

**COLOR, GENDER AND SOCIAL CLASS: DYNAMICS OF  
DISCRIMINATION OF LOWER INCOME YOUTH  
(RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL)<sup>1</sup>**

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This paper analyzes experiences of discrimination reported by a group of lower income youth from Rio de Janeiro, taking as a basis the role that social hierarchies, especially color/race, gender, and social class play in social practices. The study is part of a larger research project,<sup>2</sup> which analyzes in a comparative form the life trajectories of 21 young men and 21 young women of different colors and with differing experiences of social projects run by three non-governmental organizations and a governmental institution in Rio de Janeiro. The selected social projects shared the same general aims of promoting civic participation and providing vocational training for lower income groups, giving priority to the 14–21 age group. However, while some put greater emphasis on qualifications in the artistic and cultural sphere, others emphasized technical training.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was published in Portuguese with the title “Cor, gênero e classe: dinâmicas da discriminação entre jovens de grupos populares cariocas,” in *Cadernos Pagu*, 32:301–330, janeiro-junho, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The study is part of the project: “Sexuality, gender and the black population in Brazil and Colombia: qualitative evaluations,” supported by the Ford Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the large number of social projects aimed at young people in Rio de Janeiro city, a number of criteria were adopted in selecting these projects: 1) safe access, based on prior contact, due to the risks caused by armed conflict in Rio’s *favelas*; 2) the incorporation of projects developed both inside and outside low income communities and those aimed at homeless populations; 3) the inclusion of at least one project evaluated as successful by UNESCO (Castro *et al.*, 2001); 4) incorporation of social projects carried out by Oswaldo Cruz Foundation; 5) the ability to make comparisons with the work of Monteiro (2002) carried out

Of the 42 young people interviewed, 24 had participated in social projects and 18 had not. Both groups were similar in regard to sex, age, social position, and place of residence. The purpose of comparing data from a group with similar age and socio-economic characteristics was to be able to analyze tendencies related to the influence of social experiences on the life trajectories of these young people. Interviews were also carried out with the educators from the projects, while the activities of the organizations were directly observed.

The analysis of the biographies of the young men and women with experience of the social projects, found changes in their life trajectories compared with those of their peers who did not have such experiences. These changes were manifested in terms of increased standard of living and work opportunities, educational stimulation, and expansion of social networks. Another finding of the study is related to evidence of greater knowledge among those who took part in projects about sexual and reproductive health regarding STDs/Aids, the perception of individual risk, and the importance of condom use. These data are even more significant because the same group displayed greater carefulness in relation to health and control of reproduction, expressed in terms of postponing maternity/paternity and greater concern about child-raising.

Although it is recognized that the activities of social projects are limited by the restricted number of young people involved and do not promote changes in the structures underlying social inequalities, the results so far suggest that certain initiatives aimed at the urban juvenile population can expand the life prospects and symbolic capital of this social group.<sup>4</sup> In other words, faced with a situation of low economic growth and a

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among young people in Vigário Geral *favela*. It was agreed that the names of the projects would not be published, but the representatives of the four organizations involved would be given access to the results of the study.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the results described, see Monteiro and Ceccetto (2006).

growing necessity to enter consumption-based society, it is necessary to consider the vitality of activities that occur outside the formal economic system and the state. Further analyses are needed of the role of projects headed by non-governmental and governmental organizations that deal with the socioeconomic inequalities that affect excluded and marginalized groups in society.

Of the 42 young people of different colors (black, brown, and white) interviewed, most of the boys (20) and half of the girls (10) said they had experienced discriminatory situations. Based on these 30 interviews, this paper analyzes perceptions of situations of discrimination<sup>5</sup> encountered in the daily lives of this group, the contexts, motivations, and frequency of these situations, as well as the feelings and reactions generated by their occurrence. The analysis will emphasize the following: the role of color/race in these experiences; a comparative gender perspective; and the repercussions resulting from participating or not participating in the social projects.<sup>6</sup> Through this reflection, we hope to expand the debate about social, gender, and racial discrimination in Brazil. As shown by the brief discussion of Brazilian academic production in the social sciences presented below, there is a lack of qualitative research in this field.

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<sup>5</sup> In the literature on racial relations consulted, a distinction is made between prejudice and discrimination. Simply put, we can say that analytically prejudice and racism are ways of perceiving certain persons or racial/ethnic groups, while discrimination is the concrete manifestation of this way of thinking (Guimarães 2004).

<sup>6</sup> In a previous paper (Cecchetto and Monteiro 2006) the analysis focused on male youth, especially those with experience of social projects. In this paper we use and compare reports about discrimination from male and female youth with and without institutional project participation. We also considered reports on racial relations used in projects.

