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Author(s): Maria Cristina Morales

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Ethnic-Controlled Economy or Segregation? Exploring Inequality in Latina/o Co-Ethnic Jobsites¹

Maria Cristina Morales²

Recent research has increasingly focused on how ethnicity operates within labor markets. Due to perceptions of intragroup homogeneity and assumptions that inequality only occurs between majority whites and people of color, most research has neglected intragroup economic inequality. This study examines how skin color, immigration/nativity status, and gender influence wage differentials in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites (where workers are the same ethnicity). Using data from the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality (LASUI), it is found that there are skin color, immigration/nativity status, and sex wage gaps among Latina/os working in co-ethnic jobsites. Moreover, illustrating intersectionality, immigrant women and dark-skinned immigrants suffer from wage gaps in co-ethnic jobsites. Unexpectedly, some Latinas experience a wage advantage, in comparison with Latinos, which is associated with lighter skin. The author suggests that Latinas are subjected to multiple-jeopardy situations in which they experience an intersection of inequalities in jobsites saturated by co-ethnics but that lightness of skin color functions as a form of social capital. Thus, research on the benefits or costs associated with working with co-ethnics cannot be extended to the entire ethnic group. The conclusion is that for Central Americans and Mexicans, co-ethnic jobsites are generally forms of segregated employment with limited protection from discrimination.

KEY WORDS: co-ethnic jobsites; colorism; ethnicity; gender; inequality; labor.

INTRODUCTION

To date, most of the studies that have examined the influence of co-ethnic jobsites (where workers are the same ethnicity) have compared wages between workers employed in co-ethnic jobsites and their counterparts employed elsewhere. The present study deviates from those studies and is motivated by

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² Sociology and Anthropology Department, University of Texas at El Paso, 500 West University Drive, Old Main Building, El Paso, Texas 79968; e-mail: mcmorrales@utep.edu.

investigating wages among workers in co-ethnic jobsites. Specifically, this study evaluates whether Latina/o subpopulations, including dark-skinned individuals, immigrants, and women, are rewarded or discriminated against in co-ethnic jobsites. This study, then, allows for the investigation of intragroup discrimination, including its colorized, nativist, and gendered structures, and for the consideration of whether or not co-ethnic-concentrated employment is a safe haven that protects all co-ethnics from discrimination.

Thus far, most research has focused on the benefits and/or costs of co-ethnic employment for an entire ethnic group, with less attention being given to the possibility that some members of an ethnic group may be more privileged or disadvantaged than others. Perceptions of homogeneity and ethnic solidarity among co-ethnics, coupled with the notion that inequality only occurs between majority whites and minority groups, has limited the investigation of stratification within co-ethnic jobsites. Yet, a distinct but valuable literature on multiracial feminist theories urges us to examine the intersectionality of inequalities (e.g., Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1996; Collins, 1999; Glenn, 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; hooks, 1989; Segura, 1989), including the intersection of race and gender in labor markets (see Browne, 1999; Browne and Misra, 2003). For instance, Collins (1999) described a “matrix of domination,” in which individuals can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege through a combination of statuses of gender, race, and class. Therefore, in co-ethnic jobsites, it is possible that the benefits or disadvantages of working with co-ethnics may not be shared equally by all members of the ethnic group.

This study builds on the literature on ethnic-concentrated labor to evaluate the influence of inequality within co-ethnic jobsites. As mentioned, evaluations of the benefits or drawbacks of working with co-ethnics traditionally have compared the wages of workers employed in co-ethnic-concentrated workplaces with those of workers employed elsewhere. To build on this scholarly debate, I draw on the intersections of the inequality literature, which allows for a more nuanced assessment as to whether ethnically concentrated jobsites represent “ethnic-controlled economies” in which workers can exert labor power (Light and Gold, 2000) or segregated jobsites associated with depressed economic outcomes. Also, indicators of skin color and immigration status are considered in addition to gender, which expands on the discussions on intersectionality that have largely focused on race, class, gender, and sexuality. To empirically test these relationships, the analysis focuses on Latina/os (Mexican and Central Americans), who are important to consider given their reliance on employment in co-ethnic jobsites (Saenz *et al.*, 2004), their heterogeneity in skin color, and their large immigrant constituency.

Intra-Ethnic Inequality and Co-Ethnic Jobsites

Co-ethnic workplaces can serve as sites that enable members to overcome human capital deficits (e.g., Light and Gold, 2000; Portes, 1981; Portes and

Bach, 1985; Portes and Stepick, 1985; Waldinger, 1996; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). While recognizing that ethnicity is a crucial mechanism for sorting groups of people into categorically different sets of jobs, it is also possible to have economic equity in such workplaces (Waldinger, 1996). For example, Light and Gold (2000) used the term “ethnic-controlled economy” to describe how members of an ethnic group can exert power at work, independent of co-ethnic ownership, through numerical saturation, organization, governmental mandates, or combinations of these factors.

It is also likely that positive outcomes associated with employment in ethnically concentrated workplaces such as ethnic-controlled economies simply gloss over stronger negative processes of segregation for some racial/ethnic groups. For instance, some researchers are not optimistic regarding workers’ experiences in co-ethnic jobsites (e.g., Bonacich and Modell, 1980; Catanzarite, 2002; Gilbertson and Gurak, 1993; Hum, 2000; Kmec, 2003; Model, 1993; Sanders and Nee, 1987). The numeric dominance of one ethnic group in the workplace in aggregations such as ethnic-controlled economies may in fact exemplify segregated work environments with limited economic benefits accruing to ethnic groups such as Latina/os (see Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993).

