

Lightness/darkness of skin affects male immigrants' likelihood of gaining employment

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Skin color is a significant factor in the probability of employment for male immigrants to the United States, according to a new study by two University of Kansas (KU) researchers.

The researchers, Andrea Gomez Cervantes, a doctoral candidate in sociology, and ChangHwan Kim, an associate professor of sociology, found that among men, darker skin color negatively influenced their likelihood of employment, even after accounting for the effects of race and other demographic and education related variables. The negative effect of darker skin color was particularly salient for Asian male immigrants.

In contrast, for female immigrants, the lightness or darkness of their skin did not matter in terms of securing employment after controlling for the effect of race. While black and Asian women were disadvantaged compared to white female immigrants, Latin American women were not. Within the same racial group, darker skin color did not affect the chance of employment negatively.

"Our findings suggest that the color lines are gendered, and that race alone is no longer enough to understand the current stratification system," Gomez Cervantes said. "It is probable that meanings of femininity and masculinity are intertwined with those of skin color."

According to Gomez Cervantes, "The masculinity and threatening images attached to darker skin may have a negative impact for men, while those negative images are not applied to women, leading to different outcomes for men and women of color."

The authors, who relied on data from the 2003 adult sample of the New Immigrant Survey to look at interactions of skin color and race as well as skin color and gender on legal immigrants' employment probabilities, will present their findings at the 110th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA).

Gomez Cervantes said this research is important because the racial composition of the American population is increasingly expanding beyond black and white. Today, immigrants from Asia and Latin America account for the majority of new [immigrants](#) to the United States, and people of Asian and Latin American descent are the fastest growing populations in the U.S. Census experts have predicted that by 2050, whites will compose 46.6 percent of the American population while the racial minority population will more than double from what it is presently.

"The black/white racial divide may no longer fully predict the experiences and opportunities of those who do not neatly fit in the black/white dichotomy," Gomez Cervantes said. "The labor market experience of dark-skinned Latin American and Asian men is much less favorable than that of lighter skinned men from the same racial groups. It is also important to look at how gender interacts with skin color, as the interaction of gender and [skin color](#) may significantly shape people's life chances and opportunities."

More information: The paper, "Gendered Color Lines: The Effects of Skin Color on Immigrants' Employment," will be presented on Tuesday, Aug. 25, at 10:30 a.m. CDT in Chicago at the American Sociological

Association's 110th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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