### **Brazilian Racial Discrimination**

An important part of the studies on racial discrimination in Brazil concentrates on understanding the effects of discrimination in the structural sphere, highlighting their impact on the perpetuation of social inequalities. This was the starting point of Hasenbalg's research (1979) at the end of the 1970s. His findings highlighted numerous obstacles to the social mobility of individuals categorized as *non-white*.<sup>7</sup> Census data on discrimination and racism, which already worried intellectuals and activists from the black movement at the time, indicated heightened racial inequality, especially in the labor market and educational system. These analyses, explored further by Nelson do Valle Silva, became part of the language of social movements linked to the racial question, reinforcing the thesis that the "racial" bias of social inequalities in Brazil was due to more than just the continuation of historical disadvantages (Fry 2006). Since then, the results obtained from the use of statistical data on discrimination and racial inequality in Brazil have been the starting point for studies by social scientists on hierarchical discrimination between *whites* and *blacks* (Guimarães 2004). Recent research has highlighted the barriers encountered by people with *black* phenotypes or skin color in relation to access to public higher education (Teixeira 2003) and employment in qualified labor market sectors (Guimarães 2004; Lima 1999), as well as in the exercise of equal rights in the spheres of citizenship and penal justice (Adorno 1996; Guimarães 1996). It is worth noting that in the analytical aftermath of these studies, black activism came to regard the persistence of racial inequality not only as evidence of the failure of social policies but also the decline of certain ideological narratives that guided the anti-racist agenda in Brazilian society.

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<sup>7</sup> Due to the use of varying categories to classify color/race, in this paper the terms will be given in italics, whether referring to the works cited or to the self-classifications of interviewees.

However, in the 1970s “race” was rarely used as an analytical category or intervening variable to deal with social inequalities, which were understood from a class perspective based on theories of modernization and a Marxist-inspired sociology of social stratification. In the 1980s the anti-racist struggle was represented by an alliance between the social sciences and the black movement, which had a restricted sphere of action. However, since the second half of the 1990s and, in particular, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new actors have adopted positions in favor of racial policies. State agencies, such as the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Research Institute of Applied Economics) and Itamaraty (Ministry of External Relations), as well as journalists, economists, other academics, and parliamentarians of various ideological backgrounds have associated themselves with an agenda of demands discussed in international arenas, in which public policies based on race are seen as a way to achieve social justice, in contrast with the universalist profile defined in the Brazilian republican constitution (Grin 2006). In recent years the question of racism (or racial prejudice) has therefore gained in importance, while the so-called “culturalist treatment” of the “racial question” has received severe criticism. In proposals for racially based politics and actions as the way to fight racism, “race” is being reinvented (Htun 2004; Maio and Monteiro 2005). Fry (2006) points out that the principal criticism has focused on the notion of “racial democracy,” which is claimed to be a myth (in the sense of hiding reality), and not on the ritualized affirmation of principles considered fundamental to the constitution of social order, in the anthropological sense of the term. As Fry states,

Racial democracy was highlighted not only as something that hides the harsh reality of discrimination and racial inequalities, but also as the principal cause of these racial inequalities (Fry 2006:183).

In light of the visibility and repercussion of the criticisms of the so-called culturalist vision, and despite the almost unanimous

belief among the general population<sup>8</sup> and those who study the issue that racism exists in Brazilian society, there is no consensus about how to face racial inequalities. Instead, different approaches have been the subject of intense controversies, especially in relation to anti-racist policies, dividing not only the academic world, but also contemporary politics and social movements.

According to Costa's definition (2002:108), there currently exist two approaches or forms of anti-racist conceptual and political proposals: the "egalitarian" and the "integrationist" schools. The central difference between them is in how they regard affirmative action policies aimed at overcoming social injustices experienced by individuals socially identified as *black* or *afro-descendent*. According to the integrationist school, the cultural particularity of the idea of mixing and the *continuum* of colors – translated through the interaction and integration of different color groups – has a "negotiable value" and should be preserved as a set of practices and values that are internalized as legitimate.