For non-Cuban Latina/os,³ research on wage returns in co-ethnic jobsites suggests that such workplaces may not be as profitable for Latina/o workers as for other ethnic groups. Hum (2000) finds that Latina/o immigrants’ earnings are influenced by labor market experiences, rather than by superior payoffs to investments in human capital. For instance, Latina/os are disproportionately represented in undesirable jobs in which their wages are persistently depreciated (see Catanzarite and Aguilera, 2002; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Also, researchers have found that both occupational and job segregation (Catanzarite and Aguilera, 2002) are associated with a negative wage return (Kmec, 2003; Kmec and Skaggs, 2009). Nevertheless, others disagree and find that Latina/os’ economic returns in co-ethnic sectors are favorable (Chin, 2005; Wilson, 1999).

Numerous terms and operationalizations have been used to describe co-ethnic jobsites,⁴ but regardless of the terms and the presence of either positive or negative effects associated with each term, it is largely assumed that the

³ Henceforth, non-Cuban Latina/os are referred to as Latina/os.

⁴ There are arguably three general categories of work environments describing co-ethnic-concentrated jobsites. The first are the terms highlighting ethnic ownership. The broadest of these terms is “ethnic economy,” which refers to ethnic-owned businesses employing co-ethnic employees (see Light and Gold, 2000; Logan *et al.*, 1994); adding the feature of geographic concentration introduces the term “ethnic enclave” (see Portes, 1981). The second are the terms describing ethnic-saturated workplaces independent of ethnic ownership deriving from notions of segregation—“minority job concentrations” (Kmec, 2003), or in the case of Latino immigrants, “brown-collar occupations” (e.g., Catanzarite, 2000, 2002). The third are terms that also describe the labor concentrations of racial/ethnic groups regardless of ethnic ownership but focus on the *possibility* for ethnics to exert economic control—“ethnic concentrations” (e.g., Smith and Elliott, 2002), “ethnic-controlled economy” (Light and Gold, 2000), and “ethnic niches” (e.g., Hum, 2000; Waldinger, 1996; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). These terms are at times used interchangeably because they all describe co-ethnic-concentrated labor sectors.

outcomes are evenly distributed within the group. Thus, part of the lack of consensus associated with employment in co-ethnic jobsites may be attributed to the neglect of examining inequality factors within these workplaces. To address this issue, in the following sections I discuss how skin color, immigrant status/nativity, and sex relate to differential economic returns for workers employed in co-ethnic jobsites.

Skin Color

Research on co-ethnic jobsites has neglected the influence of skin color, yet some insights can be drawn from studies of general labor-market outcomes, which have found empirical support for phenotypic discrimination against Latina/os. Among Mexican Americans, the impact of skin color is similar to the dynamic among African Americans—namely, lighter-skinned Mexican Americans tend to have higher socioeconomic status than their darker-skinned counterparts (Allen *et al.*, 2000; see also Murguía and Saenz, 2002; Murguía and Telles, 1996; Telles and Murguía, 1990) even when considering social class backgrounds (Herring, 2004). Murguía and Saenz (2002), for instance, found skin color stratification among Mexicans in terms of household income, where individuals with light skin have the highest income followed by those with medium skin tone and, lastly, those with dark skin. One study even found a positive relationship between acculturation and earnings for Mexican Americans and other Latina/os but not for those with dark complexions and non-European phenotypes (Mason, 2004).⁵

Empirical studies on the disparities between economic outcomes and skin color have widely attributed this to discriminatory practices of privileging light-skinned over dark-skinned individuals, or colorism. Herring (2004), for example, found that darker-skinned workers of different ethnic groups (African American, Asian, and Latina/o) reported higher rates of job discrimination. Among groups of color, such as Latina/os, colorism is traced to colonization. The domination of indigenous and African people by Europeans encouraged racial hierarchies based on skin color (e.g., Hunter, 2002). As Europeans established themselves in the Americas, the “races” mixed, creating Mestizos (European and indigenous mixed) and Multattos (European and African mixed) (Herring, 2004). Thus, historically and to the present day, individuals with dark skin tend to be assigned lower status due to their association with indigenous and African populations, while those with lighter skin have higher status due to their phenotypical association with Europeans (Hunter, 2002; Morales, 2008; Murguía and Telles, 1996).

Some insights on reasons for colorism in the present day, even within Latina/o communities, can also be taken from Bonilla-Silva and associates’

⁵ For more limited support for the association between skin color and socioeconomic status, see Espino and Franz (2002).

“Latin Americanization” thesis that predicts that the racial hierarchy in the United States is increasingly reflecting that of Latin American societies characterized by skin color segmentation and color-blind ideologies (Bonilla-Silva *et al.*, 2003). As such, the biracial white versus nonwhite system in the United States will evolve to resemble the racial system found in Latin American countries, resulting in a tri-system of “whites” on top, followed by an intermediate group of “honorary whites,” and a “collective black” group at the bottom. Within this system, it is predicted that light-skinned Latina/os will occupy an “honorary white” category, while darker-skinned Latina/os will be a part of the “collective black” category. This theoretical perspective provides key insights regarding the possible impact of skin color on wage disparities within Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites.

