO; FERREIRA, 2019). Despite the advances made by feminist movements which emerged with the intent of securing gender equality rights in multiple spaces, fostering a new relationship between men and women, and ensuring that women had the freedom and autonomy to make decisions about their lives and bodies (FERREIRA AND OLIVEIRA, 2020) a group led by Black women pointed out that women do not share the same nature, which complicates the sharing of life experiences. Thus, the intersectional Black movement plays an extremely important role, as it carries the hopes of many Black women who do not see themselves represented in other social groups.

Historically, Black women have been silenced by society from childhood, and when they do speak, they are not heard. Therefore, they must shout and assert themselves, often being labeled as crazy, aggressive, or hysterical. In light of this, it becomes clear that public agents need to recognize their responsibilities to understand the effects of the silencing of Black girls/women, whether in the labor market where few Black women reach leadership positions or in education, due to the lack of educational materials that reflect Black history and culture or the fact that there are few Black teachers (MACEDO, CARDOSO, ANDRADE, 2019).

These factors further reinforce the issue of inequality between gender and race, as corroborated by Malpighi, Barreyro, Marigliano, and Leopoldo (2020), who discuss the importance of questioning the space of Black women, particularly highlighting the role of affirmative policies in addressing inequalities and reiterating the need for policies that impact Black women and the social structure.

Considering these actions to confront and reduce the risk factors faced daily by many Black women is also the responsibility of educational institutions and social formative spaces. However, in reality, these are environments that legitimize and reproduce the silencing of Black girls, whether due to the lack of school representation, the low number of Black teachers, or their difficulty in understanding the experiences of these girls/women as something more challenging due to the intersection of gender and race, which consequently constitutes a form of educational neglect.

Thus, it is essential to create spaces for listening, respect, and support for Black girls/women, both in social settings and, particularly, in educational environments. This is necessary to break the historical invisibility of Black women's narratives, as well as to address the conceptions and

challenges faced when dealing with gender and race, making them important players in the discussion.

To contribute to the expansion of discussions on the silencing of Black girls/women within the school environment as a form of educational neglect, and considering the lack of studies that give voice to Black girls/women, this study proposes the following objectives: to categorize the types of educational neglect related to racism; to identify the frequency of the types of neglect that Black girls/women experience within the school environment; and to understand how Black girls/women themselves perceive the occurrence of educational neglect. To achieve this, key variables will be described, such as neglect, lived experiences, lack of representation, and the roles of teachers.

### **The School as a Space that Neglects Black Children**

In all spaces, Black children need to be protected, cared for, and heard. However, instead, they are subjected to violence and harm, both physically and psychologically. The lack of public policies directed toward the Black population is a historical reality in Brazil (FRANCO & SOARES, 2020). Being a Black child in Brazil means growing up exposed to higher risks of violence, not being represented, having one's intellectual capacity questioned, and being part of a society that is structurally racist.

The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), established by Law No. 8.069 of July 13, 1990, emerged as an important instrument aimed at the comprehensive protection of Brazilian children and adolescents, establishing guarantees for adequate and dignified conditions for social, mental, moral, and physical development. The document positions children as subjects of rights and, in this sense, reinforces that the basic rights of children and adolescents are the responsibility of their families and the State.

However, according to Alberto and Silva (2019), the realization of the rights of children and adolescents is far from being achieved. Furthermore, the authors note that when we consider Black children, the path is even more challenging, as this group primarily occupies the most vulnerable regions, is most affected by the low quality of education in the country and income inequality, is the primary victim of homicides, and is the majority in the prison system. The right of children to simply be children is, in reality, relegated to a secondary position in a country where color, as a social marker, comes first.

Building on this, Acioli and Viana (2020, p.03) assert: "A country that does not ensure living conditions and full development for children and adolescents is investing in the incarceration and

The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence death of this segment of society." In this regard, Alberto and Silva (2019) argue that the fact that public policies are not implemented equally for all children in Brazil is what authorizes and justifies the continued marginalization of Black children in society.

Thus, neglect, according to the ECA (1990), occurs when guardians fail to meet the basic physical and emotional needs of a child or adolescent. This is evident in the actions of parents or guardians when they fail to properly feed, clothe, medicate, educate their children, and prevent accidents. It is important to emphasize the difference between neglect and poverty, as in a country with a highly unequal structure like Brazil, these two issues often become conflated: "Neglect occurs independently of poverty; it results from a dynamic established among various economic, social, and community factors, as well as personal issues and deficits in parental skills/behaviors" (PASSIAN et al., 2013, p.64).

Building on this, Candido et al. (2021) argue that neglect is a common form of violence in the daily lives of thousands of children, which can have negative consequences for their development across different dimensions. However, despite being one of the main types of violence, neglect is the least recognized and supported (CANDIDO et al., 2021).

In the school environment, neglect occurs, according to Candido et al. (2021, p.2), "when children are not provided with conditions for their intellectual and moral development, and when harmful habits that interfere with their growth are permitted." Therefore, discussing situations where Black girls/women are not heard, welcomed, or seen within the school environment also involves addressing neglect. These forms of neglect are internalized and imposed in such a way that they are not recognized as violence. School neglect of historically marginalized groups occurs through a subtle manipulation by dominant classes, aiming to invalidate certain beliefs and behaviors.

