

The Consequences of “Race and Color” in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The vast majority of quantitative research on ethnoracial inequality uses census categories. In this article, however, I question whether census categories (in Brazil) are the most adequate measure for estimating ethnoracial inequality. Using the first nationally representative survey to include interviewer-rated skin color data in Brazil (LAPOP 2010), I examine: (1) the association between skin color and stratification outcomes, (2) how using multiple measures of race may reveal different information about inequality across different outcomes, and (3) whether census race categories and skin color should be considered equivalent or analytically distinct concepts. I find that skin color is a stronger predictor of educational attainment and occupational status among Brazilians than race (operationalized as census race-color categories used in virtually all research on ethnoracial inequality in Brazil). Centrally, this study finds that “race” and “color” are analytically distinct concepts given that they are empirically distinct, even though they are often conflated in everyday life and by social scientists. The implications of these findings for the study of ethnoracial inequality in Brazil and beyond are discussed, with a focus on directions for future research.

KEYWORDS: skin color; race; Brazil; ethnoracial inequality; cognition.

For many decades now, the quantitative analysis of ethnoracial inequality has relied nearly exclusively upon data provided by a country’s national census and the categories included therein. Consider, for example, the voluminous literature on ethnoracial inequality in the United States and Brazil, which uses census data to detail gaps in educational attainment, chronicle health outcomes, and measure indices of segregation between ethnoracial categories (often presumed to be homogeneous, “self-aware” “groups”; see Brubaker 2002). Yet, as ubiquitous and unquestioned as these categories are (see Wacquant 1997), it remains an open question whether they are *the most adequate* categories to the task of estimating ethnoracial inequality. This is the central concern I address in this study, which empirically examines and compares two different metrics for the estimation of ethnoracial inequality in Brazil—census race-color categories and interviewer-rated skin color.

This article contributes to a long-standing debate over best practices with respect to the estimation of ethnoracial inequality in Brazil by bringing nationally representative data to bear on the question of whether skin color and census categories are analytically and empirically equivalent or distinct

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(most recently, Banton 2012; Telles 2012). Moreover, it contributes to a growing body of literature on the multidimensionality of race (Bailey, Loveman, and Muniz 2013; Saperstein 2012; Telles and Lim 1998) by comparing the association of different dimensions of race with the same stratification outcomes.

In Brazil, census categories (typically referred to as “race-color” categories) are thought to capture a skin color continuum that ranges from individuals with very fair skin to individuals with very dark skin (Telles 2004). These “official” census categories developed by the IBGE (Brazilian census bureau) are: *branco* (white), *pardo* (brown), *preto* (black), *amarelo* (yellow) (Asians), and *indigena* (native). Nearly 99 percent of the population, however, is categorized as white, brown, or black. Researchers use these categories to analyze ethnoracial inequality and claim to detail how, in Brazil, educational attainment, income, occupational status, and residential segregation are all strongly associated with individuals’ skin color (Telles 2004). Is it true, however, that these race-color categories are equivalent to skin color or color (a broader concept that includes skin color and other ethnoracially coded phenotypical traits)? The terms “race” and “color” are used in everyday life, as well as by many scholars (much like in the United States), and even the Brazilian census uses the terminology interchangeably, asking individuals what is their “race or color.” Edward Telles (2004) contends, for example, “Brazilians often prefer the notion of color rather than race because it captures fluidity. Nevertheless, the Brazilian notion of color (*cor*) is equivalent to race because it is associated with a racial ideology that ranks persons of different colors [phenotypes]” (p. 218, emphasis added). Elsewhere, he writes that, “color captures the Brazilian equivalent of the English language term race (Telles 2004:79)¹, and more recently, he even goes as far as to state: “We could exchange the words race and color and we could come to the same conclusions” (Telles 2012:1166).

Despite the fact that virtually all current research on ethnoracial inequality in Brazil, however, uses race-color census categories and even explicitly claims to use such categories to highlight “the significance of skin color” in Brazil, there are several compelling reasons to believe that these census categories are *not* equivalent to skin color (or even *cor*). While research demonstrates that ethnoracial categorization is strongly driven by skin color in Brazil (Telles and Paschel 2014), research has also demonstrated that categorization (both outsider ascription and self-identification) is also profoundly influenced by contextual factors such as age, gender, region, socioeconomic status, and more (Sansone 2003; Schwartzman 2007). That is, there is evidence that Brazilian race-color categories may be somewhat endogenous with the very outcomes scholars seek to examine (e.g., educational attainment, income, occupational status, etc.) (Mitchell-Walthour and Darity 2014). In other words, while one may make use of race-color categories to study inequality, the reality in Brazil is that these categories *always already* include some aspect of socioeconomic status (Carvalho et al. 2004:333). Such a dynamic leads to inconsistency between self- and other classification in Brazil (Telles and Lim 1998). For example, Stan Bailey (2009:50) finds that while 77 percent of self-classified whites were also classified as white by others, only 60 percent of self-classified browns and 56 percent of self-classified blacks were also classified as such by interviewers.

Moreover, one’s “racial” status can shift depending on the region in which they live. At the very least it is clear that as one moves northwestern from the southernmost state of Brazil, the population becomes much darker skinned (Telles 2004). A person considered *pardo* in Salvador, Bahia (in the northwest) may be considered *preto* in Curitiba, Parana. Similarly, a person considered *pardo* in Curitiba, Parana may be considered *branco* in Salvador, Bahia. Brazil’s color continuum is *relational*, with categorization depending on the particular phenotypic profiles most prevalent in each region, and the historical legacies of migration unique to each region. For example, the requirements for *whiteness* are certainly stricter in Rio Grande do Sul than they are in Sergipe (in the northwest) (Monk 2013).

1 As if racial classification (on the black-white axis) in the United States is primarily a matter of phenotype instead of ancestry via the “one-drop rule.”