Another explanation for wage disparities along skin color is derived from segregation. Morales (2008), for example, found that darker-skinned as opposed to lighter-skinned workers are more likely to work with co-ethnics. Moreover, this is a concern given that there is a negative association between Latina/os’ wages and the likelihood of working with co-ethnics. An explanation for this segregation can be drawn from Omi and Winant’s (1994) “racial formation” perspective. Under this perspective, it can be argued that not only race but the assignment of skin color variations to particular labor structural locations involves the representation of racial meanings. As such, light skin may operate as a signifier of whiteness, organizing racial meaning and the labor structure along color lines even in labor markets where co-ethnics predominate, which in the case of Latina/os is an ethnic group with pronounced skin color variations.

The theoretical perspectives outlined above illustrate some of the reasons behind the costs associated with having darker skin even within communities of color such as Latina/os. As such, it is likely that the association between skin color and wages will persist in co-ethnic jobsites. In addition, if Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites are segregated sectors that are characterized by vulnerability and negative returns to human capital, then it can be expected that dark-skinned workers will not have enough power to avoid wage discrimination, contrary to predictions of the ethnic-controlled economy theory. Drawing from the literatures on skin color wage disparities in the general labor market and theoretical perspectives on race and colorism, it is argued here that “whiteness”—and, by association, lightness of skin tone—influence wages in co-ethnic jobsites; specifically, that in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites dark-skinned Latina/os will earn lower wages than their lighter-skinned counterparts (Hypothesis 1).

Immigration/Nativity Status

Some argue that in order to understand Latino economic inequality it is vital to emphasize the role of nativity (Valenzuela and Gonzalez, 2000). Cultural and social differences between the U.S. and foreign labor markets, as well as the limited transferability of employment skills, have disadvantaged

foreign-born workers. Yet, in explaining the immigrant-nativity gap, the overall consensus is that human capital factors alone cannot account for the earning differentials (Sanders and Nee, 1996; Valenzuela and Gonzalez, 2000).

Two competing views have been put forth to explain earnings differentials by nativity status. First, orthodox economic theories explain the gravitation of immigrants toward menial, low-paying jobs as an expected result of an expanding economy. According to this line of thinking, when the economy is growing, native workers take better-paying positions and leave a scarcity of labor at lower-paying jobs (see Portes and Bach, 1985). Second, the colonized minorities' perspective draws on the historical circumstances where immigrant groups did not arrive of their own free will or worked under conditions of servitude or peonage and thus occupied positions at the bottom of the labor structure. Under these circumstances, native-born workers did not leave vacant positions; rather, positions at the bottom of the labor structure are casted for a particular class of worker (Portes and Bach, 1985). As such, employers may prefer immigrant labor to native-born because they are perceived to be more easily exploited—more “docile” and more willing to work for low wages (see Farley, 1996).

Furthermore, newly arrived immigrant workers are initially more willing to take low-paying jobs because they want to begin sending money back home as soon as possible and they use the prevailing wage structure from their home countries as their point of reference (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Yet, Doodoo and Pinon (1994) found no evidence of a pay penalty associated with nativity or citizenship status among the Mexican-origin population in the United States. They attribute this finding to misperceptions of the homogeneity of the Mexican-origin population. Despite these competing explanations, most researchers agree that nativity should be considered in explaining Latina/o earnings differentials.

Only a limited amount of research has examined the influence of nativity status on economic outcomes in co-ethnic jobsites. Instead, studies have primarily focused on immigrants and have neglected the native-born workers. One exception is research on “brown-collar occupations,” in which recent Latino immigrants are concentrated (Catanzarite, 2002). Findings have shown pay degradation for both immigrants and native-born workers employed in brown-collar occupations (Catanzarite, 2002). Thus, based on insights from Catanzarite (2002) and the literature on immigrant wage penalties (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Portes and Bach, 1985), I propose that among workers in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, foreign-born/immigrant Latina/os will earn lower wages than their native-born Latina/o counterparts (Hypothesis 2).

Sex Wage Gap

Scholars long ago established that women in the United States are paid less than men for comparable work (see Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Reskin and Roos, 1990) and that women of color earn the lowest wages of all (see

Browne, 1999). Yet, it is unclear how pervasive the sex wage gap is in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites. Most of the scholarship on gender dynamics in co-ethnic work environments has focused on ethnic economies (ethnic-owned, co-ethnic employee businesses) (Phizacklea, 1988) and enclaves (geographic concentration of ethnic economies) (Chin, 2005; Gilbertson, 1995; Yamanaka and McClelland, 1994; Zhou and Nordquist, 1994) and has generally found women's labor (at lower wages) to be indispensable for the economic survival of the ethnic group. However, these findings may not be easily generalized to women employed in co-ethnic jobsites. The literature on sex and economic outcomes associated with employment in co-ethnic jobsites is limited, with an exception being Brown *et al.* (2001), who found lower wages for Latinas and African-American women as opposed to white women employed in predominately black and Latina/o jobs. However, the question of the sex wage gap (between females and males) in co-ethnic jobsites remains largely unexplored.