In educational institutions, students from higher socioeconomic classes are more likely to succeed, as their cultural and linguistic backgrounds are dominant within educational systems: curriculum proposals, pedagogical strategies, linguistic practices, and hierarchical relationships often marginalize and exclude students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the majority of whom are Black (BORDIEU, 1989).

In this sense, the school environment often mirrors the external social landscape. Thus, school neglect towards Black girls/women can be manifested either explicitly or implicitly, but regardless, it is already deeply rooted in school relationships. Moreover, Candido et al. (2021) highlight the difficulty teachers have in identifying neglect as a form of violence within the school space, which perpetuates its occurrence and hinders efforts to address it.

For this reason, Carvalho (2022) emphasizes that discussing school discomfort involves acknowledging the distress felt by Black children throughout their educational and social experiences. According to the author, content and interactions devoid of positive contributions stigmatize the development of Black children. "Consequently, neglecting an entire population belonging to this group, as what is established in childhood also manifests in adulthood" (CARVALHO, 2022, p.37).

As discussed by the authors referenced, there are various forms in which neglect towards Black girls/women manifests. However, within the school environment, these actions are expressed through silencing. By silencing a Black girl whether through the lack of representation, the absence of Black teachers in schools, or the failure to validate their experiences the school contributes to her neglect.

### **Silencing in the School Context and Its Impact on the Construction of the Subjectivities of Black Girls/Women.**

Discussing the experiences of Black girls/women necessitates addressing stereotypes, particularly the standards imposed by a structurally racist and patriarchal society, which are based on analyses derived from collectively shared labels or beliefs about a specific social group, aimed at minimizing someone's behaviors and characteristics (CANDIDO & FERES, 2019).

This social construction of the role of women, manipulated by the patriarchal and sexist system, suggests that being a woman is synonymous with being weak and sensitive, with a role limited to motherhood and domestic duties (LIMA et al., 2019). However, when considering Black women, racism emerges as an additional factor that intensifies their marginalization. According to Santos (2020), Black women experience more intense prejudice and discrimination due to the intersection of race and gender, or intersectionality, where their entire body becomes the object of offenses and judgments.

The term "intersectionality" thus allows us to identify racial and gender discrimination together, enabling a better understanding of how these forms of discrimination operate simultaneously to limit the success of Black women. One of the challenges is that even within feminist and anti-racist movements, race and gender are often seen as mutually exclusive issues.

Supporting this idea, Oliveira and Borba (2019, p.4) argue that: "The myth of racial democracy leads to the discourse that equates the oppressions suffered by all women. However, in countries marked by racism, it is not enough to combat gender inequalities without also fighting racism, as this risks maintaining the oppression of a specific group."

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The issue is recognizing that the experiences of Black women cannot be neatly categorized as either racial discrimination or gender discrimination. It is a dual problem: the discrimination itself and the invisibility of this discrimination within political movements and interventionist policies. Intersectionality, therefore, suggests that we are not always dealing with distinct groups of people but rather overlapping groups.

The tendency is to acknowledge the problem but view it as an issue belonging to the community rather than one that affects women more than the community. The challenge of intersectionality arises when Black women suffer gender discrimination similar to that experienced by dominant women, while also enduring racial discrimination that white women do not frequently face. As a result, Black women must be protected.

It is important to note that the image of Black people has historically been the target of discrimination and prejudice. Such distortions related to the Black woman's body have been present since the period of slavery, during which they were defined and treated as "things," becoming objects to be used and, at the same time, rejected (HOOKS, 1981). The sexist and racist gaze portrays the Black female body as hypersexualized and exotic, reinforced by stereotypes such as "the color of sin." This "sinful" body is only valued and noticed when it becomes synonymous with accessibility and availability. In contrast, the white woman is viewed as beautiful, delicate, and pure (ARRAES, 2014).

Reinforcing the idea that Black beauty is synonymous with ugliness, dirtiness, and imperfection, the perception of Black women's hair as "bad," while straight hair is seen as "good and beautiful," represents the racism imposed on this group. As a result, many Black women change their hair in an attempt to escape a marginalized and discriminated position (MENDES, 2021).

It is important to emphasize that the impacts related to phenotypes whether through the minimization of Black girls'/women's identities, the reproduction of racism, or the silencing of the Black female voice strongly reflect on the social and personal trajectories of Black women. However, during the school years, the process of cultural denial can be intensified, as this is the phase in which girls are discovering themselves, undergoing hormonal and psychological changes, and seeking to form bonds and identities. In this process, Black girls/women suffer the most, as they must not only cope with these changes/discoveries but also learn to deal with the prejudices and discrimination they face (SANTOS, 2020).

Akotirene (2013) argues that the concept of intersectionality is "an analytical lens on structural interaction in its political and legal effects" (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p. 63). Therefore, the focus must go beyond multiple identities and reinforce "how and when Black women are discriminated against

and are more likely to be positioned at identity intersections that make them vulnerable to the collision of modern structures and flows" (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p. 63). The mistake lies in disregarding the multiple discriminatory experiences that Black women may face due to the overlap of oppressions.

However, Akotirene (2019) acknowledges that, like other concepts, intersectionality cannot encompass all realities, as it does not seek to universalize experiences, given that Black feminism stems from the critique of the "universal woman."

Thus, as Oliveira (2020, p. 309) evaluates, it becomes necessary to understand intersectionality as "the intellectual authority of all the women who were once silenced, that is, Black women whose voices were denied since the transatlantic slave trade because whiteness used discourse as a powerful mechanism of domination."

