

**Self vs. Social Classifications of Race:
Inconsistency, Category Ambiguity and Affirmation in Brazil***

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This study examines the extent of inconsistency, category ambiguity, and affirmation in racial self-classification with data from a national survey of Brazil. The effects of class and reference groups are also investigated. The findings show that Brazilians often self-classify in racial categories that are inconsistent with their social classification and in ambiguous categories. Such persons tend to be poor, uneducated and live in more racially heterogeneous places. The findings suggest that racial classification is segmented by class and that nonwhites residing in predominately white areas present reactive identities by disproportionately choosing consistent and less ambiguous identities. Results also suggest that earlier work overemphasized the middle class, was selective of particular localities and that Brazilian patterns of racial classification may be changing. The tendency for more educated black youth to identify in a racially assertive category also suggests change. Finally, implications for black activism and affirmative action are discussed.

Self vs. Social Classifications of Race:

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Social scientists often rely on race data where respondents classify themselves. However, self-classification by a particular individual may vary from how that person is classified by others. Since race is often considered to be physically apparent, users of race data often assume that self and social classifications are the same or nearly the same. Furthermore, racial classification of respondents by themselves or by third parties may be subject to situational or contextual influences. The degree and the manner in which self and social classifications of race differ have implications for studies of racism and racial inequality. For example, studies of discrimination using human capital models tend to rely on self-classified race even though we may racially classify others and discriminate accordingly.

Unlike non-racial ethnic identities, racial identities are often imposed on the basis of one's appearance or ancestry. However, biological traits are critical but often not the only criteria in determining race especially when race is based on appearance. Individuals may sometimes negotiate and creatively manipulate their racial identities and, more specifically, their racial classification. Racial identity or racial self-classification is about claims to a racial group, where individuals may depict themselves as bearers of certain racial characteristics rather than merely choosing the category that best describes one's phenotype or genotype. Furthermore, individuals may choose racial labels with connotations that best reflect their identity in societies where multiple categories may be used to classify the same person.

In this paper, I examine how Brazilians racially self-classify and the extent to which self-classification reflects their race as described by interviewers. I focus on the extent to which Brazilians classify themselves in (1) census racial categories that are inconsistent with their socially ascribed race (inconsistency); (2) the popular but ambiguous category *moreno* (category ambiguity) and (3) the *negro* category, the term preferred by the Afro-Brazilian movement (affirmation). Furthermore, I examine the influence of social class and racial reference group variables on self-classification. I use data from a national survey for Brazil that codes race according to self-classification, using both close-ended Census categories and open-ended responses, and interviewer classification the using close-ended format.

BACKGROUND

Racial classification in Brazil is especially complex and ambiguous (Nogueira 1955; Harris 1964; Wagley 1968; Sansone 1995). Furthermore, it is based primarily on appearance so that full-blooded siblings can often be of different races (Harris 1964). Unlike the US and South Africa, racial categories are numerous and lie along a color continuum with much overlap and unclear limits between categories (Harris 1964; Sansone 1995; Ribeiro 1996). Whereas racial categories were defined to maintain and enforce Jim Crow Laws in the US and Apartheid Laws in South Africa, a comparable legal system was not established in Brazil, precluding the need for legal definitions. Race was never used as an explicit variable for social organization in Brazil, at least since Abolition in 1888. Even during 19th century slavery, race was usually not a good marker

of slave status in Brazil since most Brazilian born blacks were free. Rather, African birth was the best marker of slave status and by 1872, sixteen years before Abolition, freed blacks were three times as numerous as slaves (Klein 1969; Skidmore 1972).

In recent years, racial consciousness and discussion of racial issues have clearly increased as Brazilians now acknowledge the pervasive racism and high levels of racial inequality in their country (Telles 1995; Guimaraes 1995). Although the national ideology since the 1930s maintains that Brazil is a racial democracy, where racism is insignificant (Pierson 1967; Skidmore 1972; Hanchard 1994), a recent national survey shows that 89% of Brazilians of all races believe that whites are prejudiced against blacks (Folha de São Paulo 1995).¹ Television, newspapers and other media forms have brought the issues of race and racism into national debate for the first time. Whereas the media virtually ignored racial issues, it has become more attentive to racism and racial inequality in recent years. Even the popular *telenovelas* (nightly soap operas) have begun to include nonwhite actors in serious roles and often show scenes revealing interracial tensions. Also, the increasing availability of international news reveals racial and ethnic conflicts and a growing world music industry demonstrates black cultural expressions and black consciousness in other societies (Sansone 1995). Such attention to race is likely to have made Brazilians increasingly conscious about their own and others' race.

¹ There was no significant variation by race in the opinion survey. 89% of whites, 88% of browns and 91% of blacks agreed with this assertion.

THREE FEATURES OF RACIAL CLASSIFICATION

Inconsistency

Throughout Latin America, scholars have found substantial flexibility in the use of racial categories, allowing individuals to claim racial identities that may be inconsistent with the way they are perceived by others (Harris 1964; Belote and Belote 1984; Wade 1995). The lack of clearly defined racial boundaries and the possibility of classifying in more than one category contributes to inconsistency. Thus, identity switching in Latin America is often not mere “passing”, i.e. occurring through deception, but in some cases is fully legitimate. For example, a mixed race person may identify herself as black to black friends, as brown on official documents and as *moreno* to white colleagues.

Although inconsistency in racial classification in Latin America may be greater than in other multiracial societies, researchers have also found persons of African origin in the US and South Africa to change their racial classification (Lelyveld 1985; Davis 1991). Although strict racial classification laws in these countries permitted little inconsistency between social and self-classification, the end of such laws is likely to lead to greater inconsistency. For other groups, like Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans, identity switching is more common (Hahn et al 1992; Nagel 1996, Eschbach and Gomez 1997). Also, individuals often racialize and thus distinguish members of ethnic groups not commonly considered to be racially differentiated in places as diverse as the US, Eastern Europe and Central Africa. Such social classification is based on perceived

markers including facial characteristics, height, clothes, and lifestyle but is often inconsistent with the way these persons identify themselves (Horowitz 1985; Szelenyi and Treiman 1993; Malkki 1995).