Given these dynamics, Brazilian census race-color categories may only provide a *rough approximation* of the vast phenotypic variation and, thus, variation in social experiences and life chances across the Brazilian population (Carvalho et al. 2004). What is potentially lost in conventional analyses that utilize census categories is that the frequency and severity of discrimination individuals face in their everyday lives may not be adequately captured by how individuals are classified into one of two or three categories, because these categories do not necessarily measure consequential, fine-grained, gradational differences in physical appearance. Certainly, earlier research (and contemporary research) on Brazil suggests the centrality of a gradational system of continuous inequality along a color continuum from the fairest (and most visibly “European”) to the darkest skinned (and most visibly “African”) (Harris 1970; Wagley 1952). Indeed, ethnoracial inequality may be produced and reproduced by processes that are more complex than can be adequately captured by a strict dichotomy between black and white.

Consequently, a surprising aspect of our current quantitative research on ethnoracial inequality in Brazil is that, ironically, despite being widely held as *the* canonical case of a skin color hierarchy—or “pigmentocracy”—*scholars are not studying the significance of skin color*, but instead the significance of classification into census categories, which is overdetermined by a variety of factors (Guimarães 2012:3).² It is hard to imagine how this is not problematic in a country where social stratification has long been held to be a matter of one’s ethnoracially coded phenotypical appearance (e.g., skin color) and ethnoracial categorization has been found to be fluid, ambiguous, and unstable (see above).

By directly testing the association of skin color with socioeconomic status in Brazil (net of relevant controls), this study contributes both to the literature on ethnoracial inequality in Brazil and to a recently resurgent literature on skin color stratification in the United States and beyond. This research has demonstrated how skin color is associated with a variety of key outcomes among African Americans, such as educational attainment, occupational status, and health (Monk 2014, 2015). In fact, studies even show that intraracial disparities in these outcomes associated with skin color often rival or exceed disparities between blacks and whites as a whole (Keith and Herring 1991; Monk 2015). Studies show that skin color is also associated with socioeconomic status among Latinos and immigrants in the United States (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008; Murguia and Telles 1996). Still, research on color stratification remains marginal compared to the substantial literature on inequality *between* ethnoracial categories (especially black-white inequality).

Lamentably, research on ethnoracial inequality in the United States and Brazil often claims to be investigating “the significance of skin color,” without any actual data on skin color. In each case, this practice seems to be underwritten by following common-sense and folk practices, which conflate race (in terms of classification into census categories) and the social perception of skin color in everyday life, ostensibly treating each dimension of race as if they are equivalent. Furthermore, in each case, by using census categories researchers transform what is actually a *continuum* of phenotypic difference, ranging from the fairest skinned and phenotypically European to the darkest skinned and phenotypically African, and the inequality that is continuously associated with these differences, into a simple *dichotomy* of black and white. In Brazil, conventional practices, which lump census category browns and blacks into a single *Afrodescendente* or *negro* category, ostensibly on the basis of shared African ancestry (regardless of color), only further simplify a system of classification (and inequality) that is *already oversimplified* by *trichotomization* into the primary census race-color categories of black, brown, and white.

In sum, the study of ethnoracial stratification in the United States and Brazil, by nearly exclusively estimating ethnoracial inequality using census categories, has largely abandoned earlier research,

2 Guimarães (2012:3) reports that skin color, other physical traits, ancestry, culture, and socioeconomic status are all aspects of self-classification in Brazil (listed in order of importance), according to data from the 2008 IBGE. To overcome this surprising limitation of existing data Bailey and colleagues (2013) utilize photo comparisons to try to tap into the significance of phenotype, nevertheless, it is still not actual *skin color data* used in recent work on skin tone stratification in Mexico (Villarreal 2010) or work on skin tone stratification in the United States that utilize interviewer-rated skin tone data (Keith and Herring 1991).

which clearly documented the social significance and consequentiality of *skin color* for life chances. This constitutes a *lost legacy of color* in the United States and Brazil. Using the first nationally representative data set in Brazil that includes skin color data, I find that skin color is a significant predictor of educational attainment and occupational status, and skin color is an even stronger predictor of these outcomes than race (i.e., census categories) as it is commonly operationalized in virtually all existing research on ethnoracial inequality.

This suggests that race (in terms of census categories) and socially perceived skin color are *analytically* and *empirically* distinct despite the common academic practice of conflating each of these different dimensions of the larger concept of race. Race may be split into three primary components—ancestry, physical appearance, and sociocultural elements—with the salience and consequentiality of each particular component varying throughout history and depending on the case in question (i.e., variation throughout time and space) (Wacquant n.d.). The analytical disaggregation of these components enables the examination of the salience and consequentiality of *each* component as a part of race, that “well-founded fiction,” which, like Bourdieu [1994] 1998 remarked of “family,” is:

[O]nly a word, a category, a collective principle of construction of collective reality, a common principle of vision and division (*nomos*) that we all have in our heads because it has been inculcated in us through a process of socialization performed in a world that was itself organized according to the division into [races] and that is both immanent in individuals and transcendent to them, since they encounter it in the form of objectivity in other individuals (pp. 66-67).

DEBATES AND ADVANCES IN THE STUDY OF ETHNORACIAL INEQUALITY IN BRAZIL (AND BEYOND)

For most of the twentieth century there was a struggle over the recognition and interpretation of ethnoracial inequality in Brazil. In fact, for much of the twentieth century Brazil was widely held to be a shining example of a harmonious and successful multiracial society. With the understanding that many social scientists worldwide accepted that Brazil was a “racial democracy,” UNESCO devised a series of studies of interracial relations in Brazil, motivated by the horrors of Nazism and the fallout of World War II. The rationale for these studies was explained in a brief document titled, “The Race Question,” drafted by an international team of leading social scientists who explicitly stated their aims to learn lessons from Brazil’s “harmonious” racial order. However, these studies had the unanticipated result of raising serious doubts about the veracity of the idea that Brazil actually was a racial democracy. While not in total agreement with one another, the first wave of UNESCO studies revealed that while ethnoracial categorization in Brazil was indeed “ambiguous” and “fluid,” and there was arguably more race mixture and intermarriage and considerably less segregation along racial or color lines than in the United States, it was not the case that Brazil was a “racial paradise” (Harris 1952; Wagley 1952).