For this reason, the school environment should be a space of welcome and protection. Instead, it becomes a place that ignores racism and reinforces the behavior of aggressors (SANTOS, 2020). As Carvalho (2015) corroborates, the child finds themselves in a situation where they have no representations of their own culture to identify with. Consequently, as Malafaia (2018) discusses, Black girls/women are forced to identify with the culture of their white peers, noting that the process of fitting a Black body into white standards causes pain and confusion in the construction and development of these Black girls/women. According to the author, representation is essential in constructing Black subjectivity and identity, especially when it is possible to see their peers occupying more public and private spaces each day without having to deny their own culture.

In this context, the discrimination and prejudice experienced by Black girls/women, due to the social construction of their role and the stereotypes present since the period of slavery, legitimize the direct or indirect silencing of their voices, which ultimately pushes them further to the margins of society. The act of silencing involves a combination of small limitations imposed daily, which, according to Angela Davis (1981), places them at the bottom of the social pyramid. These same impositions classify them as scandalous, angry, and hysterical when they try to express their opinions. This silencing within the school space occurs through various situations, three of which will be discussed below.

### **Restricted and Imposed Experiences on Black Lives**

As discussed in the previous section, Black girls/women undergo an early process of cultural denial and erasure, as they encounter racism at a very young age. When they enter school, they encounter an institution that silences their existence by, among other reasons, ignoring the entire

The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence social and historical background they carry, which marginalizes them in all aspects: gender, class, and color.

Currently, the Brazilian context consists of an average of 209.5 million people, with 9.4% self-identifying as Black and 46.8% as mixed-race (INSTITUTO BRASILEIRO DE GEOGRAFIA E ESTATÍSTICA, 2018). It is also important to highlight that Brazil is considered a racially mixed country that bears deep and significant scars of racism (PEREIRA & COSTA, 2019). These visible marks, which have accompanied the Black population for more than 400 years, also place them in a condition of permanent social vulnerability: precarious housing; lack of basic sanitation services; insufficient means for family sustenance; exclusion from citizenship; lack of representation and opportunities.

In this context, racism, defined as “a systematic form of discrimination based on race, manifested through conscious or unconscious practices that result in disadvantages or privileges depending on the racial group to which one belongs” (ALMEIDA, 2019, p.25), can be understood through three conceptions. The first is individualistic, where racism is seen as a pathological deficiency due to certain prejudices; the second is institutional, where certain racial groups gain greater advantages through power and domination; and finally, the third is structural, where the normalization of racism in social, political, legal, and economic relations prevents individual and collective accountability for racist acts, thereby legitimizing the reproduction of racial inequality in a naturalized manner.

This last conception, through the denial of racism, underpins the concept of meritocracy, which falsely suggests that Black people who work hard will enjoy the same rights as white people. In reality, this notion has only widened the inequality between white and Black individuals, as it incorrectly assumes that everyone has the same opportunities, rendering anti-racist policies unnecessary.

Supporting these claims, Barbosa, Gonçalves, and Santana (2019) describe how the lack of the aforementioned resources contributes to the weakening and moral and material fragility of individuals. They argue that the Black population lives in a state of permanent marginalization, poverty, and abandonment.

Racism is not just a stance; it is also an action sustained by the hierarchical ranking of races. During the period of slavery, Black individuals endured direct derogatory expressions. After the abolition of slavery, these expressions became entrenched in Brazilian vocabulary, practiced in a veiled but still intense manner. The fact that a significant portion of the population, deeply rooted in

these beliefs, considers them "jokes" allows the judiciary to resist recognizing cases of racism that are, rationally, deemed neutral (ALMEIDA, 2019).

It's important to note, as corroborated by Batista (2018), that structural racism is directly linked to the crises inherent in capitalism, as these crises have adapted societies to various manifestations of racism. The power and domination of the ruling group have relegated Black people to the most marginalized positions in society. In this context, the author states that "racism and sexism put people in their 'proper place,' that is, in the least privileged and most precarious sectors of the economy" (ALMEIDA, 2019, p.160).

This clearly illustrates how deeply embedded racism is in the social structure. Black people occupy subordinate positions in all spaces, whether through structural violence, cultural violence, and/or institutional force. What has changed since the period of slavery are the justifications for these actions, but the actions themselves persist to this day.

The consequences of discriminatory practices extend beyond the present generations. What we refer to as intergenerational discrimination suggests that the effects of social exclusion can be perpetuated over time, affecting multiple generations of the same group and leading to social stratification a phenomenon that hinders the inclusion and mobility of minority groups. Given that these processes are integral to the functioning of social institutions; they perpetuate inequalities between various groups. Thus, the intergenerational nature of discrimination also stems from the difficulty that minorities, especially racial minorities, face in accumulating and passing on wealth to future generations. This hinders people's access to financial resources at crucial moments in their lives, particularly when making important decisions about education and career (MOREIRA, 2017).

These observations are supported by data published in the report *Desigualdades Sociais por Cor ou Raça no Brasil* (Social Inequalities by Color or Race in Brazil), released by IBGE (2019), which shows that the Black population has less access to income and worse living conditions compared to white people. Consequently, they are classified as living below the poverty line, particularly those earning less than \$1.90 per day.

Another striking aspect when analyzing the experiences of the Black population is that the only area in which they lead is in low educational attainment, as they have the highest illiteracy rate compared to the rate among whites (CAZUZA; ALCANTARA, 2019).