Category Ambiguity

Ambiguous racial categories make the Brazilian system more unique. In a 1976 national survey, researchers asked Brazilians to classify their race using any category. *Moreno*, roughly translated as brown², was the second most common response after white and comprised 34 percent of all responses (Silva 1987). However, field researchers have found the term *moreno* ambiguous enough to substitute for almost any other racial category (Nogueira 1955, Pacheco 1987, Stephens 1989). Its definition varies from (1) light skinned persons with dark hair (Hutchinson 1957:120) to (2) a person of mixed race or parentage who generally has brunet hair (Wagley 1963) to (3) a black person (Levine 1979: 143). Harris et al (1993) found that if *moreno* were substituted for the brown term in the Census, fully 63% of residents of a small town would be *moreno* compared to 32% in the official brown category.

The ambiguous *moreno* category downplays racial differences and permits a relatively large percentage of Brazilians to be average or ordinary, thus making them socially acceptable to peers across the racial continuum. In her study of a neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, Pacheco (1987) found that residents in a poor multiracial community

² Although *moreno* and the Census term *pardo* both translate as brown, their definitions in Portuguese are clearly distinct. From this point on, I use *moreno* in the original

would claim “we are all *morenos* around here” or something similar as if *moreno* referred to Brazilians in general (Pacheco 1987). The near universalism of the term is reflected in popular “soccer” culture which proclaims *moreno* as the ideal and normative color category, where only the extremes do not fit (Guimarães 1995). The use of this ambiguous term rather than more explicit terms is consistent with the discomfort Brazilians have in discussing racial issues, which are generally not treated in an open manner (Nogueira 1955, Sansone 1995, Twine 1992).

Affirmation

Fernandes (1978:293) argues that under a racial democracy ideology, blacks have been denied self-affirmation as blacks in spite of their socioeconomic marginality. A small but growing Afro-Brazilian movement claims the ambiguity and use of multiple terms in the Brazilian system and Brazil’s veiled racism have prevented such affirmation and thus the mobilization of popular support by Afro-Brazilians³ in their attempts to combat racial injustice (Dzidzienyo 1985; Hanchard 1994). Thus many Afro Brazilian leaders call for an assertion of a black identity for all persons of any African origin and the dropping of the brown or mixed race category from official data gathering efforts. Although classification as black (*negro* and *preto*) has long been stigmatized, activists

Portuguese and brown to refer to the more unambiguous Census term *pardo*.

³ I use the term Afro Brazilians or nonwhites to refer to brown and black Brazilians collectively. Although the Afro Brazilian movement prefers both groups to be classified as *negro*, this term and the Census term *preto* translate as black and commonly refer only to those at the darkest end of the color spectrum. To distinguish these, I thus use *negro* in the original Portuguese and “black” to refer to the census term *preto*.

call for all Brazilians of at least some African appearance or origin, to affirm their blackness, classifying themselves as *negro* (Nascimento 1982; Andrews 1991; Sansone 1995).

De Vos and Romanucci Ross (1995) define ethnicity as a collective sense of social belonging and ultimate loyalty related to parentage and a belief in common origins. According to this definition, African Americans are members of an ethnic as well as a racial group because black identity in the US is believed to be collectively shared. Furthermore, a history of segregation in the US has accentuated cultural and ethnic differences between blacks and whites, leading to unmistakable color lines and racial identities. In turn, these have led to the formation of a unified black movement in those countries while the absence of legal segregation and ambiguous identities have prevented this in Brazil. By contrast, such identities are more fragmented in Brazil so that persons of African origin are not easily classified as members of an Afro-Brazilian ethnic group. Thus, Afro-Brazilian leaders seek to create ethnicity based on African origin and a common experience of subordination. This is similar to cases like the Sinhalese in Ceylon, where threats to the unity of this group led to identity affirmation which resolved internal stresses resulting from their political and social degradation (Obeyeskere 1995).

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF CLASSIFICATION

Class Effects

Racial classification, like ethnic classification in general, may vary by social context. Brazilianist scholars, in particular, have paid attention to how class affects the

calculus of racial classification in Brazil. Based on several decades of studying a town in Brazil, Marvin Harris and his colleagues (Harris 1964, Harris et al 1993) find a tendency for *race-color identity to shift toward white among wealthier and better-educated nonwhite individuals*. Many better off blacks classify as brown or even white and better off browns classify as white. This finding is consistent with the popular Brazilian adage that “money whitens” (Degler 1986). Similarly, Wood’s (1991) analysis of census data finds that 38 percent of a 1950 black cohort reclassified as brown by 1980 and he concludes that the upward mobility of some blacks during the period permitted such reclassification.

On the other hand, other scholars claim that *money does not whiten one’s racial classification to any significant degree*, as Harris proposes, but rather money may whiten merely by making nonwhites more socially acceptable to whites (Wagley 1968, Wade 1995). Wagley (1968) observed in his study of small villages in the North region that if money actually whitens one’s racial classification, its effect, if any, is minor. He claims that Brazilians are particularly attentive to a continuum of color differences. Based on his study of Colombia, which he contends is very similar to Brazil regarding the dynamics of racial identity, Wade (1995) also disagreed with Harris about the ability of blacks to be racially reclassified. He claims that Harris’ findings were context specific and might be open to person of mixed blood and physically ambiguous identity but that a typically black person is classified as such no matter how wealthy they are.

Also, the limited design of previous studies on Brazilian racial classification to single towns limits the generalizability of such findings to contemporary Brazil. By

examining only towns, usually isolated ones, the evidence is consequently only for one point in this very diverse country. In contemporary Brazil, where 47 percent of the population lives in places of 100,000 or more (Associação Brasileira de Estudos Populacionais 1996), the politics of racial identity have become more salient. Studies have shown that in large metropolitan areas like Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, the African origin population is especially aware of racism and of their own racial identities (Sansone 1995, Cunha forthcoming). Because Brazil has rapidly urbanized and race has become a central issue only in recent years, the findings of earlier studies might not be generalizable for most of contemporary Brazil. Also, racial classification may be changing as at least one study suggests. Kottack (1992) found that twenty-five years after his original fieldwork in the Northeast coastal town of Arembepe, residents used fewer categories and made more consistent racial distinctions.