For the egalitarian school the emphasis is on the racialization of social identities based on the polarization between *whites* and *blacks*. In this way, they contest the universalist criteria used in the distribution of rights and prioritize the production of a "true equality of opportunities" for the social mobility of the black population. They argue that there is a need to implement social policies with a racial focus.<sup>9</sup> This perspective has been

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<sup>8</sup> Studies of prejudice and racial discrimination in the large cities show that most individuals acknowledge the existence of racism in Brazilian society. Nevertheless, the great majority of people deny having racist attitudes, revealing a disjuncture between individuals' understanding of the question and their self-perception of prejudice (Turra and Venturi 1995).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that since the early 2000s the Brazilian government has been using racial quotas in some ministries for hiring staff (Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform, Justice and Foreign Relations). The same

supported by data from quantitative sociological investigations of race or color as an explanatory matrix for structural social differences in Brazil.<sup>10</sup>

Differences of opinion about the best strategy to counteract racial discrimination indicate that the theme of racism has acquired visibility through the debate about poverty, social justice, and human rights. In other words, the question of "race" has come to be used as an analytical tool to explain the structural mechanisms of social inequalities and as a political instrument to overcome the historical injustices existing in Brazil. This process occurs within the ambit of democratization of the country and criticism of universalizing projects. It is influenced by the context of the end of socialism in Eastern Europe, neo-liberal ideology, significant changes in the domain of work, and new forms of political participation as evidenced by social movements organized around causes related to specific identities such as gender, "race," and sexual orientation, among others.

Qualitative investigations of this theme gain relevance, since they are capable of accounting for the values and meanings of racial relations in specific cultural contexts, without entanglement in the affirmation of political identities. This focus, understood as being complementary to quantitative studies, can help shed light on the particularities of racial relations in the national context.

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policy has been expanded to public universities (Telles 2003; Maio and Santos 2005) and to the public health field (Maio and Monteiro 2005).

<sup>10</sup> The importance of the production of statistical data about the worse conditions of *blacks* in relation to *whites* for the consolidation of race-based policies in the area of public health has been mentioned by Maio and Monteiro (2005). The reflection of the authors is supported by the arguments of Pinto and Souza (2002) and Pinto (2005) about the role of the production of information in the constitution and affirmation of "black identity" and the use of statistical analyses as an expression of social "reality."

### **Racial discrimination in distinct contexts of sociability**

Among sociological works on color in different societies, Nogueira's classic studies (1998) were fundamental for comprehending the discriminatory processes linked to the structuring of color/race in a national context and in their characteristics. Based on a comparative analysis of the United States and Brazil, the author distinguishes two types of prejudice associated with color/race directly linked to the contexts of those countries. While in the US prejudice is related to descent or origin, in Brazil phenotypic traits – such as skin tone, type of hair, and shape of lips and nose, especially when these approximate the traits or tones of black skin (*negra* or *preta* in Portuguese) – mobilize prejudice. In other words, the experience resulting from the “problem of color” in Brazilian society varies according to the greater or lesser presence of phenotypic traits and how these are counterbalanced by other aspects such as education, manners, elegance, etc.

The constant overlapping and close correlation between categorizations of color and class registered in the observations of Nogueira were interpreted by Fry (2005, 1991) and Maggie (1996) as specificities of Brazilian racial relations, sustained by flexible classificatory principles regarding the attribution of color and current discriminatory practices. In other words, for these anthropologists Brazilian cultural singularity is a positive trait and represents a form of coexistence defined by the mixing of color/race and alterities in the economic, symbolic, and political spheres. Based on this form of argument, racial discrimination can be understood as a situational procedure that includes combinations of variables that are innate (physiognomic traits) and acquired (e.g., class, gender conventions, and other social markers).

Most recent studies, especially in the field of ethnography, have highlighted some specific dynamics of discrimination in the leisure sphere. Sansone's work (2004) on inter-racial contacts in



Bahia shows the existence of a hierarchical gradation in areas or domains where black skin color can be a factor of prestige or an obstacle in social relations. In this logic, the labor market is an area considered to be unfavorable or *hard*, in which there is maximum discrimination against *black* people, while some leisure environments (and popular festivals), including the Catholic Church, are designated *soft*, with a minimal level of discrimination.

In an interesting ethnographic study of public transport in Rio de Janeiro, Maurício (1998), implicitly following the path opened by Nogueira, discusses the “subjective mediations” made by transport users. By observing the standards that guided passenger choices of the gender and color of possible travelling companions, the author identified a type of scale of preferences. Passengers of both sexes with light skin (*white, mixed*) primarily chose seats beside *white* women, followed by women with darker skin colors (*black – preta or negra*). Empty seats beside men were avoided, with seats beside men with darker skin being the last option. According to this study this selectivity was connected to two combined assumptions. The first, implicit in common sense and in Rio de Janeiro policing, associates dark color with criminality, and impacts, above all, young *black (preto/negro)* men who circulate in public spaces.<sup>11</sup> The other, which is more explicit, is the fear among the Rio de Janeiro population of being mugged in collective transport, a space where the probability of suffering different sorts of violence is high, due to the absence of proper public security.