Supporting these data, Aguilar (2019) notes that the number of Black people who have not completed their education is high. This can be attributed to economic conditions, lack of access to

The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence schools, among other factors, making it difficult for them to enter higher education and, consequently, attain higher professional positions.

In line with these findings, the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2018) reports that school dropout rates among this population become more apparent in the final years of high school. This may be associated with a lack of interest in studies, as they do not see education as meaningful to their lives; a lack of representation in the educational environment; the need to enter the workforce; lack of family encouragement; among other reasons.

Another negative indicator where the Black population is disproportionately represented is in the number of homicide victims. According to the *Atlas da Violência* (Atlas of Violence, 2019), the annual homicide rate for the Black population in 2017 was 43.4%, compared to 16% for the white population that same year. When gender is added as a factor, the data becomes even more pronounced. Santos (2019), in his study on racial/color differences in mortality due to violence in the Brazilian context, found that skin color is strongly connected to numerous indicators of social injustice, particularly in mortality statistics. The *Atlas da Violência* (2019) further illustrates that Black women account for 66% of the total number of lethal violence victims against women, most of whom are murdered by their partners, within their homes, and with the use of firearms or sharp weapons.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the data related to early pregnancy and skin color. An analysis by the organization *Gênero e Número* (Gender and Number), based on data from the Live Birth Information System (Sinasc/DataSUS), shows that in 2020 alone, 62.74% of pregnancies among adolescent mothers were of young Black women, compared to 36.52% of young white women, 0.38% of yellow women, and 0.36% of indigenous women.

As Costa and Freitas (2021) point out, the lack of future prospects, combined with the absence of social policies, educational and professional projects, and the imposition of societal roles, can lead to motherhood becoming an achievable goal. To these determining factors, the authors add the experiences of violence and abuse at home and the repetition of roles.

Another area where Black girls/women stand out is in cases of rape. According to a study conducted by the *Rede de Observatórios da Segurança* (Network of Security Observatories) at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), based on data from the report "The Color of Violence: An Analysis of Homicides and Sexual Violence in the Last Decade," Black women were victims in 73% of the sexual violence cases reported in Brazil, while white women accounted for 12.8% in 2017. In light of this, Belonia (2019) associates these figures with the fact that Black women have been stereotyped from a young age as "hot" and naturally more sensual than white women. However, this

classification stems from the male gaze, which, since the period of slavery, has viewed the Black female body as a public object.

The consequences of early reproduction and the limitation of already scarce opportunities have been building the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty, trapping thousands of women in a cycle of deprivation in income, education, and socialization. Ultimately, this results in a deprivation of freedom, development, and female emancipation in Brazil. (COSTA E FREITAS, 2021, p.7).

It becomes evident, therefore, that Black girls/women do not have the same opportunities as white girls/women to occupy their space in society. When schools normalize the invalidation of their cultural background, amplify the silencing of their struggles and limitations, and disregard the need for public policies that would place them on an equal footing, it constitutes an indirect form of mistreatment that negatively impacts the lives of Black girls/women.

### **The Lack of Positive Representation and Its Impact on the Lives of Black Girls/Women**

Today, when we discuss emancipatory, anti-racist, and feminist struggles, the term "representation" often comes to the forefront. This concept relates to the feeling of being represented by someone or a group based on shared characteristics, whether physical, behavioral, or sociocultural. It is through this idea that individuals feel part of a group, sharing experiences, possibilities, feelings, and thoughts (CARNEIRO; RUSSO, 2020).

For this reason, when considering the educational process, representation is an essential factor. The process of identification is gradually built from the earliest relationships. Thus, having positive role models, both within and outside the family, is crucial during development and the school phase (CARNEIRO; RUSSO, 2020).

However, when considering the school life of Black children, the lack of this element is striking. This is evident, for example, in the lack of Black teachers and the absence of books and materials that portray Black people as protagonists a positive reference. Consequently, the school environment loses its potential as a space for learning, becoming instead a site of conflicts and exclusions that are normalized through social practices. One such practice is the reinforcement of European standards. In this context, Souza (2019) argues that constructing a positive Black identity becomes a complex and solitary process for Black students, who must struggle against various stereotypes while striving not to erase their existence and history.

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In an effort to change this scenario, Brazil enacted Law No. 10.639/03 twenty years ago, which mandates the teaching of African History and Afro-Brazilian Culture in the basic education curriculum (SOUZA, 2019). The implementation of this law represents progress in securing educational rights and in overcoming racist discourses and practices within the school environment. Consequently, “it also implies a state intervention and the construction of an educational policy that considers diversity and opposes the presence of racism and its effects” (JESUS E GOMES, 2013, p. 22).

However, due to resistance from schools, families, and students, rooted in a racist ideology, the law has not brought about significant progress. Jesus and Gomes (2013) reached this conclusion based on the national research “Pedagogical Practices of Working with Ethnic-Racial Relations in Schools from the Perspective of Law 10.639/2003,” conducted in 2009, which involved fieldwork with 36 schools. The findings revealed that: many schools still lack collective practices and, consequently, involve a small number of professionals, leading to a lack of interest in ethnic-racial issues; a considerable number of schools have authoritarian management, limited relationships with the external public, lack of support for continuing education, and hold generally conservative political and social views; many professionals have limited and stereotyped knowledge about ethnic-racial relations and African history; many institutions only engage in projects and activities related to Law 10.639/2003 on commemorative dates, such as November 20; and many of the pedagogical practices developed by schools are directly related to a single religious perspective, reflecting religious intolerance, particularly towards African-based religions.