Reference Group Effects

Barth (1969) argued that ethnic identity was articulated and shaped in the process of interaction with others and ethnic identity may adjust itself to the specific circumstance of any ethnic interaction. This position stood in contrast to previous formulations that defined ethnicity on the basis of objective traits and characteristics. Racial identity may be manipulated in which the extent of exposure to persons of a particular racial group may lead individuals to present themselves in particular ways. However, because racial markers are often indelible and stand out, the degree of manipulation is likely to be more limited than for non-racial ethnic identities. In the

following paragraphs we present three hypotheses about how racial reference groups, particularly local racial composition and race of spouse, might affect self-classification.

Wade (1995) notes that whitening or acceptance of blacks in non-black society may occur through distancing oneself from black culture, stereotyped black behavior and black networks as well as through marriage to a lighter skin partner. To be accepted in white society, such individuals may downplay their blackness rather than racially reclassify. Similar arguments have been made for Ecuador and Guatemala (Van den Berghe 1967; Belote and Belote 1984). Seen in this way, blacks in places with relatively few blacks may classify themselves in either lighter or more ambiguous categories. *According to the whitening theory, nonwhites would lighten in predominately white locales or where they intermarry with lighter skin persons.*

On the other hand, less racial heterogeneity might lead to a reactive identity. That is, members of numerically small groups may stand out because their color is different from the norm, therefore accentuating perceived racial boundaries (Blau 1977). Thus, *persons who are in the numerical minority would be most likely to classify themselves in ways that are especially consistent with their color and in less ambiguous categories.* At the other extreme, where whites are a lower proportion of the population, i.e. where there is greater racial heterogeneity, whites, browns and blacks may choose more ambiguous and less consistent categories.

The lack of comparative studies of racial classification across Brazilian regions and the claim of many case studies that findings are generalizable to Brazil suggests a third hypothesis that *racial reference groups have no effect on identity* (Nogueira 1955;

Harris 1964, Wagley 1968; Harris et al 1992). The tendency to generalize for all Brazil may come from a general notion that nation states are communities of unified social realities that are clearly demarcated from others (Anderson 1983)

In addition to the racial composition of the community, racial reference groups may also occur at a more intimate level where the frame of reference is the spouse. In this case, marriage to a spouse that is of a lighter or darker color category may influence how the respondent identifies. If one attempts to be ordinary or average, this means choosing the same category as one's spouse, inasmuch as possible, or choosing an ambiguous category as Wade (1994) suggests. Under the whitening hypothesis, persons who marry lighter spouses are especially likely to classify themselves in lighter or more ambiguous categories. If one's identity is reactive, endogamy would imply the greater likelihood of self-classification in a more consistent and less ambiguous category.

METHODS

The Survey and Sample

I analyze data from a national face to face survey collected by the *Data Folha Instituto de Pesquisas*, the survey unit of the *Folha de São Paulo*, one of Brazil's major daily newspapers. The survey was carried out in April of 1995 and is officially called "300 Anos de Zumbi: Os Brasileiros e o Preconceito de Cor"⁴ (300 Years of Zumbi⁴; Brazilians and Racial Prejudice). Data is based on a stratified national random sample of the urban

⁴ The title refers to 300 years since the birth of Zumbi in 1695, the leader of a runaway slave colony (Quilombo de Palmares) which lasted nearly 100 years.

population 16 and over. After selecting municipalities at random from within socioeconomic level, region and size strata, successive random samples are taken of neighborhoods, then streets and then individuals. The full sample consists of 5014 persons sampled across 121 municipalities and roughly matches data from the 1991 Census on several important variables, including race, age and sex, plus or minus the statistical range of error (Folha de São Paulo 1995).

Previous research on racial classification in Brazil has focused on persons in the black to white continuum, which includes the vast majority of the Brazilian population. The 1991 Brazilian census and this survey provide only five close ended and relatively unambiguous response categories⁴, which are white (*branco*), brown (*pardo*), black (*preto*), Asian (*amarelo*) and indigenous (*indigena*). Because the inclusion of the small Asian and indigenous populations would complicate the analysis, I limited the sample to persons who classified and were classified as white, brown or black, reducing its size to 4516.

This survey is important because, for the first time, race variables based on self-classification and interviewer evaluation are available for a national Brazilian population. However, two sources of bias may limit generalizations to all of Brazil. First, the sample includes only urban areas but these accounted for fully 76 percent of the Brazilian population in the 1991 Census (Associação Brasileira de Estudos Populacionais 1996).

⁴ The small number and the relatively unambiguous categories used in the Brazilian Census have led Marvin Harris and his colleagues to remark that Brazilian census terms “lamentably” use non-Brazilian concepts of racial identity (Harris et al 1992). According to him, racial classification in the Census should be open-ended, allowing individuals to

Second, the survey seems to have overestimated the size of the black population and underestimated the brown population, which presents a problem for describing overall racial distributions but not for most of the analysis in which I examine racial groups separately. According to the 1991 Census, the population of Brazil is 52 percent white, 42 percent brown, 5 percent black, 0.4 percent yellow and 0.2 percent indigenous. The entire sample for the survey, according to self-classification of race, is 53 percent white, 36 percent brown, 10 percent black, 0.6 percent Asian and 1.1 percent Indian.

I construct racial composition variables for the metropolitan area or municipality in which the respondent resides with data from the 1991 Brazilian Census. I then link this information to the individual records in the sample. Although the sample includes respondents from 122 municipalities, I construct racial composition variables for 90 places because single metropolitan areas may contain multiple municipalities.