Farias’s research (2006) on racial relations on Rio de Janeiro beaches highlighted an important dimension of the local dynamics of color classification interlinked with racial

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<sup>11</sup> This association is regularly updated by images in media of the so-called *arrastões* (group muggings), in which groups of young men, mostly dark skinned, threaten the population in public places in urban centers such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

discrimination: the notion of territory (in its symbolic meaning related to a specific *ethos* or morality). The beaches located in the south zone of the city constitute a moral area or space whose *habitués* operate a social classification of people or groups on the basis of place of residence, not color. In this way territoriality serves as an explicit marker and helps to subsume racial discrimination within a categorization of social position or *status*, indicating once again the combination of social variables in the dynamics of discrimination.

From what the evidence about racial inequalities shows, social spaces and local dynamics cannot be ignored in understanding the logic of discrimination. In relation to the challenge this poses, which requires a discussion of which strategic methodologies are most suitable for dealing with the question of discrimination, what appears to be important is understanding experiences according to gender; in other words how men and women interpret situations of discrimination in different spheres of social life<sup>12</sup> and the meanings attributed to these experiences, both in the field of subjectivity and the socio-political sphere. Therefore, we have taken gender conditions as a classificatory principle that maintains a close relation with the types of discriminatory actions experienced by individuals and groups in contemporary society (Stolke 1991).

Explanations of concrete experiences of discrimination interlinked with the categories of color/race and gender are based on analyses of the denaturalization and contextualization of differences. This vision follows the universalist anthropological approach which denies fixed correlations between physical characteristics and moral and intellectual

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<sup>12</sup> In the sphere of affective-sexual relations, Moutinho (2004) identified eroticism as a fundamental component for comprehending the logic that presides over certain interactions between heterochromic couples in which the etiquette is not to speak explicitly about color. The existence of this rule for these couples helps in understanding certain dilemmas of Brazilian racial relations in dealing with the subtleties of racial prejudice and discrimination.

attributes (Schwarcz 1996). Nevertheless, it recognizes that beliefs in distinctive attributes linked to “race” persist to the present day as social *myths* (in the anthropological sense) and as a basis upon which differences between people are constructed, something promoted in Western thought since the nineteenth century (Fry 2005).

It is important to emphasize that the use of the term ethnicity (popularized in the social sciences in the inter-war period and often reified in the cultural field) did not accomplish as much as gender in terms of cultural elaboration (Stolke 1991; Heilborn 1993). This means that although contemporary studies in the field of molecular genetics and the sequencing of the human genome show that the concept of human race is inconsistent from the biological point of view (Penna 2005), “race” is still a powerful social, historical, and political concept. It is a concept that contaminates social relations and becomes concrete as a social marker of difference. Therefore, the different cultural arrangements in which the specific forms of discrimination are manifested in the field of social interaction have to be taken into account. In relation to this, the analysis of experiences of discrimination of a group of lower income young men and women aims to identify how the categories of color/race, gender, and social insertion are inter-related, but not necessarily reducible to each other, in the social relations established in daily life.

### **Discrimination experiences according to gender**

A comparison based on gender, aiming to identify similarities and differences between male and female discourses, guided the analysis of the meanings attributed to discrimination by the group of young people analyzed. Furthermore, it was also necessary to examine if those involved in social projects had discourses distinct from the discourses of those not involved.

### **Brief Group Profile**

Of the 42 young people interviewed, 24 had participated in social projects and 18 had not. All had some formal education, though only half were still in school. The young people who had not been involved in social projects had relatively less education, though the differences were not significant.

In terms of families of origin, the majority were from the southeast region. The young people lived in *favelas* and/or low income neighborhoods. The majority had lived in these places since birth, showing that they remained with their families of origin. With regard to conjugality, only ten stated that they had stable partners; the others said they were single or dating.

Around half of the interviewees said they were working. Most of these had participated in social projects and were involved in activities linked to the cultural sector (project monitors, percussionists, actors) or were employed in the service sector (pharmacies, supermarkets, making clothes). Young people without experience in projects were relatively more represented in the informal labor market (street seller, garbage collectors/recyclers, handymen) or unemployed, especially the women.

According to the data based on self-classification – obtained with the question *What is your color or race?* – 18 young people declared that they were *negro (black)*, 8 that they were *pardo (brown)*, 6 *moreno (mixed)*, 5 *preto/pretinha (black)* and 4 *white*. One was ambivalent (*morena-pretal mixed-black*) and the other did not answer.