Scholarship on ethnoracial inequality in Brazil in the past few decades has moved beyond the relatively small-scale ethnographic studies that were common in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s towards large-scale, nationally representative quantitative analyses using data from the IBGE (Telles 2004). After a lull in the study of Brazilian ethnoracial inequality brought on by military repression in the 1960s and 70s, by the 1980s, scholar-activists such as Nelson Valle da Silva and Carlos Hasenbalg attacked the idea that Brazil was a racial democracy armed with this newly available, nationally representative data. Their studies put to rest the long-standing notion that class was a stronger determinant of life chances than race or color in Brazil (Hasenbalg 1985; Silva 1985). These studies were directly modeled off of studies of black-white socioeconomic inequality in the United States. In fact, the title of Silva’s Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Michigan was, “White-Nonwhite Income Differentials: Brazil-1960” (1978), an almost word-for-word copy of the title of the book, *Black-White Income Differentials* (1975) by Stanley Masters.

This work also confronted the long-vaunted notion of ethnoracial ambiguity and fluidity in Brazil. Using the techniques they learned studying black-white ethnoracial inequality in the United States, [Silva \(1985\)](#) and [Hasenbalg \(1985\)](#) conducted statistical analyses that lumped the Brazilian census categories black and brown into a single nonwhite category. Specifically, their work questioned the theory that *mulatos* enjoyed advantages compared to blacks (pretos), the well-known "Mulatto Escape Hatch" theory of [Carl Degler \(1971\)](#). They argued that the principal ethnoracial fissure in Brazilian society was a dichotomy between whites and nonwhites, not a continuum from light to dark. In so doing, they promoted the idea that ethnoracial inequality in Brazil was, in fact, much more like the United States than originally though. As [Peggy Lovell and Charles Wood \(1998\)](#) put it, "Silva's findings [which support lumping together blacks and browns as negros] are not encouraging for those who wish to focus on the *subtle gradations of color that are socially recognized in Brazilian culture*" (p. 92, emphasis added).

This work was important because it demonstrated that race mattered in a climate where such thinking was often met with skepticism and denial. It also helped spur public policy initiatives to combat ethnoracial inequality ([Bailey 2009](#)). While Brazil did indeed have ethnoracial inequality and researchers were correct to challenge the idea that Brazil was free of ethnoracial discrimination and inequality, the revisionist turn of the 1980s went even further by seeming to legitimate the *dichotomization* of Brazil into black and white. [Silva's \(1985\)](#) study, "Updating the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil," which highlighted the disadvantages of pardos and pretos (aggregated together as a single nonwhite category) compared to brancos, was interpreted by many as proof that the black movement's stance that Brazil was biracial much like the United States, and that the triadic system used by the Brazilian government in the census was an attack on "black consciousness" ([Nobles 2000](#)).

As [Mara Loveman, Jeronimo Muniz, and Stanley Bailey \(2012\)](#) explain, this stance has become hegemonic in Brazil. The Brazilian government, beginning in the 1990s, even led campaigns urging Brazilians to view themselves dichotomously, as black or white on the basis of African ancestry, regardless of the color of their skin (also, see [Bailey 2008, 2009](#); [Loveman 2014](#); [Nobles 2000](#)). In this transformation, "negro is the Brazilian equivalent to the U.S. category African American, which may be translated as Afro-Brazilian by researchers using (bi)racial terminology" ([Bailey 2009:45](#)). As [Bailey \(2009\)](#) explains, however:

Using that definition there is no doubt about the low level of groupness of the negro population . . . In the 1995 and 2002 national datasets, 2 and 5 percent of browns chose negro, respectively. Hence, negro clearly does not substitute for brown or preto, nor does it appear to be an umbrella nonwhite term that represents a racialized social group . . . [N]egro movement organizations have distanced many nonwhite Brazilians by insisting that they self-label as negros. Not only does this clearly violate the principles of self-classification, but it also suggests that *there is no internally defined racialized group that includes all nonwhites in Brazil*" (pp. 57-58, emphasis added).

Indeed, even Hasenbalg now admits, decades after the revisionist turn his own work initiated that, "[w]hen we [[Hasenbalg and Silva](#)] study [racial] inequalities juxtaposing whites and nonwhites (pretos and pardos), we are *referring strictly to processes of socioeconomic stratification*. When we examine other dimensions of social life, that [binary] juxtaposition is not adequate" ([Guimaraes 2006:263](#), quoted in [Bailey 2009:210](#), emphasis added). The *statistical* significance of the nonwhite category created by lumping pardos and pretos together for estimating ethnoracial stratification was not necessarily evidence that the negro category was *already* salient in everyday life in Brazil (this is a matter of political mobilization aimed at creating a constituency for this category, of making one *see* the world telescoped through the lens of this category), or that it was roughly equivalent to the term black in the United States, a category largely determined by self-understandings of African ancestry via the one-drop rule.

Debate over the legitimacy of lumping blacks and browns into a single category continues to rage on in the academic literature (Bailey 2009; Loveman et al. 2012) (political mobilization on such a basis is a different matter than methodological techniques used by researchers to *estimate* ethnoracial inequality). Still, what *is* clear is that by analyzing ethnoracial inequality *solely* in terms of Brazilian census categories on the one hand and by lumping census category browns and blacks into a single nonwhite category on the other hand (today, often referred to as the negro category), considering *gradational* inequality in Brazil, which as many scholars point out (Harris 1970; Sansone 2003) is inextricably linked to differences in physical appearance (especially skin tone), has ironically become marginalized. Analyses in “black and white” (see Loveman et al. 2012), are not examining the significance of skin color (or even the Brazilian notion of *cor*), but rather, by utilizing a binary scheme of ethnoracial classification such analyses are testing the consequences of an ancestral, black-white, U.S.-style dichotomy for life chances in Brazil, a country where a strict black-white dichotomy based primarily on African ancestry never developed.