This responsibility poses a significant challenge for education professionals, especially those who lack experiences or training focused on ethnic-racial issues, requiring educators to acquire knowledge and theoretical foundations capable of providing them with a broader understanding of social, political, and economic systems (MARQUES; SILVA, 2020).

On the other hand, some professionals in this field argue that they are not qualified to speak on racism, believing it is not their place to do so or feeling that they are appropriating a culture that does not belong to them. However, racism is often downplayed compared to its real magnitude, and although it is present in some activities and projects within the schools' Political-Pedagogical Projects (PPP), these actions are usually addressed only on commemorative dates, making it difficult to enforce Law No. 10.639. Furthermore, acting in this superficial manner fails to create significant impacts, revealing the limited understanding many teachers have on this topic (SOARES E BERBERINO, 2019).

Another aspect to discuss is the tendency of schools to assign the responsibility of conducting activities on commemorative dates to the sole Black teacher on staff. This approach is inefficient, as it does not effectively contribute to the study of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture. The approach often lacks depth in content, leading to neglect of this topic throughout the school year.

Similarly, when discussing Black invisibility and its effects during childhood, we must consider the fact that fairy tales, heroes, and princesses are almost always portrayed for white children (CARNEIRO E RUSSO, 2020). When Black children see only white characters as the main protagonists, while Black individuals remain in the background, they understand that these are the only spaces they can occupy. Conversely, when exposed to diverse narratives without stereotypes, where Black people are valued and their culture is celebrated, they perceive different possibilities in themselves, without needing to deny their ancestry.

Therefore, the role of the teacher in selecting these books is crucial. The greater the literary and illustrative diversity, the higher the quality and quantity of knowledge acquired, leading to more positive impacts on students' lives. According to Souza (2018), when children's literature values Afro-Brazilian culture, it contributes to changing the racist ideal, brings significant benefits to all involved in the educational context, and helps in the appreciation of Brazil's ethnic-racial composition.

Given this, the school, as an influential space in children's lives, holds responsibility for shaping their identities. However, when racism experienced in schools, the lack of representation in educational materials and staff, and the absence of effective strategies by schools to combat racism are combined, the likelihood increases that Black children will feel violated, eventually drop out of school, and, in turn, lead their children down the same path, perpetuating intergenerational racism.

### **Black Teachers and Their Influence on the Learning of Black Students**

Another crucial aspect to discuss is the importance of Black teachers for non-white students. Questions such as "How many Black teachers did we have during our school years?" or "Which school has a Black principal?" are fundamental in this analysis (IRVINE; VILLEGAS, 2010). In most cases, within the school environment, Black individuals are found in roles such as janitors, domestic workers, nannies, aides, or other positions not considered leadership roles.

This issue is intertwined with structural racism, deeply rooted in society, and is closely related to the representation of Black students. In schools, anti-racist education cannot simply involve bringing Black children into these spaces. Placing Black children in a violent and racist environment will negatively mark their entire educational process.

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On the other hand, according to Irvine and Villegas (2010), Black students tend to perform better in school when they have Black teachers throughout their academic journey. The authors also emphasize that "Black teachers use their personal knowledge of the language, culture, and life experiences of Black students to enhance their academic outcomes and school experiences" (IRVINE & VILLEGAS, 2010, p. 185). The idea is that Black teachers, by serving as positive role models, boost students' self-esteem, motivating them to seek their place in society and reducing the silencing they face daily (IRVINE; VILLEGAS, 2010). In this role, Black teachers help students navigate the school culture, which often contradicts and opposes their own culture. Moreover, they provide an opportunity for white students to reassess their stereotyped views of Black people, helping to dispel myths about racial inferiority.

Sotero (2009) points out that for the Black population, there is a process of dismantling the notion that manual and low-wage labor is the only path to success. According to data released by INEP in 2017, of the 400,000 individuals teaching in public and private universities in Brazil, only 16% identified as Black or mixed-race. In contrast, 77% of these professionals identified as white. Another striking point is that while more than half of the Brazilian population identifies as Black, there is still significant inequality in accessing higher education.

These data highlight the urgent need for effective public policies to ensure access and retention of Black students at all educational levels. An analysis of secondary data from the Conecta survey conducted by the Federal University of Paraná in 2019 revealed that 75% of the 330 respondents who experienced racial discrimination in the university environment cited this as a key factor in their decision to leave the institution.

Therefore, Black students are more likely to face greater challenges in remaining in school, often without the school taking favorable measures on the topic. The scheduling of classes, library hours, research group meetings, and extension activities all condition, hinder, or make it impossible for Black students to participate, especially those who are poor and need to contribute to their family's income. It is worth noting that some measures are already being implemented by the government to ensure the effective admission of Black students to universities, such as quota programs and new admission modalities like Enem and Sisu (SOUZA & SILVA, 2020). Additionally, during their studies, Black students increasingly demand Black references in the bibliographies, texts, and practices used in their courses, fostering discussions and reflections that are often taboo in universities and making the path to higher education more accessible for others.

"Being and remaining in academia becomes an act of resistance day after day in the face of combating racism within this space, recognizing that despite

many advances in ethnic-racial relations, much still remains to be achieved. This environment continues to be predominantly occupied by white men and women in a country where over 50% of the population is Black (PNAD, 2015). It is important to highlight that the achievements and progress in the field of diversity and ethnic-racial relations result from the struggles of the Black movement advocating for policies that seek equity and equality in defense of the Black population throughout history, both within and outside the educational sphere." (ROSA, 2019, p.2).