It was not surprising to find a minority of *whites* in this sample, since national statistics show that there is a higher concentration of *pretos (blacks)* and *pardos (brown)* in the population segments with lower purchasing power. It should be noted that young people who had been involved in the social

projects use the term *negro*, but those without experience of social projects use the term *preto*. This does not mean that the use of the bipolar model of classification has been adopted by the group, since the *pardo* (*brown*) and *moreno* (*mixed*) categories are still used. Rather, we can see a change in the value of the term *negro* in some social spaces, with the racial designation of a person as *negro* in the process of losing its negative connotation due to the identification – especially among younger generations – with the transnational circuits of valorization of so-called black culture (Sansone 2004:78-89). The positive connotation of the term *negro* may also be due to the prominence acquired by the question of racial relations in the national context, for example in the public debate about recent race-based public policies.

### **Perceptions of motives for discrimination**

Of the 42 young people interviewed, 30 reported experience of discrimination, of whom 20 were men and 10 women (see Appendix). It can be noted that the majority of those who denied having suffered discrimination were female, which suggests implications associated with gender. It is also worth noting that although it was possible to identify some common points in the viewpoints and experiences described by the young men and women, there were some gender distinctions connected to contexts and motivations, as will be shown below. Although the comparison between what was reported by the young people with and without experience of social projects did not highlight significant variations, it does indicate some differences in reactions to actual discrimination.

Previous analyses of the motivations perceived in the male sample (see note 6), revealed that among men what was most important was color, followed by place of residence and what was designated in the analysis as appearance, defined in the discourse as “way of dressing,” “social situation,” and

“physical handicap.” Of the young men who mentioned discrimination due to color, half also mentioned appearance and some also cited place of residence. For example, one of the young men self-classified as *negro* cited as an example of discrimination due to color the attitude of a security guard who would not let him into a bank, but did not bother a *white* guy. The same interviewee also described discrimination based on appearance saying that “many people think that muggers are always badly dressed.” Another young *pardo* (*brown*) man said:

When I look for a job I put my address on the application. “Can wait.” I am still waiting (...) This means discrimination starts there. I read a report that young people who live in [favela] Morro do Alemão (...), or [favela] Cidade de Deus, can’t get jobs because they live there. Do only bad people live in *favelas*? There are good people there; it is just that society does not see the other side.

These data suggest that for men self-declared as *negros* and *pretos*, low social status (expressed in terms of dress and place of residence) has a weight as significant as color in situations of discrimination. This can be due to the Brazilian classification model, as emphasized by Nogueira (1998). In other words, in explanations of discrimination in Brazil color is not a determinant criterion, since bodily posture, “*o jeito*” (the look), clothes, and residential context are perceived as equally relevant elements.

In female discourse the type of discrimination perceived is caused by accusations linked to place of residence, which is related to social belonging and the negative connotations of the *favela*, which is associated with violent events, as the following illustrates:

[Why were you discriminated?] Ah, because I live here in [favela] Vigário Geral, this happens a lot, even regarding jobs. If I say I live in Vigário Geral, there is no way ... I think it makes people afraid, if I say I live in Vigário Geral. There is no way that I will say I live here. People remember the massacre. [The murder of 21 people by the police in 1993].

There is an important element here for understanding the variations between young men and women. This involves the dimension of gender which, linked to the material conditions of existence, seems to make the racial discrimination suffered by women invisible, as argued by Crenshaw (2002). The few statements the young women make about appearance do not mention color in any explicit way, unlike those of the young men. Similarly a significant number of women do not mention any experience linked to prejudice or discrimination.

It is, therefore, worthwhile to highlight the differences between male and female statements about the perception of inequalities in terms of gender, color, and purchasing power. While some young men believe that gender asymmetry has been reduced due to women's conquests in the professional sphere, in the female reports there is a greater perception of the asymmetry of gender in the production of inequality, characterized by the identification of a greater favoring of men. In terms of color, although the majority acknowledged the presence of inequalities between brown (*pardos*), black (*pretos*), and *white* people, this perception is lower among women, reinforcing the greater invisibility of color to the female group. In relation to inequality between rich and poor, what predominates among both sexes is an emphasis on the lack of education of the poor as restricting opportunities.

### **Contexts, types of discrimination and reactions**

In relation to the contexts of discrimination, some points of comparison can be found between male and female viewpoints, but they also have their specificities. Both emphasize public spaces such as shopping centers, banks, streets, and restaurants. In these places prejudice is expressed by careless service, persecution, and violence on the part of security guards in commercial establishments, as well as by the police themselves, especially towards men.

