Is Racial Classification Consistent? Analyzing Self- and Third Person Declaration Among 15-59 Year-Old Females in Two Brazilian cities

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Although the Brazilian Census Bureau has been using the same categories for racial classification for the last three censuses, there is no consensus whether they best capture racial classification in Brazil. People in general reject the categories brown (*parda*) and black (*preta*) – which, in addition to whites, account for 99% of the self-declarations – and use *morena* instead. The Black Movement would rather substitute *negra* for those two, leading to a bipolar racial classification system, very similar to the US. However, differently from the US, racial classification in Brazil is not based on ancestry or origin, but on phenotype. Thus, if one looks white, one is considered white, regardless one's racial origin.

The importance of this discussion lies in the fact that several sectors of the Brazilian society, including public universities, are trying to implement affirmative action policies, some of them targeting *negros*. From this discussion, two questions arise: Who is *negro* in Brazil? Whose opinion should be taken into account: the person's self-classification or someone else's classification? Census data do not give an answer to the second question to the extent that the questionnaire includes only one question about the respondent's self-classification, with five pre-coded answers: white, brown, black, yellow, and indigenous (Brazilian native).

In order to shed some light on this debate, the objective of this paper is to compare two forms of racial classification -- self-classification and interviewer classification -- among 15-59 year-old females who declared themselves white, brown, or black in Belo Horizonte and Recife, two large cities in two different regions of Brazil. Data come from SRSR (Reproductive Health, Sexuality, and

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Race), a survey conducted under the authors' supervision in 2002 and representative of the two cities, where 2.408 females 15 to 59 years-old were interviewed.

Descriptive results present some characteristics of the four groups under study: (1) females who, under both forms of classifications, are consistently white; (2) those who are consistently brown or black (so-called *negras*); (4) those who declare themselves brown or black but are classified by the interviewer as white; and (4) those who see themselves as white but were perceived by the interviewer as brown or black. Multinomial logistic analysis compare the four groups of females. Previous results for Recife compare females who were consistently classified with those who were not, based on bivariate logistic analysis. Controlling for age and schooling, whites have higher probability of consistency if compared to browns and blacks. However, if the categories brown and black are collapsed into the category *negra*, the probability of consistency is lower among whites.