In fact, in Brazil, nearly anyone may legitimately claim to have some degree of African ancestry; there is the widespread presumption that everyone is *mixed* to some degree (see Jones 2009). Who then could not claim to be *Afrodescendente* in Brazil? The presumption of putatively shared mixed ancestry helps explain why, if given the choice, evidence shows that the majority of Brazilians opt out of ethnoracial categories altogether in favor of simply selecting Brazilian as their “racial” identity (Bailey 2008). As ironic as it may seem (especially given the widespread repudiation of the work of Gilberto Freyre), recent research strongly suggests that the majority of the Brazilian population is indeed quite mixed (even in Southern Brazil). As Flavia Parra and colleagues (2012:181) explain, given that skin color is genetically determined by a small number of genes, if one has a system of social race based primarily on phenotype, then individuals are being classified primarily on the basis of the presence of certain alleles at a small number of genes that impact physical appearance, while ignoring all of the rest of the genome. Given assortative mating based on color and “miscegenation” the long-term tendency would be the production of a white and a black group (in terms of color), which would, nevertheless, have a similar proportion of African ancestry. In other words, color is a very poor proxy for African genomic ancestry in the Brazilian population; one can have very light skin color but just as much African genomic ancestry as someone who is darker skinned (Parra et al. 2012).

Recent work on ethnoracial classification and inequality in both the United States and Brazil considers how using multiple measures of race may lead to different accounts of the extent of inequality in a country and suggests a variety of mechanisms that may help explain said inequality (Bailey et al. 2013; Saperstein 2012). Aliya Saperstein (2012), for example, examines whether self-classification versus classification by others into ethnoracial categories has consequences for estimating ethnoracial inequality. She reports that in the United States:

women who are seen as white but identify as black report [health treatment] that is similar to other women who are seen as white, while women who are seen as black but identify as white report [receive health treatment] more similar to other women who are seen as black. However, the same pattern does not hold for family income. [W]omen who are seen as white but identify as black fall on the “white” side in terms of health treatment, but the “black” side in terms of family income (pp. 1497-98).

This work illustrates the distinction proposed some time ago by Richard Jenkins (1997) between internal and external categorization. Conceptualizing race as a “multidimensional social construct” considers how, depending on the dimension analyzed, scholars may estimate *different* amounts of inequality. Certain measures may be more appropriate than others with respect to the analysis of different outcomes (e.g., self-classified race measures may be particularly useful in analyzing ethnoracial

politics, while interviewer-rated skin color measures may be better for examining exposure to discrimination and thus, social stratification).

Saperstein’s (2012) study of the United States follows the lead of research on Brazil conducted nearly two decades ago on the consequences of classificatory inconsistency for estimating ethnoracial inequality (see Telles and Lim 1998). The research on Brazil often compares inequality using self-classification and outsider ascription and generally finds that outsider-ascribed ethnoracial classification measures reveal more inequality than simply using self-classification (Bailey et al. 2013; Telles and Lim 1998). I extend these related lines of research by using multiple measures of race in the same model (see Telles and Lim 1998) to examine whether self-identification with an ethnoracial category (the conventional form of data used to study ethnoracial inequality) versus interviewer-rated skin tone gives different estimates of social inequality in Brazil. I do so in order to determine which measure, if any, has a direct effect on the outcome in question *even after controlling for the other measure* of race (Saperstein 2012; Telles and Lim 1998).

By putting both self-classified race and interviewer-rated skin color into the same models to see which, if any, variable remains a significant predictor of the various outcomes of interest in this study, I test whether it may be the case that even though race and skin color may *overlap* to some degree, in practice it may still be a mistake to treat these categories as equivalent. Thus, the analyses here shed light on recent debates regarding whether or not race and skin color³ should be considered as analytically distinct concepts (Banton 2012; Guimarães 2012; Telles 2012) by testing whether race and skin color are empirically distinct.

This analytic design is well-suited to testing (1) whether race and actual skin color are analytically distinct by testing if these measures are empirically distinct, and (2) given the lack of data on skin tone, specifically in Brazil, whether actual skin tone matters above and beyond self-classification into census race-color categories for inequality. The central goal of this study, however, is to examine the significance of skin color for inequality in Brazil, which, ironically, despite so much discussion about the significance of skin color, current research has yet to address with nationally representative data on skin color.

DATA AND METHODS

For the analyses that follow, I utilize the Brazilian survey of the 2010 America’s Barometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP 2010).⁴ The survey is nationally representative and has a sample size of 2,482. The LAPOP survey is well-suited to the kind of analyses I focus on here due to the ethnicity module designed by the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) at Princeton University, which includes an interviewer-rated skin color variable. This skin color variable is based on interviewer’s rating interviewee’s skin tones (facial skin tone) according to a palette of 11 skin tones ranging from very light (1) to very dark (11) (see Figure 1).⁵

In addition to the skin color scale variable, I also utilize self-classified ethnoracial categories such as pardo and preto in comparison to branco, as these are the standard census categories used by most researchers of ethnoracial inequality in Brazil, activists, and the Brazilian government. I also use

3 I refer to race as self-classification into census categories, and color as *skin* color to avoid confusion considering the tendency to use the word color to also mean race in Brazil (e.g., the census question: “what is your race or color?”). Certainly, the Brazilian notion of color (*cor*) includes not only skin color, but also hair and facial features (e.g., nose, lips, etc.). Skin color, however, is typically the key marker of ethnoracial difference and is highly correlated with gradations of the other markers (Stepanova and Strube 2012).

4 I thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

5 For comparability to previous studies done on skin color stratification I divide the continuum into a five-category skin color scale, ranging from very light (1) to very dark (5). Reduction to five categories also is an important safeguard against any potential noise in the data caused by interviewers deciding between ratings that are approximate on the skin color scale, and as a safeguard against potentially small cell counts. In separate analyses I also used the skin color scale without dividing the continuum into five categories, but this yielded negligible differences in the results.



Figure 1. PERLA/LAPOP 2010 Skin Color Palette

negro, the combined black and brown category (the usage of this category is dominant among scholars, activists, and the Brazilian government; see Bailey 2008; Loveman et al. 2012).

I also use a host of sociodemographic variables either as controls or dependent variables, depending upon the analysis. These variables include: individual's educational attainment (*education*, in years 0-17), marital status (*married*, 1 = married and 0 = single or divorced), the head of household's occupational status when the respondent was an adolescent (*parent's occupational status*, a scale of 1-15, where 1 = professional [e.g., lawyer, doctor, etc.] and 15 = laborer [e.g., farm worker]) to control for respondent's class origins, whether or not the respondent is employed (*employed*, 1 = employed and 0 = unemployed), respondent's *occupational status* (also on a scale of 1-15, where 1 = professional and 15 = laborer), whether the respondent lives in a rural area (*rural*, 1 = rural and 0 = urban), and whether the respondent lives in the developmentally advanced and richer southern region of Brazil (southeastern and southernmost states; *South*, 1 = South and 0 = non-South region) (for similar models, see Keith and Herring 1991; Villarreal 2010) (see Table 1).