The survey contains three race related variables: one based on interviewer assessment of respondent's race using the close-ended Census categories and the other two based on close-ended and open-ended responses to questions about race. All three are used in this study. Before, asking questions from the survey, interviewers noted the race of the respondent using the five census categories. Next, near the beginning of the questionnaire, interviewers asked respondents, "what is your race?" and they coded respondent's exact words. Interviewers then asked, "considering the following categories, what is your race: white, black, brown, yellow or indigenous?"⁵

classify themselves according to any term among the scores that are commonly used.

⁵ The Portuguese wording of the questionnaire uses the word *cor*, which can be literally

In noting the race of the respondent, interviewers were trained to classify respondents on the basis of their phenotype alone, attempting to not allow social or nonphysical factors affect their classification. According to the survey director, in the large majority of cases, interviewers readily classified respondents, claiming there was little doubt about respondent race. Clearly, racial classification depended largely on the tastes of the interviewer even if they claimed classification was straightforward. However, we do not have alternative evidence on the level of racial ambiguity in Brazil that would permit any sensitivity analysis. Since regional conceptions of racial classification may vary, one advantage of this survey is that interviewers resided in the same region as interviewees.

In a small number of cases where interviewers had doubts about racial classification, they made decisions with the central survey team. The final decision usually confirmed the interviewer's initial impression. A more "objective" classification of race might have been made by a panel of interviewers established for each region or by interviewing a person outside of their social context, but the high costs prohibited such methodological precautions.

The data contain no information on the characteristics of the interviewer. The

translated as *color*. However, *cor* in this context refers to a range of phenotypic characteristics, including skin color, nose shape, hair type and lip width (Pierson 1967; Ribeiro 1996). According to Guimaraes (1995), the Brazilian Census designers intended the use of *color* to be neutral and thus reflect Brazilian conceptions of phenotypical differences, unlike *race*, which they saw as un-Brazilian because it conveys meanings about innate behavioral differences among persons. Furthermore, the word *raça*, sometimes used as a literal translation of race, has quite another meaning for the general Brazilian population (Pierson 1967).

survey director noted that most of the interviewers were white reflecting the near absence of nonwhites in professional positions. The overrepresentation by whites as interviewers may affect racial attitudinal responses; however, we suspect that it should not affect racial classification of respondents in any systematic fashion. We have no evidence to believe that Brazilians of different race vary in how they classify another person's race.

Dependent Variables: Inconsistency, Category Ambiguity and Affirmation

From the interviewer classification and the close ended self-classification variables, I construct two variables to assess the extent of referential ambiguity in color self-classification. The first refers to whitened responses, coded 1 if self-classification is whiter than interviewer evaluation and 0 otherwise. The second measure refers to darkened responses, coded 1 if self-classification is darker than interviewer evaluation and 0 otherwise. The final two dependent variables, self-classification as *moreno* and *negro* are taken from the open-ended question and serve to examine determinants of definitional ambiguity and identity assertion, respectively. These are coded 1 if respondents classified themselves as *moreno* in the open-ended question and 0 otherwise and 1 if respondents called themselves *negro* and 0 otherwise.

Independent Variables

Independent variables include measures of class and reference groups. I examine three dimensions of class - schooling, monthly family income and Marxist class position - because perceptions of one's social class or status could be along any one or a

combination of these factors. I use dummy variables for each of these class dimensions. Education is operationalized as persons who have not completed primary school (omitted), those who have not completed secondary school and those who have completed secondary school or higher. Family income is based on the income of all residents of respondent households in the past month and consists of three dummy variables: incomes less than 150 reais or approximately 150 dollars (omitted); incomes of 150 to less than 750 reais and incomes greater than 750 reais. Finally, Marxist class is based on control over means of production and/or over labor power (Portes 1985). Classes are dominant (employer with more than two employees), bureaucratic-technical workers (professionals and government workers), formal proletariat (salaried workers with social security protections), informal petty bourgeoisie (self-employed with social security protections) and informal proletariat (salaried and self employed workers without social security protections and unpaid family workers). Persons not currently in the labor force are omitted.

For reference groups, I use color of spouse as classified by the respondent in the survey and racial composition of the urban part of the municipality or metropolitan area in which the respondent resides. For the first indicator, I use dummy variables for whether the spouse is lighter or darker than the respondent, as reported by the respondent, making the omitted category persons endogomously or not married. For the second indicator, I use continuous variables for the proportion of the local population that is black and the proportion that is white. Finally, I also control for sex and age. Sex is a dummy variable denoted by male and age is a continuous linear variable.

FINDINGS

Self versus Social Classification of Race

Table 1 shows how color groups, as rated by interviewers, are distributed along both the close ended and open ended self-classification categories among the urban national population. The top panel of Table 1 shows that 88.1 percent of whites but only 66.5 percent of browns and 71.8 of blacks classified in the same category that they were classified as by interviewers. Thus, referential ambiguity exists among all color groups but especially among nonwhites.

Table 1 about here

Passing into a whiter category than one's ascribed color is thought to be especially common. Among persons classified as browns, 18.3 percent reclassified themselves as white. Fully 25.5 percent of blacks classified as brown and 2.7 percent even classified themselves as white. However, despite the emphasis on whitening in the literature, these results also show that a large number of non-black persons also darkened their identity in relation to their color ascription. Among those classified as white, 11.3 percent classified themselves as brown and 0.6 percent as black. Fully 15.3 percent of browns reclassified themselves as black- nearly as many as classified as white (18.3 percent). Considering that 89.2 percent (55.5 + 33.7) of the population is non-black and only 44.5 percent (33.7+10.8) is non-white, darkening is even more common than whitening in this sample of the Brazilian population.

Leaders of the Afro-Brazilian movement claim that the Brazilian Census

underenumerates blacks because many Afro-Brazilians avoid the stigma of classifying as black even though they are socially recognized and treated as such and thus official figures underestimate the black population. Table 1 shows that of the non-Indian and “non-yellow” adult urban population, 13.2 percent of respondents self-classified as black while interviewers classified only 10.8 percent of the sample as black. Thus, persons who are socially classified as black appear to be even fewer in number than those who classify as such. Thus, the Afro-Brazilian movement’s claim about self-classification as the cause of Census underestimation of the black population seems misplaced. Instead, the reason for why there is a relatively small black population in Brazil is due to general Brazilian conceptions of who is black.