The labor market was identified by young men and women as an equally unfavorable area in relation to color and place of residence, reinforcing the findings of the literature mentioned above. However, a difference associated with gender can be noted. This occurs in the sphere of relations established in work where women mostly perceive discrimination by people they know who hold hierarchically superior positions, due to their residential addresses. This finding is illustrated by the statement of a young woman, self-designated as *parda* and with experience of social projects, who saw herself as constantly confronted with the notion that her place of residence represented a threat:

[In which situations do you perceive you have experienced some form of discrimination?] Ah, the people here, when they know that there are people from a *favela*, as they say themselves, they start to become apprehensive. Like your wallet, your purse can disappear. We suffer so much in here, because people look at you as if you were just anyone. Even people who travel by bus. Actually people humiliate other people... people who are equal to you, but who feel superior when they are in certain places. Then we suffer.

Color discrimination was mentioned within the family environment, as indicated by the statement of a young woman self-defined as *negra* (black) and involved in a social project, referring to racist discourse within the family, curiously perceived as something “unconscious,” although it provoked reactions of irritation:

Look, recently I have been feeling so discriminated at home. Have you seen my husband’s face? He is really white with blue eyes. So whenever the question of color comes up. [What is that like?] I have already told you [reproducing a dialogue with her husband]: “Everyone can discriminate against me, except you.” [Why?] Because he has a stupid belief, that a black woman is hot, is good in bed, (...) but she is no use as a wife, but can warm up his feet, what the fuck is that? Then recently we were at a party and a child ran past full of energy, and I said “Wow, how beautiful, our kid will be like that.” [Husband]: “You’re crazy, of course our kid will not be like that, our kid will be black.” And I said “Who’s talking about color? I am saying he will be healthy, playful, he will run, he will be active, because he will be like his mother, he will.”



But you feel that it is unconscious, but it is discrimination. (...) Like my friends: they hope their children will be born with straight hair and pale eyes, is that right?

Among the women studied, the discrimination perceived in the work context was related to prejudicial stereotypes or comments made about their socio-economic situation, particularly their place of residence. In domestic spaces female complaints were about discrimination about color coming from family members or people near to them (peers, neighbors, spouses, and relatives), which above all interfered in their social and affective life.

Among the male respondents the most common type of discrimination was being prevented from entering, or being embarrassed when entering commercial and/or banking establishments and public places – by security guards or police, which involved the use of verbal and physical aggression. This finding converges with academic studies of the type of discrimination that most affects men, principally low social status. The discrimination is based on a racist idea often invoked as “common sense,” including among the police, that black skin color (*preta* or *negra*), combined with other attributes, is an indicator of criminality. In general, those considered suspicious due to their appearance (an indicator of class or social position) or color (a phenotypic trait) suffer abuses of power or are treated with physical violence, as was the case for two of the interviewees who had been assaulted by private security guards. The conduct of police officers based on racist assumptions has been confirmed in the work of Ramos and Musumeci (2005). These authors describe the construction of a “suspicious person with a standard color,” defined as a “colored” man from a low social class, who is the priority target of searches and arrests in routine investigations.

It can be noted that the experience of discrimination related to color varied according to gender. For men, discrimination in

public places (i.e., on the “street”) predominates, while women emphasized situations related to the domestic environment, in other words the “home” context, to use the dichotomous categorization of anthropologist Roberto Da Matta (1985). According to Da Matta these sociological categories help in understanding the Brazilian classificatory system used to demarcate differentiated types of interaction. “Home” and the “street” are spaces conceived as moral entities that operate through opposite, though complementary, codes: the “home code” is based on familiarity, friendship, loyalty, the personal, and *compadrio* (godparent relationships). The “street code” is anchored in universal and impersonal laws and in the individual. It should be stressed that in the female experiences studied here the domestic space is not preponderantly presented as a space free of the ambiguities of Brazilian racial relations.

In relation to these findings, the differences found in the male and female statements appear to be due to the discrimination experienced by each gender. While men are in general the victims – and also the perpetrators – of violent forms of discrimination, women tend to be the preferred target of verbal, or more hidden forms such as those aimed at their appearance and the body. This means that women are more susceptible than men to playful or accusatory comments about physical appearance (*ugliness, horrible hair, being improperly dressed*) and their sexual attributes (*greater vigor and sexual liberation*).

The configuration of gender differences in the experience and perception of discrimination gains a further dimension in the perception of “racial” discrimination, since there exists an understanding in daily life that verbal insults or discourses do not constitute racism. According to Guimarães (2004) this form of thought is commonly accepted among operators in the judicial sphere, including police officers who register complaints at police stations and who “decide” which articles

of law complaints come under. Often these practices result in controversial classifications that minimize discrimination, treating it as a crime against honor, especially when the victim is a woman. According to Guimarães this result from the Brazilian perception of racism as something that only involves segregation. In general people understand the discrimination of which they are victims on a daily basis as resulting from their social status, not from their "color."