Finally, according to Carneiro and Russo (2020), when the school environment includes Black teachers among its staff, it increases the likelihood of Black individuals boosting their self-esteem and contributes to self-affirmation, self-worth, and empowerment. The authors also note that the racial representation created by this diversity fosters a positive identification for children.

## **Methodology**

In alignment with the research objective, information was gathered through a focus group, which involved the spontaneous oral expression of participants during interactions and debates on the topic, divided into two sessions. The research was conducted with a group of two Black female high school students from the Federal Institute of Paraná.

In the first session, the video "Racism is Dangerous in Children's Education," produced by *Canal Preto* (Black Channel) and available on YouTube, was presented. This video discusses the educational process of Black children in Brazil, which is still significantly impacted by structural racism. The video, which lasts five minutes, was used to introduce the topic. After the video, the students were asked, "What are your thoughts on what was described in the video?" emphasizing that the objective was to hear their opinions. Following this, the research objective was reiterated, which is to contribute to more in-depth discussions on the silencing of Black girls/women within the school environment as a form of school negligence.

The students were then invited to discuss what was presented and relate it to their daily lives. Through this initial discussion, the conversations from the first day aimed to analyze what types of school negligence are related to racism and understand the experiences of school negligence among Black girls/women and their perception of these occurrences. To achieve these objectives, the following guiding questions were used: What obstacles do you face within the school environment? How do you feel about this environment? Do you feel represented and valued by your teachers and classmates? Do teachers discuss racial issues in the classroom? How often? How many Black teachers have you had during your academic journey? In what spaces and materials at school do you find positive representations? Have you ever felt excluded? If so, could you tell me why? What situation

The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence most impacted your academic journey? Do you feel that you are valued and heard like your classmates? What would you change within the school? These guiding questions were used to keep the discussion going and to steer the research.

In the second session, the terms "silencing" and "negligence" were introduced through a brief explanation of their definitions. The students were informed that negligence is a common form of violence when a child is not provided with the conditions for their intellectual and moral development, along with the permissiveness towards habits that interfere with development. Silencing, on the other hand, results from the discrimination and prejudice experienced by Black girls/women due to the social construction of their roles and the stereotypes present since the slavery period, which legitimizes the direct or indirect silencing of these girls/women, pushing them further to the margins of society.

Based on their observations, the discussions from the first session, and the summary presented to them, the goal of the second session was to understand if they felt violated and silenced within the school environment and whether they perceived this relationship similarly. To achieve this objective, the guiding questions were: Do you believe that the school can be violent towards Black girls/women? How? What are the ways society and the school use to silence Black girls/women? Are white girls/women also silenced? Do white girls/women experience prejudice like Black girls/women? Are the experiences of Black girls/women respected and valued in schools? Is silencing Black girls/women a form of violence?

To support the data interpretation, a dialectical qualitative approach was used to categorize and analyze the information and results related to the group interactions, in accordance with the research stages and objectives.

After the group interactions, the interpretation was carried out in three parts. The first part analyzed the experiences of negligent situations with Black girls/women within the school environment, based on the discussions brought forth by the participants. The second part categorized the types of school negligence related to racism and how frequently they appeared. In the third phase, the findings from the first two phases were compared with the literature review to analyze the silencing of Black girls/women as a representation of school negligence related to racism.

## **Results and discussion**

Considering the research theme, the focus group discussions aimed to give voice to the participating students, which allowed for an understanding of their perspectives on the experiences of Black girls/women in the school environment. The results will be discussed below through the

words of the students, who have been identified for the purposes of this research as Maya Angelou (1928-2014) and Toni Morrison (1931-2019) to protect their identities.

At this point, it is important to briefly explain the significance of the names being used. Maya Angelou was a great American poet and a cultural icon for the African American community, known for her activism in the civil rights movement and her fight for racial and gender equality. Throughout her life, she earned five internationally recognized awards. Toni Morrison, also a Black feminist activist, was an American writer, editor, and professor who became the first Black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993.

As an introduction, the students were asked about their relationship and feelings towards their school. Maya Angelou mentioned that when she faces difficulties at school, she tends to feel down, a challenge she attributed to her previous school experience. However, both students shared that they currently have a positive relationship with their school, primarily due to the attitude of the teachers at their current institution they no longer feel the same sense of distance they experienced in their previous schools. Both expressed that they enjoy studying at the Federal Institute (IF), as they feel welcomed by the staff and their peers.

When discussing feelings related to their value as Black women, Toni Morrison noted that she had very few Black peers at her previous school, which left her feeling like she lacked a friend who truly understood her experiences as a Black person. At the IF, however, she has found such individuals. Additionally, she mentioned that the place where she feels most represented at school is among the Black students and with "the aunts" (a term she uses for the school's cleaning staff), as she feels comfortable with them.

These statements highlight the importance of school representation. As discussed by Souza (2019), representation allows students to see greater possibilities for themselves through others, helping them to build a positive identity without needing to deny their characteristics and history. When Maya Angelou mentioned that she did not have a peer who truly understood her experiences, she underscored the importance of identifying with someone, while also confirming that the experiences of Black and white girls/women are not the same, emphasizing the need for Black girls/women to have positive Black role models during their educational journey.