Surprisingly, as Bailey and colleagues (2013) point out, many researchers tend to rely solely upon bivariate analyses and descriptive statistics, which stop short of examining whether race is significantly associated with various stratification outcomes after controlling for individual's sociodemographic characteristics. Below I present the results of weighted OLS, logistic, and ordered logistic regression models of the significance of both self-classified race and interviewer-rated skin color in Brazil. These weighted models take into account the complex design of this survey and ensure national representativeness.

FINDINGS

Education

Ethnoracial disparities in education have long been documented in Brazil. This research shows that nonwhites have significantly less education, on average, than whites (Marteleteo 2012; Telles 2004).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables in Analysis

Variable	Mean	Min.-Max.	N
Age	39.08 (15.78)	18-89	2,217
Sex (female)	.52 (.49)	0-1	2,217
Years of education	8.14 (3.93)	0-17	2,217
Occupational status	7.51 (3.79)	1-15	1,137
Parent's occupational status	8.83 (4.08)	1-15	1,931
Married	.63 (.48)	0-1	2,217
Region (South/Southeast)	.45 (.49)	0-1	2,217
Rural	.14 (.35)	0-1	2,217
Skin color scale (1 = very light skin to 5 = very dark skin)	2.76 (1.02)	1-5	2,217

Notes: Standard deviations in parentheses.

Virtually all of this research, however, utilizes the conventional race-color categories provided in the Brazilian census to estimate ethnoracial inequality. I find an insignificant gap in education between pardos and pretos (see, [Marteleteo 2012:356](#)). Staying at the level of race-color categories then, it is true that the largest gap in educational inequality is between whites and nonwhites (pardos and pretos together), which seems to corroborate the findings of Silva and Hasenbalg decades ago. Descriptive statistics reveal that the gap in average education between brancos and pretos aged 25 and older was 9.7 months. The gap in average education between brancos and negros was 7.9 months. These findings show that by following the convention initiated by Silva and Hasenbalg decades ago, scholars may actually *underestimate* the social inequality faced by pretos in particular, though only slightly.

Central to the aims of this study, using actual skin color instead of the race-color categories used in most research reveals that the gap between the lightest and darkest-skinned Brazilians aged 25 and older is 22.9 months, *nearly 2 years*. This demonstrates very clearly that there is far more educational inequality related to actual skin color than there is between the race-color categories that virtually all research relies upon. This is similar to my finding that there is more skin color-related educational inequality among African Americans in the United States than there is between black and whites as a whole ([Monk 2015](#)).

Next, I turn to ordered logistic regression analysis to determine the main effect of skin color. First, the results presented in [Table 2](#), Model 1 indicate a strong association between individual's self-classified race and their educational attainment. These results indicate that self-classified whites have higher odds of having more education than self-classified blacks or browns, even after controlling for their parent's occupational status among other factors.⁶

The results of Model 3, however, demonstrate that the relationship between self-classified race and educational attainment disappears once an individual's actual skin color is taken into account.

⁶ I do not find significant gender differences.

Table 2. Ordered Logistic Regression Education by Race and Color

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>
Age	-.053*** (.006)	-.054*** (.006)	-.053*** (.006)	-.053*** (.006)	-.053*** (.006)
Female	-.094 (.101)	-.129 (.103)	-.132 (.106)	-.094 (.102)	-.129 (.105)
Parent's occupational status	-.077*** (.012)	-.073*** (.012)	-.073*** (.012)	-.077*** (.012)	-.073*** (.012)
Region	.370* (.154)	.390* (.149)	.381* (.153)	.352* (.156)	.391* (.154)
Rural	-1.131*** (.178)	-1.139*** (.186)	-1.137*** (.189)	-1.128*** (.179)	-1.138*** (.188)
<i>Pardo</i> (brown)	-.328** (.112)		.003 (.117)		
<i>Preto</i> (black)	-.544** (.160)		.156 (.228)		
Skin color scale		-.295*** (.041)	-.318*** (.054)		-.296*** (.040)
<i>Negro</i>				-.370** (.110)	.005 (.119)
Constant	-6.559*** (.355)	-7.183*** (.380)	-7.233*** (.412)	-6.566*** (.352)	-7.183*** (.380)
Observations	1,866	1,866	1,866	1,866	1,866

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. All analyses are weighted to take into account the complex design of the survey (e.g., stratification and clustering).

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Above and beyond an individual's self-classification into one of the three Brazilian census categories, skin color is strongly associated with educational attainment, net of respondent's parent's occupational status and other sociodemographic controls. In Model 5, I also test whether the skin color scale remains significantly associated with educational attainment even after including the negro variable in the model. While Model 4 indicates a significant association between educational attainment and the negro category ($p < .01$), Model 5 demonstrates that this association disappears once individuals' skin tones are taken into account. Once again, skin color is strongly associated with educational attainment above and beyond self-classified race ($p < .001$), even when the black and brown categories are combined into a single category (following Silva and Hasenbalg). A unit increase in the darkness of respondent's skin corresponds to 26 percent *lower* odds of having *more* education compared to others (the effect across the scale is multiplicative). This shows not only that race and skin color are empirically distinct, but also that actual skin color is a stronger predictor than self-classified race.⁷ As the models control for parent's occupational status, the findings suggest that educational inequality

7 It is important to keep in mind that I am *not* testing the significance of self-reported skin color versus self-classification into census categories or outsider ascribed census categories versus interviewer-rated skin color. Consequently, it may be the case that interviewer ascription into census categories may be a stronger predictor of the outcomes examined here than actual skin color data (though even this may be due to *endogeneity*). It is important to remember, however, that virtually all research on ethnoracial inequality relies upon self-classified race data. Thus, this study is important because it compares the significance of the most commonly used measure of race (self-classification) and interviewer-rated skin color. Comparisons using Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) scores provide "very strong evidence" that the models using actual skin color instead of self-classified race provide better goodness-of-fit.

due to color discrimination is *contemporary*—it is not simply disadvantage passed down from a previous generation.