Some insights, however, can be drawn from studies on the sex wage gap in the general labor market. The sex gap in pay has largely been linked to sex-segregated jobs (England, 1992, 2005; Huffman, 2004; Kilbourne *et al.*, 1994; Reskin and Roos, 1990; Reskin *et al.*, 1999), in which the larger the female share of the workforce, the more wage depreciation there is for all workers (Bellas and Coventry, 2001; Huffman, 2004; Reskin *et al.*, 1999). This association is partly attributed to occupations with female concentrations being located in lower-paying industries and firms (England, 1992, 2005). Another explanation is the "devaluation thesis," which argues that gender bias leads to the perception that female jobs are worth less pay (England, 2005).

There is less agreement on the influence of race/ethnic segregation on women. Even though black women and Latinas are often employed in lower-paying jobs than white women, the concentration of gendered jobs does not vary substantially by race (England, 1992). However, these findings can be attributed to the focus on national data that are not refined enough to capture racial/ethnic segregation (Brown *et al.*, 2001; Jacobs and Blair-Loy, 1996). Racial/ethnic groups also have a sexual division of labor that impedes individuals from activities of the opposite sex (Amott and Matthaei, 2006), yet the effects of race/ethnic labor composition are especially debatable if we simultaneously consider sex and race/ethnicity (Reskin *et al.*, 1999). At the same time, the devaluation of labor associated with lower-status groups might also determine the race composition of establishments and affect workers' pay (Reskin *et al.*, 1999). Based on insights from the literature and the persistent sex wage gap in the general labor market, I propose that within co-ethnic jobsites, Latinas will earn less than Latinos (Hypothesis 3).

Intersectionality

Feminist scholarship, in particular, suggests that inequality factors do not operate in isolation, but interact with one another to form intersections of

factors (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill, 1996; Brown *et al.*, 2001; Collins, 1999; Glenn, 1985; hooks, 1989; Segura, 1989). As such, gender processes cannot be understood independently. This scholarship has largely focused on race/ethnicity, class, sex/gender, and sexuality as interconnected concepts that interdetermine processes such as economic experiences (Amott and Matthaei, 2006). Scholars have taken various approaches to intersectionality to examine economic inequality (Browne and Misra, 2003). For example, “multiple jeopardy” is a concept used to describe the disadvantaged position of women of color by illustrating that women also exist as differential categories, such as women of color and working-class women (Browne and Misra, 2003; Segura, 1989).

Less attention has been given to intersections involving color and nativity, both of which are important considerations for Latina/os. Due to the conflation of the concepts of “race” and “color,” the term “color” is sometimes used interchangeably with “race.” A different body of literature, however, considers immigration/nativity status and gender simultaneously. In the case of immigrant Latinas, inequality is magnified by the gendered, racialized, and nativist labor market institutions and processes (see Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). The intersection of inequalities, however, has received limited attention in the literature on co-ethnic jobsites, and so the question remains: How does this intersection of inequalities operate in co-ethnic jobsites? I propose that within Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, despite the presence of co-ethnics, intra-ethnic stratification creates a multiple-jeopardy situation through colorism, nativism, and sexism. The following is a summary of all the hypotheses that will be investigated regarding wage outcomes in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites.⁶

- H1: Dark-skinned Latina/os will earn lower wages than lighter-skinned Latina/os.
- H2: Foreign-born Latina/os will receive lower wages than native-born Latina/os.
- H3: Latinas will earn less than Latinos.
- H4: Foreign-born, darker-skinned Latina/os will earn lower wages than native-born lighter-skinned Latina/os.
- H5: Foreign-born Latinas will receive lower wages than native-born Latinos.
- H6: Darker-skinned Latinas will earn less than lighter-skinned Latinos.

These hypotheses will contribute to discussions on whether co-ethnic jobsites are indeed safe havens that protect all Latina/os from wage discrimination based on color, nativity, or sex.

DATA AND METHODS

For this analysis, I use data from the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality (LASUI), which is a part of the Multi-City Study of Urban

⁶ Unfortunately, limited sample sizes did not allow for the examination of three-way interactions.

Inequality (MCSUI).⁷ The LASUI is a multistage, stratified, probability sample of employers and households. Race-of-interviewer effects were minimized by ethnoracial matching of respondents and interviewers. The actual rate of ethnic matching between Latina/o respondents and interviewers was 74%. Even though the data were collected approximately a decade ago, they continue to be a rich source of information, including detailed information on the jobs and labor markets in which Latina/o workers participate, and they are among the latest to contain an indicator of skin color.

The sample is restricted to wage earners in co-ethnic jobsites. Specifically, workers employed in these jobsites are identified by the following question: What is the race or ethnicity of most of the employees doing the kind of work you do at this location? The survey codes the race and ethnicity of co-workers in broad terms—in this case Latina/o. This represents a measure of ethnic concentrations at the job level, where employers and employees interact and employers make decisions about workers, thus influencing wage allocations (Kmec, 2003; Kmec and Skaggs, 2009). Comparable conceptualizations of co-ethnic jobsites with LASUI and MCSUI data have been used to examine employees' authority attainment (Smith and Elliott, 2002), as well as ethnic networks and employment (Elliott, 2001), and to determine the distinctiveness of ethnic economies (Hum, 2000; Kmec, 2003). Also, consistent with the recommendations of previous studies, this analysis excludes the self-employed (see Logan *et al.*, 2003; Sanders and Nee, 1987). The study builds on the literature based on these data by examining intra-ethnic stratification factors.