Also, the percent of persons that interviewers ascribed to the white category (55.5 percent) and who self-classified as white, is nearly the same (55.3 percent). The percent of persons classified as brown by interviewers (33.7) was greater than the percent self-classifying as such (31.5). Considering sampling error, the overall racial composition for the total population is similar using the two classification methods. However, there is substantial whitening and darkening for individuals but these countervailing effects wash each other out in the marginal distributions. Thus, the Brazilian Census figures, which report race based on self-classification, provide estimates of the total population by race that are comparable to those based on social classification. Nonetheless, reporting of the characteristics of persons within the categories could be quite different.

The bottom panel shows the six most common racial categories for the open-ended race question, which account for all but 4.3 % of respondents. These include the

three census terms (white, brown, and black), the particularly ambiguous category (*moreno*) and the Afro-Brazilian affirmation category (*negro*). A sixth category, *moreno claro*, comprised 7.1 percent of all responses and based on several fieldwork at several sites, refers to “a person whose skin color and/or hair are light brown” (Stephens 1989). Thus, this category seems to be more ambiguous than the Census categories but less ambiguous than *moreno*. As expected, many socially classified whites (7.8 percent) and browns (8.1 percent) but almost no blacks (0.8 percent) classified themselves in this category.

Socially classified whites and blacks preferred the white and black terms, respectively, when classifying themselves. Nevertheless, large numbers of blacks (30.8 percent) and whites (15.0 percent) also preferred to call themselves *moreno*. On the other hand, the majority of browns (60.7 percent) preferred the term *moreno*. Only 13.2 percent of socially classified browns also classified themselves as brown. Fully 32.1 percent of the entire sample chose the *moreno* category. The fact that large numbers of whites, browns and blacks chose this term demonstrates the ambiguity or the near universal inclusiveness of the term.

Fully 20.5 percent of those classified as black chose the *negro* category. However, only 2.3 percent of browns and no whites chose this category. These results suggest that calls in recent years from the leaders of the Afro Brazilian movement for anyone with African descent to classify as *negro* may have been successful only among those who are perceived as black. However, a large percentage of black persons may have classified as *negro* even in the absence of the Afro-Brazilian movement.

Unfortunately, I have no data for which to compare national usage of this term prior to the current movement. In any case, appeals to classify as *negro* have certainly not moved large numbers of the brown population to classify as such and have had absolutely no effect on the white population, many of which, the movement claims, have some African blood.

The overall distribution of social vs. self-classification is illustrated in Figure 1 for the close-ended self-classification and Figure 2 for open-ended self-classification. Figure 1 shows that nearly half of the sample was classified and classified themselves as white. Nearly another quarter was classified and classified themselves as brown. Figure 1 also shows that most persons classified in a particular census category also self classified themselves in the same category although the extent of consistency appears to be greatest for whites. That is, self-classified whites were particularly likely to be classified by interviewers as white while nonwhites were especially likely to be inconsistently classified.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

Figure 2 shows that using open-ended self-classification categories, nearly 40 percent of the total population was classified as white and classified themselves as white. Over 15 percent were classified as brown but classified themselves as *moreno* and merely ten percent were interviewer-classified whites who classified themselves as *moreno*. Figure 2 reveals that the *moreno* category is clearly the most ambiguous, including large numbers of persons from the interviewer classified white, brown and black populations.

Patterns of Inconsistency: Lightening and Darkening

Unexpected findings of both whitening and darkening might seem random and reflect ambiguity in classifying persons racially located near the boundaries that separate color categories. However, the large number of inconsistent classifications in both whitening and darkening directions and the strong association with social variables suggest that inconsistent color classification is socially structured and occurs among more than just those of questionable classification. Also, it occasionally occurs from opposite points in the color spectrum, from white to black and vice-versa. Thus, other factors besides phenotype might be associated with choice of category. For example, whitening may be positively correlated with class as previous literature claims.

Based on theories about class and reference groups, I use logistic regression to examine how these social characteristics affect whether or not one whitens or darkens through self-classification. Logit models predict self-classification as brown or white vs. black for socially classified blacks and self-classification as brown or black vs. white for socially-classified whites (Table 2). Although respondents could classify in one of three categories, I collapsed these into two because (1) I am mostly interested in the direction of self-classification and (2) classification in categories furthest from their social classification was a rare event for which multinomial logit models are not well suited to capture. For browns, I run a multinomial logit model to predict either self-classification as white or black vs. classification as brown because this group has the choice of classification in three directions rather than two (Table 3). Thus, Tables 2 and 3 are separate for methodological reasons but I report results for the tables simultaneously in

the following paragraphs.

Table 2 about here

Class has almost no effect on the likelihood of blacks to whiten (Column 1 of Table 2). The only class category that is statistically significant is bureaucratic-technical workers, who are less likely than persons not in the labor force to whiten. For whites (Column 2 of Table 2), education is inversely correlated with the likelihood of darkening. Table 3 shows the likelihood of either classifying as white (whitening) or black (darkening) among interviewer classified browns. Whitening for browns occurs among the least educated and darkening for browns is least likely among persons in dominant/petty bourgeoisie classes and those with a secondary education.

Thus, class effects on whitening, when they occur, run opposite to those predicted by previous analysts. The earlier evidence, based mostly on ethnographies of small towns, claimed that whitening occurs among the upwardly mobile. The apparently greater salience of race in modern Brazil may account for a changed relation between status and racial classification. The whitening of higher status nonwhites may have been common in traditional Brazilian society but in urban Brazil today, this phenomenon is significantly less than the extent of whitening and darkening among low status Brazilians.

Reference group variables present interesting findings as Tables 2 and 3 show. Marriage to a lighter color spouse decreases the chances of whitening for blacks (Table 2) and browns (Table 3). Also, marriage to a lighter person decreases the chances of whitening for blacks (Table 2) and increases the chances of darkening for browns (Table

3). Thus intermarriage elicits a reactive identity, especially in the case where browns marrying whites are more likely to classify as black. The coefficients representing marriage to a darker person for whites (Table 2) and browns (Table 3) have no significant effect on the likelihood of classifying in a darker category.