In discussing representation, it is necessary to consider stereotypes and standards. Black women are marginalized from an early age for various reasons, including both their gender and race. Specifically, in Brazil, the portrayal of Black women has been shaped in the public imagination over the past four centuries. This means that even when the conditions that perpetuate these images

The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence disappear, the stereotypical ideas persist (SILVA, 2021). As a result, their skin color, hair, body, features, and even their behavior and way of speaking are often not enough to earn them respect and admiration. In their conversation, the interviewees identified the aspect they consider most urgent in relation to Black women. Maya Angelou noted that she currently sees more Black girls/women embracing themselves, partly because they are seeing Black women more frequently in various spaces, such as in some advertisements. However, if she could change something today, it would be the hypersexualization of the Black female body a concern also raised by Toni Morrison.

Building on this, Toni Morrison shared that, despite encouragement from her older sister, she is still in the process of accepting her physical characteristics and body she has not yet fully accepted her skin color and its details. On the other hand, Maya Angelou mentioned that she currently has a better relationship with her appearance: her family has always encouraged her to embrace her body, and she believes that growing up in Salvador, close to many Black people who proudly embrace their race, has influenced this process:

*"I like who I am overall, and I wear the clothes I want."* (ANGELOU, 2 DE DEZEMBRO DE 2022).

In light of these different locations, the students compared their experiences and agreed that the greater exposure to white people in Curitiba intensifies the imposition of standards, making it more difficult for Black people to achieve self-acceptance and increasing feelings of exclusion and low self-esteem.

Continuing the discussion on representation, the students shared their perceptions of their teachers. Maya Angelou mentioned that some teachers frequently bring racial discussions into the classroom, but she feels the lack of more Black teachers, as they currently have only one Black teacher, who teaches History.

Regarding this point, the students could not recall having had Black teachers during their educational journey. To them, this absence signifies a lack of opportunities for Black people in other positions, as they mainly see Black individuals in roles such as cleaning and security. In contrast, they have formed a stronger connection with their History teacher, not only because he is fun but also because they feel represented by him and appreciate that he consistently brings racial discussions into the classroom.

Having a Black role model in the school environment goes beyond learning about one's roots and culture; it is connected to personal aspects such as self-confidence and security. For the students,

having someone older to look up to in school a place for development and identity building would help them better navigate situations of racism.

In addition to the History teacher, they shared that their Portuguese teacher also opens up space for this discussion, such as through a project that honored Black women at the IF, a task they fondly remembered. However, it is worth noting that, out of the 18 subjects they take, only these two teachers address such issues. This observation aligns with the thesis of Lucimar Gonçalves (2012), who argues that discussions on diversity or discrimination are often limited to Black teachers. This is justified by three possible reasons: the school itself often assigns this role exclusively to Black teachers; in other cases, there is a lack of interest from other teachers; and many professionals claim they do not know how to handle these topics due to a lack of experience, qualification, or even an inability to manage diversity. "This lack of preparation, which we must consider as a reflection of our myth of racial democracy, undoubtedly compromises the fundamental goals of our mission in the process of shaping the responsible citizens of tomorrow" (MUNANGA, 2008, p. 11).

During this discussion, we talked about Law No. 10,639, which made it mandatory to include Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in the curriculum for elementary and high schools. However, as mentioned, even after 20 years, studies show that the implementation of this law has been inadequate. According to Meinerz (2018), studies and lessons on Afro-Brazilian culture are often limited to November, during Black Consciousness Week. Given this, I asked if they felt this was the case at their school. In response, Toni Morrison (December 2, 2022) stated: *"Yes, because of the month and the day, things definitely become more intense. Only these two teachers care enough about these issues to bring them up throughout the rest of the year. Maybe there should be more, like books. In the subjects, they could introduce these discussions by assigning us some books to read."* Building on this, Oniesko and Ferreira (2016) point out that Black students need to see themselves positively represented in textbooks and among the teaching staff, as this can support pluralistic practices that embrace ethnic-racial diversity through unbiased content.

Considering the experiences of Black and white girls/women, Toni Morrison highlighted the issue of colorism when explaining how she experiences racism:

*"Maya Angelou, who has darker skin, will experience more racism than I do, and compared to white girls/women, it's the same; they don't experience what we go through. They don't know what it's like to walk into a store and be followed or watched just for being Black"* (MORRISON, 2 DE DEZEMBRO DE 2022).

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*Toni Morrison agreed with her colleague's response and added that she notices white girls/women have better experiences compared to Black girls/women. For example, she said: "I always see Black girls/women from the IF taking the bus, but I don't see white girls/women doing that."* (MORRISON, 2 DE DEZEMBRO DE 2022).

Toni Morrison's statement is justified by previously presented data, which indicate that Black women face the highest rates of poverty and inadequate housing, exhibit higher levels of illiteracy, and are the most frequent victims of homicide, domestic violence, and sexual assault. These statistics confirm that the experiences of Black girls are significantly more challenging due to societal factors. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that the intersectionality of race and gender strongly influences the educational trajectories of these girls/women.