Why is interviewer-rated skin color a better predictor of educational attainment than self-classified race? Outsiders' perceptions, as opposed to individuals' self-identification with race categories, may more closely align with the discrimination individuals face in everyday life. As Telles (2012) rightly points out:

racial identity [self-classification into census categories] measures also pick up, besides color and phenotype, social effects that might influence one's identity, including class, gender, age, region, and social desirability. As a result, they might not adequately capture racial discrimination, which depends on the evaluation of race by others (p. 1166).

Such social effects are well documented in the Brazilian case, where individuals' self-classifications also rely on their own perception of their social standing in society at large. The findings of this study suggest, however, if we *reverse* our analytic gaze, that when individuals have the same skin color, more education is *not* more likely to lead them to self-classify as white—that is, education alone does not necessarily whiten (Model 3), though it may tend to do so intergenerationally through intermarriage (Schwartzman 2007).

This study extends previous work that either utilizes a single measure of race or compares the degree of inequality across multiple measures of race. For example, Models 1 and 2 show that if scholars used either measure on its own they may conclude that skin color or self-classified race is strongly associated with educational attainment in Brazil. However, utilizing only race measures instead of actual skin color would lead researchers to underestimate the degree of educational inequality in Brazil. Education is one of the most important indicators of well-being in societies all over the world. In the United States, Canada, across Western and Eastern Europe to Bangladesh, China, and Korea, individuals with higher educational attainment also have higher life expectancy and better overall health (Cutler and Lleras-Muney 2006:6). Given the well-documented finding that education is a strong determinant of employment status, occupational status, and earnings, these findings serve as clear evidence of the significance of skin color in Brazil.

Occupational Status

While employment status is not significantly predicted by skin color or census race after education is controlled for (results not shown), this may be due to the large informal labor market and lack of adequate unemployment compensation. Consequently, I examine the significance of race and skin color among formally employed Brazilians to test for ethnoracial inequality in the formal labor market. Occupational status is rated on a scale of 1 to 15 where a score of 1 refers to professionals such as lawyers and doctors and a score of 15 refers to agricultural laborers. The results of the ordered logistic regression analysis presented in Models 1 and 4 demonstrate that self-classified race is not significantly associated with respondent's occupational status once educational attainment and other sociodemographic characteristics are taken into account.

This is in contrast to individual's skin color, which is significantly associated with occupational status even after controlling for respondent's educational attainment and the same sociodemographic controls (Table 3, Model 2).⁸ The results presented in Models 3 and 5, however, show that neither census race nor skin color are significantly associated with respondent's occupational status when they are included in the same models together. This may be because these models only include individuals who are employed and as such have a lower sample size, which may reduce the number of instances skin color and self-classified race to diverge.

8 Women tend to have lower occupational status than men, though there is no significant interaction between skin color and gender.

Table 3. Ordered Logistic Regression. Occupational Status by Race and Color

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>
Age	-.010 (.005)	-.010 (.005)	-.010 (.005)	-.010 (.005)	-.010 (.005)
Female	.285* (.123)	.292* (.125)	.290* (.122)	.286* (.124)	.291* (.123)
Educational attainment	-.231*** (.02)	-.228*** (.024)	-.228*** (.024)	-.231*** (.025)	-.228*** (.024)
Rural	.718** (.229)	.720** (.222)	.725** (.227)	.713** (.229)	.724** (.226)
Region	-.209 (.148)	-.215 (.135)	-.208 (.148)	-.199 (.141)	-.206 (.142)
<i>Pardo</i> (brown)	.120 (.150)		.0450 (.170)		
<i>Preto</i> (black)	.226 (.258)		.0671 (.354)		
Skin color scale		.091* (.047)	.076 (.072)		.079 (.058)
<i>Negro</i>				.141 (.138)	.046 (.170)
Constant	-5.579*** (.392)	-5.398*** (.387)	-5.400*** (.392)	-5.572*** (.394)	-5.392*** (.390)
Observations	1,137	1,137	1,137	1,137	1,137

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. All analyses are weighted to take into account the complex design of the survey (e.g. stratification and clustering).

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

These results reveal that if researchers relied solely upon self-classified race, which virtually all research relies upon, they may conclude that there is no association between race and occupational status in Brazil. Furthermore, given the rampant conflation of self-classified race categories with color (*cor*) and/or actual skin color, the researchers may even conclude that there is no association between color and occupational status in Brazil. Indeed, they may falsely conclude, that *only* educational attainment determines the prestige of individuals' occupations in Brazil and thus ethnoracial discrimination on the labor market is not a factor.

By utilizing measures of self-classified race and skin color, however, the findings of this study show that there is a significant difference for darker-skinned Brazilians, even after taking educational attainment into account (though educational attainment is a stronger predictor than skin color). Model 2 indicates that for each one point increase in the darkness of respondent's skin color (as rated by interviewers), the odds of respondent's having a less prestigious occupation increases by 10 percent, even after taking respondent's educational attainment and other controls into account. This suggests that ethnoracial discrimination is a factor on the labor market, though this would be missed by researchers who only use race-color categories.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that interviewer-rated skin color is a significant predictor of respondent's educational attainment and occupational status, even after controlling for various sociodemographic factors and respondent's census category membership. Moreover, I find that interviewer-rated skin tone is a stronger predictor of education and occupational status than census categories.

This demonstrates that though race (operationalized as census category membership) and skin color may overlap in folk practice (Telles 2012), they are empirically and analytically distinct categories that are not equivalent (Banton 2012). Census categories obscure consequential phenotypic heterogeneity even when, as the case of Brazil shows, these categories are explicitly thought to be *color* categories.

Unfortunately, race and color are often conflated not only in everyday life, but by researchers of ethnoracial inequality. Race and color tap into different dimensions of individuals’ life experiences and the ethnoracial disparities they face. They are not substitutable and do not refer to the “same underlying thing”:

[E]ach classification scheme captures a distinct dimension of the multidimensional social construct of race. “[R]ace” in Brazil is partly a matter of self-identification and partly a matter of identification by others. Thus, the degree of consistency across measures will vary across time and place, and no single measure of “race” can be presumed, a priori, to be a proxy for others” (Bailey et al. 2013:115).