Because the analysis is limited to workers in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, and because wage returns in these environments are lower than for workers employed in more racially integrated workplaces (Kmec, 2003), a variable is introduced to control for selectivity bias. This is necessary because the regression coefficients obtained from the selected sample of workers in co-ethnic jobsites may confound the parameters that explain the wage returns with the factors that determine whether or not a Latina/o worker is employed in such a jobsite. The selectivity bias variable is constructed following the widely adopted Heckman's (1979) correlation two-step method. First, the predicted probabilities of Latina/os working in co-ethnic jobsites are calculated. Because the formation of co-ethnic jobsites is largely attributed to job networks that facilitate labor market adjustments for immigrants (and native-born minorities to a lesser extent) (Waldinger, 1996), employment in co-ethnic jobsites will be predicted based on a measure of job networks, such as whether the individual used friends or relatives for gaining employment. So, the equation is:

$$P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \varepsilon,$$

where P is the probability of employment in a co-ethnic jobsite for all Latina/o workers, β_0 represents the intercept, β_1 represents the nonstandardized coefficient, and x_1 represents workers who use job networks to locate

⁷ Bobo *et al.* (2000).

employment. The results provide a new independent variable, the inverse Mills ratio (λ), which is entered into the wage regression model as an indicator of selection into the sample. The following is the full wage model estimated using OLS regression:

$$(\ln)\text{hourly wage} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{skin color}) + \beta_2(\text{foreign-born}) + \beta_3(\text{sex}) + \beta_4(x_1) + \beta_5 M + \varepsilon,$$

where β_0 represents the intercept; x_1 is a vector of human capital, demographic, and labor market (firm- and occupational-level) controls; M is the inverse Mills ratio to account for selectivity bias; and ε is the error term.

Operationalization of Theoretical Concepts

Dependent Variable: The dependent variable is the natural logarithm of respondents' hourly wages. The LASUI constructed an hourly wage variable based on a combination of three factors: (1) earnings; (2) whether earnings are hourly, weekly, biweekly, monthly, or annually based; and (3) hours worked per week. The natural logarithm of hourly wages is used to minimize outliers in the distribution and to facilitate the interpretation of regression coefficients. The log form of wages can be interpreted as the percent change in the wages in response to a unit change in the independent variables. For dummy variables, the effects on percent changes in hourly wages are calculated as $(e^B - 1 \times 100)$ (Allison, 1999).

Independent Variables: The primary independent variables are skin color, immigrant/nativity status, and sex. Skin color is measured with two dummy variables: medium skinned (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise) and dark skinned (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise). The reference category for these two dummy variables is light-skinned workers. Admittedly, this is a difficult concept to operationalize, but the LASUI's skin color categories follow those of most other quantitative data sets, with the perceptions of respondents' skin color ranging from light to dark as determined by interviewers' perceptions. Moreover, as noted above, in 74% of the cases a co-ethnic interviewer made this determination, which is useful in the assessment of intra-ethnic skin color segmentation. The LASUI, as part of the MCSUI, is among the most recent data sets with indicators of skin color. Prior research on skin color differentials among the Latina/o population has been conducted with the 1979 National Chicano Survey (e.g., Hunter, 2002; Mason, 2004; Telles and Murguía, 1990; Murguía and Telles, 1996) and the 1990 Latino National Political Survey (e.g., Espino and Franz, 2002; Murguía and Saenz, 2002). Nativity is dummy coded as "1" for foreign-born and "0" for native-born. Unfortunately, the small sample size

impeded the construction of more refined categories of nativity or length of stay. Sex is coded as “1” for female and “0” for male.

Control Variables: The control variables in the model include various human capital, demographic, and labor market controls at the firm and occupational levels. The individual-level, human-capital-related economic factors are education, English-language proficiency, and job experience. In terms of explaining labor market differentials, human capital theory continues to be an important framework for understanding the labor market experiences of workers, and education is the most influential human capital indicator related to employment outcomes. Based on this, a series of dummy variables was constructed to indicate workers’ highest level of education: (1) less than a sixth-grade education, (2) from seven to eleven years of education, and (3) high school graduate. The reference category is workers who have at least some college education. English proficiency is also included as a control because it is used by employers as a proxy for length of time in the United States and experience in the U.S. labor market (Chin, 2005); it is coded as “1” for limited English proficiency and “0” otherwise. Job experience is operationalized as the number of days of experience performing a particular job before being hired into the present position, and a separate variable, “job experience squared,” is controlled for in order to capture any potential nonlinear relationship between work experience and wages.

Demographic controls related to labor market outcomes include age and parental status.⁸ Age is measured as a natural logarithm because this variable is skewed and transforming it to its natural logarithm can reduce this problem (see Hamilton, 1992). Parental status is included as a control because having children at home is associated with unfavorable economic outcomes (Chin, 2005; England, 2005). Parental status is coded as “1” if the respondent has a child or children in the household and “0” otherwise.