The young researcher, who is also Black, found it relevant to share a personal experience from her school years: *"For many years, I felt the need to be the best in the class because, from a young age, I understood that to reach the places that white people could, I had to work much harder. Therefore, since I wanted to achieve the space that I only saw white people attaining (going to college, reaching high positions, traveling), I always pushed myself hard and consistently strived to get high grades."* (ANGELOU, 2 DE DEZEMBRO DE 2022). At this point, Maya Angelou agreed and joked that our experiences are the same. The student shared that she always had the same feeling, but currently, her biggest pressure comes from her siblings, as they are all Black and went to university right after high school, so she seeks the same for herself. This point corroborates Moura's idea (2018, p. 540) by stating that:

Based on racism and the consequent racial hierarchy constructed, being Black comes to mean assuming an inferior, disqualified, and lesser position. Meanwhile, sexism acts in the disqualification of the feminine." It is clear that in the fight against discrimination, Black women have had to make even greater efforts than white women, as they are subjected to a double discrimination stemming from the enslaved origins of Black people in society.

Therefore, despite the existence of public policies and affirmative actions on paper, such as the Statute of Racial Equality a government measure aimed at reducing the impacts of structural racism and ensuring that the Black population has equal access to health, employment, housing, and education there is still a need for additional policies and actions to be created and effectively implemented to achieve equity.

With these statements, we were able to address the following question: "Are your experiences, as Black girls/women, truly valued by your teachers?"

For Maya Angelou (December 2, 2022), it depends on the teacher: *“The Portuguese teacher perceives and values our experiences a lot. I think that if I brought something to another teacher and spoke openly, they would pay attention, but they wouldn’t notice it on their own.”*. Drawing from her experience, Toni Morrison added: *“In my Elementary School and even until a couple of months ago, I always felt excluded, and the teachers never did anything. Here at the school, it depends: for some, it works as Maya Angelou said. But, for example, the Art teacher organized a circle and gave me the opportunity to talk about some things, and today I don’t feel as excluded anymore.”*.

Reflecting on their experiences led to a discussion about silencing and structural racism. Regarding this topic, Toni Morrison mentioned that having more Black teachers from a young age would be much better for a student’s development, as she believes that only these teachers truly understand the experiences of Black students, *“Not having them is a form of silencing, and it will take a long time to change this”* (MORRISON, DECEMBER 2, 2022).

Maya Angelou discussed the negative impact on Black people when they see only white women in prominent images. She noted that it leads to the belief that they can only occupy certain spaces, like being custodians, for example.

*“I always had important Black figures in my life and read many books thanks to my mother’s encouragement, not from school. Unfortunately, if a child doesn’t have this at home, they won’t get it from anywhere else”* (ANGELOU, DECEMBER 2, 2022)).

From these responses, it is clear that both young Black women understand that the lack of positive representation and the absence of effective discussion on racial issues are indeed forms of silencing and maintaining structural racism.

To conclude, the discussion reached the topic of school neglect. On this subject, Toni Morrison stated that racism starts early: *“White girls have more friends, can have boyfriends, and it extends from that to jokes/comments”* (MORRISON, DECEMBER 2, 2022).

In response, Maya Angelou shared that she always felt quite excluded in schools by white girls and doesn’t remember any teachers addressing this issue. Both girls view these experiences as examples of school neglect, as they believe their race was a motivating factor for these exclusions and explains why white girls could have certain things that they could not. Due to not being protected, supported, or heard by the schools, they feel they were violated, as these memories are traumatic and have impacted their personal and social relationships, affecting their self-perception and interactions with others.

The silence of black girls/women as a representation of school negligence

In addressing the final question about potential actions by schools that undermine black students and could even lead them to abandon their studies, they mentioned:

*The response from Maya Angelou was: “The lack of more black teachers and the limitation of discussions on racial issues to November” (ANGELOU, December 2, 2022),*

*Toni Morrison added: “The lack of materials that positively represent Black images, blackest people in the school being from the cleaning staff, teachers staying silent when they see us suffering from racism or being excluded, and reproducing beauty standards in the classroom” (MORRISON, December 2, 2022).*

Thus, when asked if, based on everything we discussed, they consider that schools can be violent towards Black female students, they directly responded that they do.

Finally, when asked what they would say today to a 12-year-old Black girl entering adolescence, Toni Morrison said: *“Trust yourself more and don’t compare yourself with others, because everyone has their own way. For us, it will always be more difficult, but things will change”* (MORRISON, December 2, 2022).

## **Final considerations**

During the analysis of discussions brought up by Black female students from the Federal Institute of Paraná regarding their relationship with the school institution, three main forms of silencing of Black girls/women by the school were identified.

The responses align with current research discussing how Black girls, due to the intersection of race and gender, still need to fight for their place in society. Thus, it can be asserted that the silencing of Black girls/women is a representation of school negligence.

Reaffirming what was previously discussed, school negligence is characterized by the failure to provide children with essential support for their intellectual and moral development. Derogatory language practiced in schools, harms, hurts, and offends many Black children, as words and expressions are used to propagate hatred. In this context, it is crucial to understand that racism is not a joke or a game and should not be trivialized. Therefore, when school management does not inhibit the occurrence of racist practices and does not strive to deconstruct these actions, it ends up being complicit.

The suffering caused by racism and social vulnerability exacerbates the risk factors related to the well-being, mental health, and academic performance of Black children. Therefore, it is crucial to implement new policies that are meaningful in mitigating the impacts of racism experienced by Black children.

Finally, despite the limited number of studies exploring the experiences of neglect within the school environment and the perceptions of these students on the subject, as well as efforts to categorize which types of school neglect are related to racism, the literature review on Black girls/women, combined with the results from the focus group, has validated that the silencing of Black girls/women whether through the absence of Black teachers, lack of representation, or the delegitimization of their experiences as Black girls is a representation of school negligence.

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