Table 3 about here

Local racial composition has no effect on whitening and statistically significant effects only on darkening. The likelihood that browns classify as black increases in places with more blacks and decreases in places with more whites. Also, whites living in place with larger numbers of whites are less likely to darken. These findings support the hypotheses that persons will seek to classify themselves in local normative categories. Furthermore, contrary to Wade (1995), these findings do not support the contention that nonwhites will whiten in places where they are distant from black or brown communities. Thus, respondents who classify inconsistently with their appearance tend to classify themselves in reaction to their spouse's color but they classify in the more ordinary color categories of the local population.

Age seems to best differentiate the chance of either whitening or darkening. In particular, younger persons are especially likely to darken. The higher rate of darkening among youth may occur because youth are especially likely to experiment with different identities before claiming a more stable identity (Erickson 1968) and that youth of all races in Brazil are often steeped in largely "black" popular culture (Sansone 1995). Also, since many of the youth are unemployed or outside of the formal labor market, there are few material incentives to whiten or at least assert one's ascribed white identity.

Relatedly, darkening by socially classified whites not in the formal labor market may not be stigmatized as it is among older white workers.

Patterns of Referential Ambiguity

Table 4 shows logit regression results for classifying as either *moreno* or *negro*. I present results for the full sample (column 1) and then separately by interviewer classified race (columns 2, 3 and 4) because large numbers of whites, browns and blacks classified as *moreno*. In the regression for the full sample, I control for race as classified by the interviewer. Finally, for classifying as *negro*, I present results for only interviewer classified blacks (column 5) because whites in the sample never and browns rarely classified as *negro* (see table 1 for distributions).

Table 4 about here

Column 1 of Table 4 shows that even though many racially ascribed whites and blacks also classify as *moreno* when given the option to classify with the category of their choice, they are considerably less likely than racially ascribed browns to do so. Based on the value of the coefficients, whites are about one-ninth (.111 or $e^{-2.201}$) and blacks are less than half (.436 or $e^{-.830}$) as likely as browns to classify as *moreno*. Thus, blacks are nearly four times as likely as whites to classify as *moreno*. All of the differences by race in the probability of classifying as *moreno* are statistically significant.

All sets of variables except female are significant for the full sample. Younger and lower status persons are more likely to classify themselves as *moreno*. Also, all reference group variables are negatively correlated with classifying as *moreno*. Thus,

endogomously married persons and those living in more racially heterogeneous places are more likely to classify as *moreno*.

Preference for *moreno* might be better understood when whites, browns, and blacks are modeled separately. Column 2 of Table 4 shows that whites with a university education, those married to darker spouses and those living in largely white places are less likely to use the term. For browns and blacks, low status persons in general, younger persons and those residing in largely white places are more likely to classify as *moreno*. The findings for browns and blacks are consistent with those for the full sample. Thus, lower status persons of all races are more likely than others to use *moreno* to describe their color, just as they are more likely to classify in ways that are more inconsistent with their appearance.

For the total sample and for each of the race groups, persons that live in more heterogeneous areas are especially likely to classify as *moreno*. This supports the theory about the tendency for classification in more ordinary categories. The existence of the ambiguous *moreno* category makes classification in one normative category possible for persons of several colors, which is desirable, according to this theory. The greater chance of browns that marry whites to classify as *moreno* also supports the passing as ordinary hypotheses because classifying ambiguously means that browns can classify like whites under the same *moreno* category. However, the lower likelihood of classifying as *moreno* for whites that marry nonwhites compared to those that marry other whites demonstrates that the reverse does not hold. In this case, whites are presenting a reactive

identity to their darker spouses.⁶

Patterns of Identity Assertion

Finally, I examined determinants for classifying as *negro* among interviewer classified blacks (Column 5 of Table 4). The fact that multivariate analysis of classifying as *negro* is limited to only interviewer classified blacks suggests that despite the supplications of the Afro-Brazilian movement that all African origin persons classify as *negro*, only phenotypically black persons do. Among blacks, then, those that are most likely to classify as *negro* are younger and higher status persons, as captured by education and Marxist class position, and those living in places where there are more blacks. Additionally, females are more likely to classify as *negro*.

The effects of age, class and gender may not be surprising. Young people who are in the process of forming identities are more likely to be receptive to new identity options and they tend to be less conservative. The finding that black youth are especially likely to classify in assertive categories might seem to contradict another finding that black youth are more likely to classify in the ambiguous category. However, the evidence also suggests that higher status black youth tend to classify as *negro* while their lower status counterparts tend to classify as *moreno*. The finding that education for

⁶ Although the logit compares persons identifying as *moreno* to persons who identify in all other categories, I also ran a multinomial logit to compare classification in various open-ended categories compared to classification in the white category rather than all other categories and found the same result. I did the same for all other regressions in Table 4, i.e. compared self-classification in the most common categories to self-classification in the census category they were identified as, and found similar results

blacks increases the chances of identifying in the assertive category suggests that these persons may be more exposed to black activist movements and are best situated to understand that racism cannot be reduced to classism, as the racial democracy ideal claims. Finally, in the case of women, their greater inclination to classify as *negro* may be a reaction to the greater discrimination they suffer from being black and female.

CONCLUSIONS

For sociologists, race continues to be important because racism, which assumes that humans are divided by different and ranked physical types, guides social behavior and relations between individuals. Thus, race is socially ascribed or imposed so that racism depends on social classification. Nevertheless, social scientists often assume appropriate race data can be captured with self-classification although individuals often negotiate their race based on physical as well as non-physical criteria like culture, consciousness, class and territory in declarations of their race. A static conception of race overlooks the creative abilities of humans who use strategies like passing, impression management and manipulation. Although the methodological problems in collecting socially-classified race data may make it impractical, social scientists should at least be aware of the limits of self-classification.