An advantage of the LASUI is that it allows for labor market characteristics at the firm level to be accounted for. To control for firm-level stratification, indicators of firm size and the respondent’s supervisor are included. Also included is firm size as a control because lower-paid co-ethnic jobsites are often characterized by a predominance of smaller firms with less revenue and because smaller, nonbureaucratic firms are hypothetically more likely to practice statistical discrimination in which race and sex are used as proxies for skill and employment costs (Reskin *et al.*, 1999). The logged form of firm size is used because it is possible that the effect of firm size on co-ethnic jobsites is nonlinear (Elliott, 2001). Moreover, within the firm, the influence of the supervisor is important because having a co-ethnic supervisor can be an indicator of depressed wages associated with segregation (see Kmec, 2003) and might be erroneously perceived as a form of protection from labor discrimination

⁸ Controls for disability and nationality were tried, but they were not significant and did not improve on model fit.

(Elliott and Smith, 2001). In addition, not having a supervisor is an indication of autonomy at the jobsite. Therefore, a series of dummy variables indicating whether the worker has a non-Latina/o supervisor, a Latina/o supervisor, or no supervisor (reference category) are included as controls.

The occupational-level characteristics (occupation, percent female in an occupation, and human capital requirements) are also included as control variables. It is well established that wage disparities are partly attributable to the distribution of employment across occupations. To control for whether workers in co-ethnic jobsites who perform the same jobs have different salaries, a measure of occupation is included. The LASUI codes occupation based on the Census Occupation Codes. A series of dummy control variables are used here to identify workers who are employed in technical work, sales, or administrator support (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise); service (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise); precision production, crafts, or repair (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise); and operators, fabricators, or laborers (1 = yes, 0 = otherwise). The reference category is managerial and professional specialty occupations. Note that due to limited sample sizes, the occupational categories could not be further refined and that workers employed in farming, forestry, and fishing ($N = 1$) are excluded. In addition, a higher percentage of female workers in an occupation is associated with lower wages (England, 1992, 2005; Kilbourne *et al.*, 1994; Reskin and Roos, 1990; Reskin *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, following insights from Browne *et al.* (2001), a measure of the percentage of females in a respondent's occupation within the local labor market is included. Specifically, the occupational composition variable is based on the percentage of females in each of the 1990 Census three-digit Census Occupation Codes for Los Angeles County. This variable was created by obtaining 1990 Census data on the percentage of females in each three-digit Census Occupational Code for L.A. County.⁹ Then the corresponding percent female value was assigned to each respondent's three-digit occupation. In addition, some workers attribute racial/ethnic and sex wage disparities to the lower human capital requirements of the jobs they occupy (see Brown *et al.*, 2001). To control for the human capital requirements in the respondent's occupation, a continuous variable measuring the amount of job-specific skills that are necessary to perform the respondent's work tasks is included. Specifically, this variable is based on the question: "If someone with appropriate education but no experience were to start your job tomorrow, how long would it take him/her to be fully able to do the job?"

Plan of Analyses

Background bivariate analysis begins with a description of the mean wage distribution in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites across selected categories. In the multivariate analyses, OLS regression is used to estimate the effects of skin

⁹ Retrieved September 3, 2007 (<http://censtats.census.gov/eo/eo/shtml>).

color, nativity/immigrant status, and sex on wages. The analytical model includes the dependent variable (log hourly wage), three independent variables (skin color, nativity/immigrant status, and sex), and control variables (human capital, demographic, firm, and occupational indicators, and a selectivity bias variable).¹⁰

RESULTS

Background analysis provides preliminary support for Hypotheses 2 and 3, which propose that native-born workers and males earn higher wages than their respective counterparts (not shown). However, the wage distribution according to skin color deviates from expected patterns. The hourly wages for light-skinned (\$6.98) and medium-skinned (\$6.90) workers are similar and lower than the average hourly wage for dark-skinned workers (\$7.80). Although these averages are all below the livable wage for L.A. during this timeframe (\$7.97) (Morales, 2008), in order to more accurately assess the hypotheses, multivariate analyses are used.

Table I presents the coefficients for the relationship between inequality factors and the logged hourly wages of workers in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites using OLS regression analysis. The table is presented as additive models to allow for the assessment of how inequality factors operate when demographic, human capital, and firm-level factors are controlled (Model 1). It is also well established that occupational factors account for wage disparities, particularly with regard to the sex gap. To analyze the differential impact of firm versus occupational factors on wage outcomes in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, occupational indicators, along with demographic and human capital controls, are considered (Model 2). Finally, the full model includes all the independent and control variables (Model 3). For purposes of clarity and space, only the results for the full model and for the variables of interest are reported. The full model explains about 42% of the variation in logged hourly wages for Latina/o workers in co-ethnic jobsites.

As expected, among Latina/os in co-ethnic jobsites, the inequality factors of skin color, nativity, and sex significantly affect logged hourly wages, net of demographic, human capital, firm, and occupational characteristics. Hypothesis 1 is partially supported, in that in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, medium-skinned Latina/os earn about 13% less than light-skinned Latina/o workers. Dark-skinned workers earn less than light-skinned individuals, but this relationship is not statistically significant. Providing support for Hypothesis 2, foreign-born workers earn about 22% less than their native-born counterparts.

¹⁰ The data were collected between September 1993 and August 1994, and all of the data were weighted using a normalization of the person weight to account for nonresponses. So, the weighted counts of persons were proportional to the age-sex-race adult distribution of L.A. County based on the 1990 U.S. Census. By normalizing the weights, the weighted sum of y provides an estimate of the population total of Y (SAS, 2004).