Researchers of social inequality should be careful to distinguish census-level classification from processes of categorization and discrimination that occur in everyday life, which may be more directly linked to gradational variation in ethnoracially coded phenotypic traits. This is increasingly important as the Brazilian government and many researchers adopt a scheme of ethnoracial classification—the binary, “black-white” black movement format—which further simplifies what is already a simplification of Brazil’s gradational continuum of ethnoracial difference (Carvalho et al. 2004). Indeed, “[m]ost existing papers model race with simple dummies for white, black, and so on, ignoring phenotypic heterogeneity within racial groups” (Francis and Tannuri-Pianto 2013:734). By simply dividing the population into whites and nonwhites, researchers miss out on leveraging this phenotypic heterogeneity to estimate social inequality—ironically, in a society precisely where skin color is undeniably central in determining differential treatment and life chances due to its persistent usage as a key *marker* of ethnoracial division and thus, source of *stigma* (see Goffman 1963).

Given the inextricable historical and contemporary linkages between how ethnoracial inequality is studied in the United States and Brazil (see above), it should not be surprising that similar confluences plague our literature on ethnoracial inequality in the United States as well. Yes, while most research focuses on interracial inequality, a growing body of research shows clearly how skin tone stratifies life chances within and across most ethnoracial categories (Monk 2014). As the contrast is usually explained, however, it is Brazil where physical appearance is central to categorization and inequality, leading to fluidity, ambiguity, and most importantly, gradational inequality, not the United States, which is putatively rigid, ancestral, and dichotomous both in its categorization scheme and its inequality (i.e., stratification between blacks and whites). Relatedly, the story goes that Brazilians have a richer vocabulary (i.e., more categories) to describe themselves and others with respect to the domain of race than what we see in the United States (this, unfortunately, ignores the usage of color labels for hundreds of years in the United States; see Wilder 2010).

What this contrast obscures, however, by focusing on macro-level, census-style categorization, is that skin color stratification has long been a feature of *each* society. A missing element in the discussion of the futures of the U.S. and Brazilian racial orders is that dichotomous classification and continuous skin tone inequality may *co-exist*. The case of the United States, for example, clearly demonstrates that despite the primary basis of ethnoracial classification being ancestral and dichotomous (black-white), there is substantial inequality *within* the category African American linked to gradations of skin color (Keith and Herring 1991). This has, in fact, been the pattern for African Americans since slavery to the present day (Bodenhorn 2006; Monk 2014). Recognition of this *intra-categorical* skin tone stratification, however, has often been marginalized compared to the recognition of and political mobilization against inequality between blacks and whites as a whole (Hochschild

2006). A consequence of this, insofar as politics shape academic concerns, data collection, and methodology, is that the scholarly recognition and analysis of intracategorical color stratification has also been marginalized.

Extricating oneself from the messy bramble that is the comparative study of “race relations,” necessitates a clear, epistemological break from folk concepts and pre-notions (of the United States or any other particular case) (see Bachelard [1938] 2002; Durkheim [1901] 1982), especially by breaking away from the practice of setting up analyses of ethnoracial inequality solely in the pre-given terms of census categories and data (Wacquant 1997). Furthermore, we must both forge and use new analytic tools.⁹ Using skin color as a common analytic basis of comparison for the estimating ethnoracial inequality in the United States and Brazil is a very promising intervention, which also overcomes the error of comparing incommensurable ethnoracial categories across cases, even when said categories are nominally equivalent.¹⁰

Researchers must remember that census categories are always already political artifacts, which are the result of political struggles over defining principles of social vision and division. As such, they represent the elevation of a *particular* vision of the principles of identification and stratification over others (Bourdieu [1994] 1998)—this is how individuals mobilize together politically in the name of a particular cause, but not others (e.g., Hochschild 2006 on the relative lack of political mobilization around colorism among African Americans). Consequently, these categories are often the epistemological obstacle par excellence,¹¹ which may blind both the analyst (to the extent that they use these categories uncritically in their scientific endeavors) and individuals in everyday life (to the extent that their vision of the world remains telescoped through the dominant, politicized social categories that are legitimized and underwritten by the massive reservoir of *symbolic power* that is the State) from the complexities of the production and reproduction of social inequalities in everyday life.

As Brazil moves towards a similar dichotomous system of ethnoracial classification, which attempts to place more weight on ancestry for ethnoracial categorization relative to appearance, there may be struggles over the “right” to benefit from affirmative action and similar policies aimed at ameliorating ethnoracial inequality. In fact, there is already evidence of such struggles. André Cicalo (2012), for example, notes conflicts over “authenticity” with individuals identifying as “light-skinned negros” (see, the United States) and feeling pressure to prove their ethnoracial bona fides.¹² This is an important issue given that there are many cases of individuals who self-identify as white in everyday life (and may be identified as such by others), but change their identification to pardo or negro for the purposes of gaining access to affirmative action benefits (Francis-Tan and Tannuri-Pianto 2015). Still, these incentives

9 I propose the adoption of an analytic concept of race (Wacquant 1997), coupled with focusing the attention of researchers to the role of the body as a *central locus of social inequality* via an extended and refined concept of bodily capital to conceptualize salient and consequential phenotypic traits such as skin tone and hair with respect to the production of ethnoracial inequality (more broadly, however, one may also consider the consequentiality of other bodily properties such as height, weight, body size, and notions of physical attractiveness) (Monk 2013).

10 We must be aware of “the power that language has to make everything look the same” (Wittgenstein 1953:14-15). As Bourdieu and Wacquant (2005) put it, “The problem of language [here] . . . is at once crucial and thorny. [S]ocial scientists stock their technical language with so many theoretical ‘faux amis’ based on a mere lexicological facsimile, without seeing that these morphologically twinned words are separated by the whole set of differences between the social and symbolic system in which they were produced and the new system in which they are inserted” (p. 197). Yes, “[T]he cognitive, psychological operations at work in Brazil are of a different kind and embedded in a different structure of relationships than those in the United States” (Segato 1998:148). Though, the cognitive role (and consequentiality) of skin color as a marker of ethnoracial division is shared in the United States and Brazil.

