# Male immigrants with darker skin have fewer job opportunities than women and those with lighter skin.

America's demographics are changing; by 2065 one in three may be an immigrant. What to these changing demographics mean for American society? In new research **Andrea Gómez Cervantes** *and* **ChangHwan Kim** *look at the effects of immigrants' skin color on their employment opportunities. They find that for male immigrants, darker skin has a negative effect on employment, but found no effect for women. They suggest that assimilation of immigrants into the US has become segmented by gender, race, and skin color.*
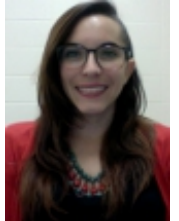
Racial divisions between black and white have marked American society throughout history. Color lines have been synonym to racial division and social inequality. Recently, the demographic composition of the country has changed, becoming more diverse due to growing new immigrants and multiracial populations. It is predicted that by 2065, one in three Americans will be an immigrant, or have immigrant parent, with Asians expected to be the largest immigrant group (38 percent among immigrants), followed by Hispanics (31 percent), whites (20 percent), and blacks (9 percent). In contrast the white, native-born population is expected to decrease from 62 to 46 percent. Social scientists attempt to understand the changing demographic composition of the country and its implications for social stratification. While some point to the continuing divide between blacks and whites, others argue that new immigrants reshape racial divides, either by blurring the color lines, or by re-establishing them.

In new research, we explore the way immigrants fit into these existing racial divides by looking at the intersection of gender, skin color and race in immigrants' employment possibilities. We find that for male immigrants, darker skin color has a substantial negative effect on employment, while for women skin color had no effect on employment.

Scholars agree that racial inequality is based on social constructions and meanings associated with racial categories—i.e. black, white, Latino, Asian—which also include connotations with physical attributes such as skin tone, facial features, or hair texture. While empirical research demonstrates that racial inequalities persist, studies on colorism show growing inequalities within racial groups based on skin color. People of color, including immigrants, with lighter skin tones are better off economically—in both income and wealth—than those with darker skin tones. Given the fluidity in meanings of race and gender, it is possible that meanings and social constructions of skin color are tied to those of gender. For instance, meanings of whiteness are typically attributed to beauty and purity, all feminized characteristics, while blackness is linked to ideals of masculinity including fear, criminality, aggression, and dominance. As a result, skin color prompts particular stereotypes and beliefs that are gendered. Most importantly, because dark skin is a suggestion of dominance and masculinity, dark skin is often viewed as a threat.

We use the 2003 New Immigrant Survey to test, through a set of logistic regressions, whether race and skin color affect legal immigrants' employment possibilities. Skin color is measured by a color scale ranging from 0 to 9, where 0 is the lightest possible skin color and 9 is the darkest possible skin color. We also control for human capital and demographic variables including, race, birth place, level of education, final degree from an American education institution, English proficiency, age, age-squared, years of immigration, and residential region. We created separate models for men and women and by immigrants' race and education levels to see if skin color had different effects on immigrants' employment opportunities.

We find that a darker skin color has a substantially negative impact on employment for male immigrants. With every increase level in the skin color scale from light to dark, male immigrants have almost 8 percent lower odds ratio of employment. That is, the darker their skin color is, the less likely they are employed. Unlike male immigrants, the effect of skin color on employment for women is neither statistically nor substantially significant. Thus, skin color did not have an effect on immigrant women's likelihood of employment. When looking at individual racial groups, we find that skin color had a negative effect on Asian immigrant men, even after controlling for education and other human capital related covariates.

Given that the labor market tends to be gender segregated, we wonder whether these gender differences are due to immigrants' types of occupations. So we also tested for immigrants' employment opportunities by level of education. Our results continued to vary by gender and also by level of education. We find that low educated immigrant men with dark skin are less likely to find a job than low educated men with light skin. However, for women it was the race variable that brought employment differences. Highly educated Asian and black female immigrants do not appear to be disadvantaged in finding a job, while less educated Asian and black female immigrants are substantially disadvantaged, compared to their white counterparts. This result implies that the racial stereotypes significantly affect Asian and black immigrant women, but not skin color.

Our results have strong implications on the incorporation of new immigrants. Given that work is the one of the first connections between new immigrants and American society, our findings suggest segmented assimilation processes by gender, race, and by skin color. Skin color interacted differently for men and women in their possibilities of employment. Because immigrant men with dark skin have a lower likelihood of gaining employment, they may face challenges and struggles in assimilating into society's middle or upper classes. Particularly among the less educated,

Asian male immigrants who are often portrayed as model minority in the media are not more advantageous than black male counterparts as long as Asian immigrants' skin color is equally dark as black immigrants.

Most importantly, our results suggest that skin color has different implications for men and women. It is probable that meanings of femininity and masculinity are intertwined with those of skin color. As theorized by previous scholars, femininity is linked to ideals of whiteness, which makes immigrant women nonthreatening to the existing laboring structure. Yet, because masculinity and blackness are tied, immigrant men with a dark skin tone may be viewed as threats more likely than immigrant men with a light skin or immigrant women.

This article is based on the paper: "Gendered Color Lines: The Effects of Skin Color on Immigrants' Employment" presented at the ASA annual conference August 2015.

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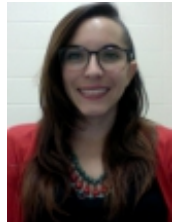
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