Table 1. OLS Regression Examining the Relationship Between Selected Variables and Logged Hourly Wages Among Latina/o Workers in Co-Ethnic Jobsites

| Selected Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Medium skin tone | −0.112* (0.063) | −0.117* (0.066) | −0.138** (0.065) |
| Dark skin tone | −0.044 (0.075) | −0.107 (0.080) | −0.093 (0.078) |
| Foreign-born | −0.269*** (0.095) | −0.200** (0.097) | −0.244*** (0.096) |
| Female | −0.264*** (0.050) | −0.266*** (0.063) | −0.285*** (0.062) |
| Controls | | | |
| Grade school | 0.009 (0.075) | 0.033 (0.084) | 0.069 (0.083) |
| Education 7–11 yrs. | −0.103 (0.067) | −0.068 (0.073) | −0.041 (0.072) |
| H.S. diploma | 0.021 (0.066) | 0.022 (0.072) | 0.057 (0.070) |
| Limited English proficient | −0.033 (0.089) | −0.104 (0.090) | −0.074 (0.089) |
| Experience | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Experience square | −0.000 (0.000) | −0.000 (0.000) | −0.000 (0.000) |
| Log age | 0.218** (0.105) | 0.189* (0.107) | 0.209** (0.106) |
| Parent | 0.053 (0.047) | 0.024 (0.047) | 0.045 (0.047) |
| Log firm size | 0.049*** (0.018) | | 0.048*** (0.018) |
| Latina/o supervisor | −0.196** (0.089) | | −0.178** (0.090) |
| Non-Latina/o supervisor | −0.009 (0.087) | | −0.021 (0.087) |
| Selectivity bias | 0.755*** (0.163) | 0.777*** (0.164) | 0.690*** (0.167) |
| Technical | | 0.188 (0.126) | 0.179 (0.122) |
| Service | | 0.109 (0.132) | 0.092 (0.130) |
| Production | | 0.202 (0.144) | 0.165 (0.142) |
| Operation | | 0.114 (0.129) | 0.096 (0.126) |
| Percent female occupation | | 0.001 (0.001) | 0.0007 (0.001) |
| Average skills requirement | | 0.0002*** (0.000) | 0.0001*** (0.0005) |
| R ² | 0.38 | 0.38 | 0.42 |
| N | 239 | 239 | 239 |

^aStandard error.
p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01.
Source: Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality 1994.

Also, females employed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites earn 25% less than males, providing support for Hypothesis 3. Thus, consistent with the wage gap documented in the general labor market (see Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Reskin and Roos, 1990) and differences between native and immigrant wages, human capital alone cannot account for the observed wage disparities (see Sanders and Nee, 1996; Valenzuela and Gonzalez, 2000).

Relationship Between Intersections of Inequality and Wages of Latina/os in Co-Ethnic Jobsites

To explore whether multiple jeopardy as a result of the intersections of inequalities exists in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, the interaction effects between selected variables (skin color, nativity, and sex) and wages are assessed.¹¹ Table II presents the multivariate results from examining the interaction between skin color and nativity, constructed by multiplying skin color

¹¹ The interaction between parental status and sex was tried, but the results were not significant.

Table II. Abridged OLS Regression Examining the Relationship Between Selected Variables and Logged Hourly Wages Among Latina/o Workers in Co-Ethnic Jobsites

| Selected Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Medium skin tone | −0.009 (0.144) ^a | −0.226*** (0.085) |
| Dark skin tone | 0.187 (0.174) | −0.054 (0.098) |
| Foreign born | −0.075 (0.165) | −0.150 (0.100) |
| Female | −0.254*** (0.064) | −0.213 (0.144) |
| Interactions | | |
| Foreign born × Medium skin tone | −0.145 (0.158) | |
| Foreign born × Dark skin tone | −0.343* (0.191) | |
| Female × Foreign born | | −0.226* (0.124) |
| Female × Medium skin tone | | 0.242** (0.120) |
| Female × Dark skin tone | | −0.181 (0.160) |
| R ² | 0.43 | 0.46 |
| N | 239 | 239 |

^aStandard error.

p* < .10; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01.

Note: The model includes controls for human capital and demographic factors (education, English proficiency, experience, age, and parental status), labor-market-related factors (firm size, supervisor, occupation, percent female in occupation, and average skill requirement), and selectivity bias. *Source:* Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality 1994.

variations by nativity (reference category = light-skinned native born) (Model 1). An additional model considers the interaction of sex and the other inequality factors of interest—nativity and skin color (Model 2). These interactions are constructed by multiplying sex and nativity (reference category = native-born males) and skin color variations and sex (reference category = light-skinned males). The models explain about 43% (Model 1) and 46% (Model 2), respectively, of the variation in logged hourly wages for workers employed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites.

Table II reveals three major findings regarding wage disparities for dark-skinned, immigrant/foreign-born, and female workers employed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, net of human capital, demographic, firm, and occupational controls. First, supporting Hypothesis 4, and illustrating the intricacies of the skin color-nativity gap in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, being foreign-born lowers the wages of dark-skinned workers by 34% ($e^{-0.343 + (-0.075)} - 1$) compared with native-born, light-skinned workers (Model 1).¹² Being foreign-born is also associated with decreased wages for medium-skinned workers, but those results are not statistically significant.

