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Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Light and shadows: An analysis of racial differences between siblings in Brazil



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 May 2015

Received in revised form 2 February 2016

Accepted 17 February 2016

Available online 23 February 2016

Keywords:

Race

Skin tone

Siblings

Inequality

Racial differences

Brazil

ABSTRACT

Using data from the 2010 Census of Brazil, this article quantitatively examines the phenomenon of sibling differences in racial classification. In sum, the findings demonstrate that within-sibling racial heterogeneity occurs in 17–19% of families. The strongest predictor of racial discordance between siblings is racial discordance between parents. Furthermore, within-sibling regression models establish that race exhibits a modest but statistically significant association with some education and labor market outcomes. Most outcomes are not associated with race for siblings aged 15–19, although in families with both sexes, darker females have more favorable educational outcomes, while darker males have less favorable outcomes. In contrast, darker siblings aged 20–25 are less advantaged than their lighter brothers and sisters along a number of dimensions. They have significantly lower education, lower personal income, lower formal employment, and lower occupational status. It is argued that patterns for siblings aged 20–25 may be indicative of individual racial discrimination.

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1. Introduction

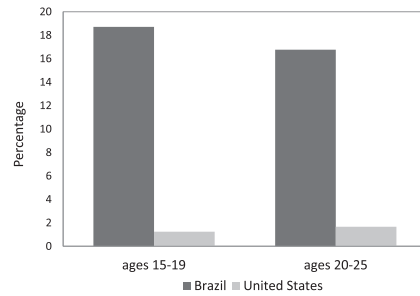
A growing literature uses sibling differences in birth weight, birth order, health, poverty, and neighborhood to estimate effects on education and other outcomes (Aronson, 1998; Conley and Bennett, 2000; Conley et al., 2007; Edmonds, 2006; Fletcher, 2010; Haas, 2006; Hao and Matsueda, 2006; Warren et al., 2012). But rarely does a study consider sibling differences with respect to race. Fig. 1 depicts the percentage of families with different-race full siblings in 2010. Strikingly, the prevalence of within-family racial heterogeneity is ten times higher in Brazil than in the United States. Taking the case of Brazil, this article quantitatively investigates differences in race between siblings. Not only is this phenomenon interesting per se, but it may also provide insights about racial discrimination.

Portuguese racial terms are used throughout the text. The three major racial groups are “branco” (white or light-skinned), “pardo” (brown or brown-skinned), and “preto” (black or dark-skinned). Data are drawn from the 2010 Demographic Census of Brazil, a nationally representative sample of 6 million households. This study focuses on full siblings identified as branco, pardo, or preto and living with both parents. Two distinct samples are constructed according to age group: siblings aged 15–19 and siblings aged 20–25. The first part of the statistical analysis examines the prevalence and patterns of families with different-race siblings. The second part examines racial differences in education and labor market outcomes across and within families. To this end, the analysis employs a within-sibling fixed effects regression model.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.02.003>

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NOTE. Sample includes sets of full siblings living with both parents. For Brazil, there are 169,163 sets aged 15–19 and 115,206 sets aged 20–25. For the US, there are 17,986 sets aged 15–19 and 7,586 sets aged 20–25. Sample weights are used. Data sources: Brazilian Census 2010 and American Community Survey 2010.

Fig. 1. Percentage of families with different-race siblings, 2010.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that within-family racial heterogeneity is a statistically relevant phenomenon in Brazil, as it occurs in approximately 17–19% of families. The strongest predictor of racial discordance between siblings is racial discordance between parents. Furthermore, within-sibling fixed effects regression models establish that race exhibits a modest but statistically significant association with some education and labor market outcomes. Most outcomes are not associated with race for siblings aged 15–19, although in families with both sexes, darker females have more favorable educational outcomes, while darker males have less favorable outcomes. In contrast, darker siblings aged 20–25 are categorically less advantaged than their lighter brothers and sisters along a number of dimensions. They have significantly lower education, lower personal income, lower formal employment, and lower occupational status. It is argued that patterns for siblings aged 20–25 may be indicative of individual racial discrimination. Nevertheless, the estimated coefficients are small in magnitude, implying that individual discrimination is not the primary determinant of interracial disparities. Instead, racial differences are largely explained by the family and community that one is born into.

This article makes several contributions. It is one of the first studies to empirically analyze the correlates of racial differences between siblings. Moreover, it is the first to examine labor market outcomes for full siblings identified as different races. To the extent that differences in race reflect differences in phenotype, this article contributes to the literature on discrimination by providing a unique approach to identify the effect of race. Advantageously, the within-sibling method is able to estimate the effect of race as a difference, not a residual; to control for all family background and macro contextual factors; to obtain reduced-form effects avoiding problems of imprecise controls and controls affected by discrimination; and to produce results with relatively good external validity.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related literature, Section 3 describes the data and methods, Section 4 presents the results, Section 5 discusses the results, and Section 6 concludes.

2. Related literature

2.1. Race in Brazil

In Brazil, physical appearance is a more important determinant of racial classification and stratification than family ancestry. Individual and social contextual factors are also predictors of racial identification. One line of research examines trends in racial classification across time (Carvalho et al., 2004; Marteleto, 2012; Schwartzman, 2007; Telles, 2004; Theodoro et al., 2008; Wood and Carvalho, 1988). For instance, Carvalho et al. (2004) uncover a significant “browning” of the population during the latter half of the twentieth century. Patterns in census data imply that a sizable proportion of individuals who identified themselves as preto in 1950 re-classified themselves as pardo in 1980. However, this trend has reversed in more recent years. Marteleto (2012) attributes the convergence of educational attainment between pardos and pretos from 1982 to 2007 not only to structural changes but also to changes in racial identification, as educated parents became more likely to identify themselves and their children as preto.

Another line of research examines the construction of racial identity at the individual level (Bailey, 2008, 2009; Bailey et al., 2013; Bailey and Telles, 2006; Francis and Tannuri-Pianto, 2013; Marteleto, 2012; Schwartzman, 2007; Telles, 2002, 2004; Telles and Lim, 1998; Telles and Sue, 2009). These studies emphasize that although race is variable at times, it is patterned and constrained in systematic ways. For example, Telles (2002) finds that contexts (e.g., education, age, sex, and local racial composition) play a role in forming identity. Persons self-identified as pardo who completed secondary school were more likely to be identified as branco by interviewers than those who did not complete secondary school, and persons whom interviewers identified as pardo who completed secondary school were likewise more likely to self-identify as branco. Francis and Tannuri-Pianto (2013) find that among university students, higher family socioeconomic status was associated with lighter racial self-classification and lower socioeconomic status with darker racial self-classification, even after controlling for a non-self-reported measure of skin tone.

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