The Brazilian case demonstrates that racial self-designations are often not consistent with classification by others. The findings from this show that respondents self-classified in both darker and lighter categories than they were socially classified and

using both methods.

vice-versa, with nearly equal frequency. Although the crossing of racial boundaries might seem to occur from a random switching of ambiguous looking persons between categories, the large number of inconsistently classified persons (22 percent) and the fact that predictor variables strongly correlated with the consistency variable suggests that racial choices are socially structured. Similarly, predictor variables were often correlated with self-classification in ambiguous and assertive categories.

Class is related to racial identity classification in which persons classifying in inconsistent and ambiguous categories tend to be poor and uneducated. Whereas previous literature noted the whitening effect of higher-class status for nonwhites, this study shows that higher status blacks, browns and whites are most likely to classify themselves in a consistent way with their social classification and in the less ambiguous category. Thus these findings were unexpected but a changing Brazilian classification system might explain the findings. If previous ethnographic evidence is correct and generalizable, then these findings suggest that Brazilian racial classification has changed disproportionately in the middle class. Change is also strongly suggested by the fact that older persons are especially likely to whiten. Earlier findings may also have been biased by focusing on upwardly mobile nonwhites.

Middle class blacks have more consistent identification, are less likely to choose an ambiguous category and are more likely to choose the racially assertive category. This group may be especially conscious of their race because they are best situated to understand it. Compared to poor blacks, middle class blacks may better understand that racism exists independent of class discrimination and contrary to the prevailing racial

democracy idea.

For the most part, Brazilians of all races are especially likely to identify inconsistently and in ambiguous categories in more racially heterogeneous communities. Conversely, Brazilians in predominately white communities, like those in the state of Sao Paulo and those further south are especially likely to classify themselves in categories that are consistent with their social classification and, when offered the choice of self-classification, in more precise categories. Thus, previous findings on racial classification, which were based mostly on cases in the North and Northeast, are not generalizable to the national level today. The findings support a socio-demographic hypotheses about reactive identities that where there is less racial heterogeneity, racial boundaries become more important. A socio-historical hypothesis, that massive European and Japanese immigration since the 19th century has made ethnic distinctions important in that part of Brazil, is also supported (Andrews 1992; Oliven 1996).

Findings for intermarriage effects also support the reactive identity hypothesis. Racial boundaries are stronger for nonwhites who marry lighter skin persons because they are more likely to classify in consistent categories or are more likely to darken than those not married or in endogamous marriages. Whites married to darker spouses are less likely to classify in the ambiguous category.

Because race is not an objective phenomenon, racial boundaries may be variable across observers. This study discusses two measures of race, neither of which is entirely subjective either because their consequences are real. The lack of objective indicators simply reflects the slippery and socially determined nature of racial classification. Social

researchers, however, need to be sensitive to the most appropriate ways to capture race data for their substantive purposes. For example, social classification is especially important for studies of racial inequality due to racism while self-classification might be especially important for studies of self-esteem. In the absence of available data on social classification, researchers should consider possible biases in results.

Advocates of both more particularistic and more universalistic racial classification systems challenge the way official race data is collected. Particularists, particularly Afro Brazilian leaders, claim that the use of an intermediate category (brown) divides an African origin population that shares similar cultural identities and socioeconomic conditions. Universalists claim that the use of flexible and ambiguous categories is genuinely Brazilian and has ameliorated potential racial conflict and thus they should be used in official statistics. Both sides understand that state regulation of classification represents a powerful force in defining and legitimizing ethnic and racial divisions and in this sense has the potential to make and remake groups. Nonetheless, findings from this study show that a more universalistic system continues to dominate popular racial classification despite the existence of an official system that has changed little since 1940.

Current efforts to implement some form of affirmative action in Brazil to reduce large racial inequalities are hindered by its racial classification system. Providing assistance to blacks or nonwhites requires identifying members of the group. But in Brazil, who is black or nonwhite? Which classification system should be used and who defines the members of the group? Given the potential individual benefits of affirmative

action, many persons, who would otherwise classify themselves and would be classified as white, may opportunistically classify themselves as black or nonwhite diverting benefits from those for whom being black or nonwhite is not a choice. A recent proposal by Senator Benedita da Silva to require one's race to be printed on official identification cards might help resolve this problem because persons identifying as nonwhite would need to consistently present themselves as such. On the other hand, this is also likely to have a lasting effect in making racial classification less ambiguous.

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Table 1: Color Defined by Interviewer Distributed by Color based on Self Classification using Only Census Categories (Close Ended) and Category of Choice (Open Ended): Adult Population in Urban Brazil 1995

Self Classification			Color Classified by Interviewer			
Term Used	Portuguese	Literal Translation	White	Brown	Black	Total
ONLY CENSUS CATEGORIES						
White	<i>Branco</i>	white	88.1	18.3	2.7	55.3
Brown	<i>Pardo</i>	grey, brown	11.3	66.5	25.5	31.5
Black	<i>Preto</i>	black	0.6	15.3	71.8	13.2
Total			100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
CATEGORY OF CHOICE						
White	<i>Branco</i>	white	71.6	7.4	0.8	42.4
<i>Moreno Claro</i>	<i>Moreno claro</i>	light brown, Brunette	7.8	8.1	0.8	7.1
<i>Moreno</i>	<i>Moreno</i>	brown, Brunette	15.0	60.7	30.8	32.1
Brown	<i>Pardo</i>	grey, brown	2.1	13.2	8.0	6.5
Black	<i>Preto</i>	black	0.1	3.8	31.2	4.7
<i>Negro</i>	<i>Negro</i>	black	0.0	2.3	20.5	3.0
all others			3.5	4.8	7.0	4.3
Total			100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0
Distribution			55.5	33.7	10.8	100.0

N=4516 in top panel and 4513 in bottom panel

Source: Data Folha Instituto de Pesquisas “300 Anos de Zumbi: Os Brasileiros e o Preconceito de Cor”

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients Predicting Whitening Responses for Interviewer Classified Blacks and Darkening Responses for Interviewer Classified Whites: Adult Population in Urban Brazil, 1995.