When it comes to the reactions to experiences of discrimination, similarities were found among both genders. What predominated among both young men and women was the interiorization of negative emotions, expressed as feelings of humiliation, sadness, and embarrassment. Some stated that they reacted with irony or indifference, though only one young man mentioned the possibility of resorting to the courts or to civil society organizations that provide legal assistance. It can be assumed that the fact that they do not seek to have their rights as citizens guaranteed by the responsible authorities results from the tendency of the justice system to see most cases of racism as something minor, as argued by Guimarães above.

Finally, it is interesting to highlight that, unlike situations of discrimination in which color was explicitly invoked, prejudice linked to place of residence could cause young men and women to react by valorizing their place of residence. This finding converges with the value given to the local space, which the concept of territory helps to explain. Despite the alarming growth in violent deaths in the 1990s, arising out of territorial disputes over the control of the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro *favelas* and poor neighborhoods, the territory, in its sense of "feeling at home," is celebrated by those who live in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, especially young people. It is configured as a locus of juvenile sociability because of the centrality acquired by leisure in the definition of new identities in an urban context. This signifies that the concept of territory

has become an important variable along with color, generation, and gender in youth studies (Farias 2006; Cecchetto 2004).

### **Approaches of social projects**

In order to expand the analysis of the repercussions of social projects on the life trajectories of the young people who have had experience of social projects, nine professionals who had worked with educational activities in these projects were interviewed. One of the foci in these interviews was the approaches used by projects to confront the question of racial relations. The interview data, as well as the analysis of the documentation and publications produced by the projects, showed that the institutional work generally focused on professionalization and the exercise of citizenship by low income youth, and that there was no emphasis on the differentiation of “racial” groups.

Only one professional explicitly mentioned the valorization of the “codes and symbols of the black movement” and musical styles (samba, rap, funk) in carrying out his work. Place of residence, in this case *favelas*, as being associated with combating prejudice was also emphasized by the same educator. The associations between color and social class were mentioned by the other professionals, with the aim of illustrating the perception of the greater social vulnerability of poor young black (*preto/negro*) people with low educational levels.

Social class tends to acquire a greater centrality in the perception of social inequality among professionals in the social projects, and no approach focusing on the affirmation of identity and/or racial consciousness was identified. Articulations prevailed that sought to strengthen local support networks through the establishment of partnerships aimed, above all, at expanding the possibilities to provide welfare type

services (social work and psychological care) and vocational services (courses) to young people and their families.

With regard to the repercussions of the social projects, it should be noted that the two young men who reacted to situations of discrimination (one of whom went to a police station to file a complaint) took part in these projects. Among the women who took part in the projects there were also reactions against unfavorable attitudes or implicit racism encountered in professional activities. However, a large proportion of the young women without any experience of social projects did not mention having faced discrimination; in this context what predominates is a discourse about their greater difficulty in accessing the labor market. In other words, perceptions of the experience of discrimination were much more prevalent among men and among the young people who took part in the social projects analyzed.

It can thus be supposed that experience of social projects contributes to shaping the visions and behavior of these young people regarding discrimination, as it favors the recognition that their rights as citizens were being violated due to class, color/race, and/or gender differences. These changes can be understood through the comparative study, mentioned in the introduction, of the trajectories of youths who did or did not participate in the social projects studied. According to the findings young people with experience of social projects had better insertion in the labor market, a higher level of education, an larger circle of contacts, and had incorporated, even if only partially, a more egalitarian perspective on gender relations than those without any experience of social projects. Differences in gender were indicated by the higher social vulnerability of females among those who had not participated in social projects.

## Conclusions

The interpretation of the reports of the young men and women indicates that situations of discrimination are learned in distinct forms according to gender. Experience of social projects also has particular repercussions in terms of the perception of discrimination. Social class is still a resource used to speak of color/race, while social inequalities are not always seen as racial inequalities by the group studied.

For the young men, what stands out is the importance of the public space, the “street,” as the principal locus of the discrimination directed towards them, with the use of police power, including the use of physical force, being prevalent. They face situations in which color/race-based prejudice is linked to urban poverty. In relation to this, Zaluar’s arguments (2004) about the impact of social inequality on low income Rio de Janeiro groups are of relevance. Her research in Rio de Janeiro *favelas* since the 1980s has identified an over-representation of young men, especially poor *black* men, among the victims of urban violence. The perverse integration of poverty, crime, and the networks of the drug and arms trade particularly afflicts young men in Rio de Janeiro. The high rate of mortality among poor male youth reveals in part the Brazilian form of discrimination, a form of conduct that legitimates color and class as criteria that can make a person, males in general, a suspect or criminal. The absence of social policies to fight poverty as well as changes in the area of public security have been contributing to the overlapping of two forms of status that are not given prestige by Brazilian society: black (*preta/negra*) skin color and poverty.