11 “Epistemological vigilance is especially necessary in the social sciences, where the separation between everyday opinion and scientific discourse is more blurred than elsewhere . . . [For] the sociologist, familiarity with his social universe is the epistemological obstacle par excellence, because it continuously produces conceptions or systematizations and, at the same time, the conditions of their credibility. [P]reconceptions or ‘pre-notions’—‘schematic, summary representations’ that are ‘formed by and for experience’—derive their self-evidence and their ‘authority,’ as Durkheim [1901] 1982 observes, from the social [and political] functions they fulfill” (Bourdieu, Chamboredom, and Passeron [1968] 1991:13).

12 Hunter (2005) reports that lighter-skinned African Americans often feel as if they are discriminated against by other African Americans for being perceived as less racially “authentic” (also see Monk 2015).

may end up crystallizing the notion of negro (Bailey 2009). Recent evidence (see Telles and Paschel 2014) shows that now education may actually *darken* racial self-classification in Brazil!

While most work comparing ethnoracial dynamics in the United States and Brazil has focused on highlighting the fundamental differences between these two cases, in the past few years there has been fervent debate over whether the future of the U.S. racial order is Brazilian (or Latin American) and whether the future of the Brazilian racial order is the United States (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Daniel 2007). The level of analysis in this debate has been recent shifts in macro-level ethnoracial classification in the census, ethnoracial political mobilization, and public policies (e.g., affirmative action). What has been obscured in this comparative discussion, however, is that historically and contemporarily *both* countries have had (and continue to have) some degree of ethnoracial ambiguity regarding mixed-race individuals (Khanna and Johnson 2010). The one-drop rule did not apply consistently across the entire United States until well into the twentieth century (ca. 1930), and in some parts of South Carolina and Louisiana, which were demographically similar to Brazil, there was widespread recognition of mixed-race individuals as a separate ethnoracial category much like in Brazil. There were cases where phenotypic appearance and community reputation (similar to the case of South Africa) trumped foggy memories of distant African ancestry even as the one-drop rule was in operation (Davis 1991). African Americans have and continue to utilize a system of color labels and designations that are similar to Brazilian color labels (Wilder 2010) and, crucially, each country has clear evidence of ethnoracial inequality along skin color continua (Monk 2013). Seen this way, these two cases appear to have much more in common than much of the discourse (popular and academic) around these cases implies.

Consequently, while many have proposed that Brazil may be the future of the U.S. racial order and that the United States may be the future of the Brazilian racial order, the differences between these two racial orders appears to be not one of kind, but of *degree*. Each case shares elements of categorization (ascription and self-identification) and thus, stratification. The "real" difference between these cases, for example, is not the degree of race mixture itself, nor the putative variation in the harshness of their regimes of slavery, but rather, *the symbolic construction of ethnoracial boundaries* (see Wimmer 2008) and the deployment of ethnoracial categories in everyday life (see Jones 2009 on ethnoracial cognition). What may be emerging is convergence on an intermediate racial order.

Moreover, even if it were the case that there is more phenotypic variation in Brazil than the United States (in terms of combinations of skin color, hair, and facial features), raw phenotypic variation, on its own, does not automatically give rise to myriad social categories of race. Rather, the ability to see and explicitly name differences is the result of a prolonged and complex process of social learning similar to what is described by Bourdieu [1997] 2000) in his formulation of the relationship between habitus and field. Douglas Jones (2009:263-64) even notes that in Brazil (at least in Bahia) there may exist a "weak one-drop rule" where "mixed-race" individuals are perceived as an intermediate category, but closer to black. Such a rule may, in fact, be developing (or already exists) in the United States.¹³

Given these ostensibly well-documented differences in ethnoracial schemata in the United States and Brazil, how might skin color stratify in these two countries in such similar ways? In order to understand the differences and similarities of these two cases, I contend that we must turn our attention to a different analytic level—*social cognition*—and, thus, the historical trajectories that are lived out in the present cognitive schemata and the deployment of social categories in everyday life. Indeed, there is a very compelling cognitive reason why skin color so significantly stratifies each society despite these noted differences in ethnoracial schemata. In each society skin color has taken on a role as a primary phenotypical marker of ethnoracial categories—it is a primary cognitive cue in a heuristic¹⁴ for making judgments not only about ethnoracial categorization, but given the existence of

13 Still, one would presume some differences given the historical palimpsest and contemporary persistence of the one-drop rule in the United States.

14 A heuristic is a "strategy that ignores part of the information, with the goal of making decisions more quickly, frugally, and/or accurately than more complex methods" (Gigerenzer 2008:111; but also see Kahneman 2011).

ethnoracial stereotypes and biases, judgments of human worth and capability (Eberhardt et al. 2006; Hannon 2015). Indeed, skin color is profoundly implicated in the triggering of explicit and, arguably even more important, *implicit* biases (Amodio and Devine 2006; Maddox 2004).

The existence of relatively different categorical schemata both in terms of categorical richness and understandings is no bar to the commonality of the cost of color in Brazil and the United States. Indeed, the real cognitive differences between the United States and Brazil—greater categorical richness and specificity in the domain of ethnoracial categorization in Brazil (Harris 1970) coupled with corresponding additional layers of cognitive schemata, and the existence of mixed essences in Brazil (see Jones 2009)—should not obscure the reality of deep similarities in processes that produce and reproduce social inequality in everyday social interaction (i.e., socially perceived skin color as a primary cue of ethnoracial categories, which facilitates dichotomous and *continuous* ethnoracial categorization and, thus, stratification). Research has shown for quite some time that dualistic categories are always already continuous in practice anyways. Studies reveal that individuals even perceive odd numbers along a graded continuum of typicality (Armstrong, Gleitman, and Gleitman 1983; for more on typicality, see Rosch and Mervis 1975 whose work draws heavily on Wittgenstein's [1953] notion of family resemblances and Schutz 1970 on typification). Ultimately, we must always keep in mind that the differences between the U.S. and Brazilian racial orders are not to be found “in the peculiarities of some *national character* or ‘soul’ but in the particularities of different collective histories” (Bourdieu [1994] 1998:3, emphasis added).

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