Independent Variables	Whitening for Blacks	Darkening for Whites
University Education	-.178 (.596)	-.772 ^{***} (.253)
Secondary Education	-.149 (.279)	-.291 [*] (.154)
750+ Reais Monthly Family Income ¹	.084 (.368)	.295 (.228)
150-749 Reais Monthly Family Income ¹	-.319 (.276)	.142 (.207)
Dominant/Petty Bourgeoisie	.178 (.413)	-.123 (.223)
Bureaucratic-Technical Worker	-.879 [*] (.425)	.112 (.220)
Formal Proletariat	-.366 (.297)	.252 (.186)
Informal Proletariat	-.337 (.280)	.009 (.184)
Spouse Lighter Skin	-1.774 ^{**} (.649)	—
Spouse Darker Skin	—	.022 (.191)
Percent White in Local Area	-.007 (.005)	-.019 ^{***} (.003)
Percent Black in Local Area	-.034 (.032)	.004 (.019)
Female	-.255 (.219)	-.136 (.134)
Age	-.007 (.007)	-.008 [*] (.005)
Constant	2.088	-.597
Log Likelihood	-273.235	-869.914

* p < .10 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (one tailed tests)

Note: Omitted categories are primary education, less than 150 reais, not in labor force, endogamously or never married and male. Percent white, percent black and age are continuous variables.

¹ Missing income data variable included in equation but results not shown.

Table 3. Multinomial Logit Regression Coefficient Predicting Self-Classification as White or Black

compared to Brown for Persons Classified by Interviewer as Brown: Adult Population in Urban Brazil 1995.

Independent Variables	White	Black
University Education	-.852* (.418)	-.478 (.384)
Secondary Education	-.752*** (.187)	-.588** (.195)
750+ Reais Monthly Income ¹	.197 (.233)	.285 (.258)
150-749 Reais Monthly Family Income ¹	-.043 (.189)	-.006 (.208)
Dominant/Petty Bourgeoisie	.087 (.276)	-.799* (.391)
Bureaucratic Technical Worker	.022 (.278)	.379 (.263)
Formal Proletariat	.089 (.214)	.278 (.219)
Informal Proletariat	.212 (.182)	-.097 (.206)
Spouse Lighter Skin	-.738* (.290)	1.127*** (.196)
Spouse Darker Skin	-.579* (.314)	-.498 (.370)
Percent White in Local Area	.003 (.003)	-.007* (.004)
Percent Black in Local Area	.004 (.022)	.051* (.022)
Female	-.207 (.148)	-.100 (.160)
Age	-.005 (.005)	-.018** (.006)
Constant	-.984	-.847
Log Likelihood	-1247.084	

* p < .10 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (one tailed tests)

Note: Omitted categories are primary education, less than 150 reais, not in labor force, endogamously or never married and male. Percent white, percent black and age are continuous variables.

¹ Missing income data variable included in equation but results not shown.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Coefficients Predicting Open Ended Self Classification as *Moreno* or *Negro*: Adult Population in Urban Brazil, 1995.

Independent Variables	<i>Moreno</i>			<i>Negro</i>	
	Total (1)	White (2)	Brown (3)	Black (4)	Black (5)
White	-2.201 ^{***} (.086)	—	—	—	—
Black	-.830 ^{***} (.119)	—	—	—	—
University Education	-.656 ^{***} (.174)	-.841 ^{***} (.236)	-.284 (.236)	-.336 (.279)	.937 [*] (.556)
Secondary Education	-.368 ^{***} (.093)	-.258 [*] (.140)	-.157 (.134)	-.480 (.308)	.602 [*] (.282)
750+ Reais Monthly Family Income ¹	-.536 ^{***} (.126)	-.058 (.200)	-.694 ^{***} (.185)	-1.460 ^{***} (.438)	.578 (.426)
150-749 Reais Monthly Family Income ¹	-.298 ^{**} (.104)	-.061 (.180)	-.326 [*] (.153)	-.584 [*] (.279)	.152 (.356)
Dominant/Petty Bourgeoisie	-.436 ^{**} (.145)	-.246 (.201)	-.473 [*] (.218)	-1.097 [*] (.548)	.901 [*] (.486)
Bureaucratic-Technical Worker	-.206 (.135)	.052 (.202)	-.296 (.199)	-.819 [*] (.424)	.788 [*] (.412)
Formal Proletariat	-.264 [*] (.111)	.142 (.168)	-.497 ^{**} (.162)	-.774 [*] (.332)	.725 [*] (.340)
Informal Proletariat	-.077 (.102)	-.070 (.167)	-.137 (.147)	-.291 (.288)	.085 (.369)
Spouse Lighter Skin	-.297 [*] (.117)	—	.587 [*] (.182)	.759 (.841)	— ²
Spouse Darker Skin	-.396 ^{**} (.143)	-.450 [*] (.196)	.154 (.221)	—	—
Percent White in Local Area	-.011 ^{***} (.002)	-.010 ^{***} (.003)	-.006 [*] (.003)	-.028 ^{***} (.005)	.008 (.006)
Percent Black in Local Area	-.039 ^{***} (.011)	.015 (.017)	-.041 [*] (.017)	-.177 ^{***} (.036)	.060 [*] (.036)
Female	-.124 (.079)	-.101 (.121)	.002 (.115)	-.479 (.237)	.578 [*] (.254)
Age	-.006 [*] (.003)	-.000 (.004)	-.008 [*] (.004)	-.021 ^{**} (.008)	-.018 [*] (.010)
Constant	2.126	-.887	1.660	3.031	-2.692
Log Likelihood	-2205.262	-1019.795	-973.139	-242.351	-216.008

* p < .10 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (one tailed tests)

Note: Omitted categories are brown, primary education, less than 150 reais, not in labor force, endogamously or never married and male. Percent white, percent black and age are continuous variables.

¹ Missing income data variable included in equation but results not shown.

² Lighter skin spouses predict failures perfectly for blacks.