Regarding perceptions and experiences of discrimination related to color among women, what draws our attention is the resignification of experiences in the domestic space. Unlike men, the type of discrimination that most affects and mobilizes women comes from people known to them or with whom they

socially interact. This involves a form of discrimination at “home” and not on the “street,” as mentioned above. Similarly, another observation is related to the lack of female statements that identify situations of discrimination in the various spheres of social relations, with an emphasis on those self-classified as black (*negro/preto*). One question appears to be obvious: Why were reports of discrimination less frequent among women? A clue to the answer can be found in Bourdieu’s work (1999) on the *habitus* of masculine domination. This approach allows us to understand the systematic character of the naturalization of differences between men and women and the processes through which this naturalization is taken as a point of reference to underpin gender asymmetries. As a result, despite the achievements of the feminist movement in recent decades, it is still possible to think of the force of gender conventions in terms of the hierarchy and prestige that dominate social relations.

At the same time silence should not just be interpreted as evidence of the acceptance of a subordinate role, but also as a specific way of dealing with certain social phenomena in accordance with gender. The women recognized situations of prejudice in the work environment and did not avoid reacting when confronted with verbal offenses, raising suspicions about the moral character of the others involved. The young women and men interviewed understood that prejudiced comments about place of residence are based on pre-existing notions associated with poverty and criminality, and reaffirm social hierarchies. In other words the symbolic violence of stereotypical discourse about social origin was not ignored by women. In the interfaces between hierarchies of color/race, class, and gender, particularly in the Brazilian context, color as a principle of social classification is associated with social situation and gender. This does not mean that the identification of racism is always subsumed to economic conditions or gender identity, or that color does not play a relevant role in

the dynamics of oppression, only that it acquires a specific format according to social contexts.

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## APPENDIX – Profiles of the 30 young people who stated that they had some experience of discrimination

	Nº	Age	Color/ race*	Place of Residence	Participated in Project	Experience of discrimination
H O M E N S	1	21	NEG	Santa Teresa	YES	Appearance and being black; in the workplace.
	2	21	PAR	VG	YES	Place of residence, in the labor market.
	3	22	BRA	Queimados	YES	Being poor, in a commercial establishment.
	4	18	NEG	VG	NO	Color, in the labor market.
	5	23	NEG	VG	YES	Racism, in a commercial establishment.
	6	22	NEG	VG	NO	Place of residence, in the labor market.
	7	21	MOR	VG	NO	Color, place of residence, in a public space (approached by the police)
	8	22	NEG	VG	YES	Color and place of residence, in a commercial establishment
	9	24	NEG	VP	NO	Color, in interpersonal relations (football club)
	10	24	NEG	SC	YES	Color, in a commercial establishment
	11	24	NEG	SC	YES	Being poor, in the domestic space.
	12	22	NEG	Santo Cristo	YES	Appearance, in a public space
	13	21	MOR	RUA	NO	Color, in a commercial establishment.
	14	23	PRE	RUA	NO	Having a physical handicap, in the workplace.
	15	20	NEG	Nova Holanda	YES	Place of residence, in the workplace
	16	24	MOR	VP	YES	Place of residence and religion, in the workplace.
	17	23	PAR	VP	YES	Place of residence, being evangelical, origin; in a public space (university).
	18	23	PAR	VP	NO	Sexual orientation, in the labor market.
	19	20	NEG	VP	NO	Place of residence, in the labor market.
	20	19	PAR	Sepetiba	YES	Interpersonal conflict, in the domestic space
M U L H E R E S	21	23	NEG	VG	YES	Color, in the domestic space.
	22	19	NEG	VG	YES	Place of residence, in the labor market.
	23	25	BRA	VG	NO	Place of residence, in interpersonal relations (peer group).
	24	18	PAR	VG	NO	Sexual orientation, in the domestic space
	25	18	AMB	Paciência	YES	Being homeless, in a public space
	26	21	NEG	VP	YES	Appearance and being black, in the workplace
	27	23	PAR	Bonsucesso	YES	Place of residence, in the workplace.
	28	23	MOR	VP	NO	Using drugs, in interpersonal relations (peer group).
	29	22	NEG	Vila do João	NO	Color and place of residence, in the Labor market.
	30	24	MOR	VP	NO	Being a single mother, in the domestic space

\*Color/race classification was based on the self-classification of the young people.

KEY: **Color/race:** NEG: Black; PAR: Brown; MOR: Mixed; BRA: White; AMB: Ambivalent.

**Residence:** VG: Vigário Geral; VP: Vila Pinheiro; Sc: São Cristóvão.