Second, supporting Hypothesis 5 and clarifying the influence of nativity on sex in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, foreign-born females, as opposed to native-born males, experience wage disparities. Specifically, net of controls, being foreign-born lowers female earnings by 31% ($e^{-0.226 + (-0.150)} - 1$) compared with native-born males (Model 2). Thus, this research shows that the influence of immigration status on wage outcomes in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites is gendered (see also Browne *et al.*, 2001).

¹² For a discussion on the interpretation of interaction effects, see Jaccard and Turrisi (2003).

Third, and unexpectedly, there is no support for Hypothesis 6. Having medium skin tone increases female wages in contrast to light-skinned males employed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites. Specifically, net of controls, having medium skin tone increases female wages about 1.6% ($e^{-0.181 + (-0.054)} - 1$) compared with light-skinned males (Model 2 of Table II). Being dark skinned is associated with lower wages for females, but those results are not statistically significant. To further investigate this finding, the reference category for these sets of interaction variables was changed to dark-skinned males, and findings showed a similar pattern (results not shown). This finding is similar to that of Gómez (2000), who found that dark skin negatively affects the wages of Dominican and Puerto Rican men but not those of women.

Alternative Models

The previous analyses raise questions about the influence of skin color on the sex wage gap in co-ethnic jobsites. In particular, we may ask what accounts for the wage advantage of lightness, specifically medium skin tone, for females employed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites. Hunter (2002) theorizes that society's emphasis on women's physical appearance influences light skin color to function as a form of social capital for women of color, converting this form of capital (Eurocentric beauty) into economic capital. If this is the case, light skin color would be particularly important for women whose job tasks involve face-to-face interactions with customers or clients, thus making their physical appearance more relevant to the job. Using logistic regression, the effects, among workers employed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, of sex and skin color on the odds of having job tasks that involve such face-to-face interactions were estimated. Specifically, face-to-face interaction is measured as whether the worker's tasks involve interaction with customers/clients daily, weekly, or monthly as opposed to almost never. Results show that females are more likely to have work tasks that entail face-to-face contact than males, net of demographic, human capital, firm, and occupational controls (not shown). Skin color is also statistically associated with having face-to-face interactions with customers/clients, with medium-skinned workers being less likely to have such job tasks than light-skinned workers. Dark-skinned workers are also less likely to have such face-to-face interactions, but these results are not statistically significant. Thus, there are some indications that skin color and sex are important determinants of which workers interact with customers/clients.

If having contact with customers/clients is connected with wage disparities, we would expect the relationship between sex and skin color on wages to differ by whether job tasks require face-to-face interactions. Separate ordinary least square (OLS) regression models for Latina/o workers employed in co-ethnic jobsites by job tasks (those tasks involving face-to-face interactions and

those that almost never require such interactions) were estimated (not shown).¹³ Statistical tests comparing beta coefficients of sex and skin color across job tasks are not statistically significant.¹⁴ The skin color reference category was changed to dark skinned to better suit the exploration of the benefits of lightness for females, and the results show that darker-skinned males suffer wage disparities in comparison with lighter-skin-toned females in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, regardless of whether their job tasks require face-to-face interactions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined wage disparities among Latina/o (Central American and Mexican) workers in Los Angeles, California employed in co-ethnic jobsites. These work environments are important to study, given Latina/os' reliance on co-ethnic-concentrated labor sectors (Saenz *et al.*, 2004). Although numerous studies have examined labor market social inequality for this group, few have focused on intra-ethnic inequality, largely because of perceptions of homogeneity and the assumption that stratification only occurs between majority white and minority groups. Co-ethnic jobsites represent an ideal environment for examining intra-ethnic stratification because workers are primarily from the same ethnic group.

A major finding is the wage disparities associated with skin color, nativity/immigration status, and sex in jobsites with an overrepresentation of Latina/os. Similar to the literature on skin color segmentation and earnings in general labor markets (Allen *et al.*, 2000; Arce *et al.*, 1987; Murguia and Saenz, 2002; Murguia and Telles, 1996), workers with lighter complexions enjoy higher wages than those with darker skin tone in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites. Latina/o immigrant workers also suffer penalties in pay when compared with their co-ethnic native-born counterparts in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites. Therefore, similar to findings in general labor markets (Sanders and Nee, 1996; Valenzuela and Gonzalez, 2000), human capital factors alone cannot explain the disparities between immigrant and native-born workers. Moreover, the sex gap in pay that has been well documented in general labor markets (e.g., Brown, 1999; Padavic and Reskin, 2002; Reskin and Roos, 1990) persists in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites.

Another major finding concerns the influence of the intersectionality of inequalities on the wage outcomes of Latina/o workers in co-ethnic jobsites. There are three major results related to intersectionality in these work environments. First, immigration status intersects with skin color to depress the wages

¹³ The model was sorted by sex and included whether a worker's job tasks included face-to-face contact as an independent variable. Unfortunately, the limited sample size of female workers in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites ($N = 73$) made OLS regression results unreliable.

¹⁴ Both z and t tests were conducted independently, and none of the results showed statistically significant beta differences between the two groups.

for darker-complected Latina/os. Hence, this research highlights the existence of a skin color-nativity wage gap in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites that leads to wage disparities for darker-skinned immigrants. Second, the sex gap in pay persists in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites when nativity/immigration status is considered. Specifically, immigrant Latinas experience economic disparities when employed in jobsites saturated by co-ethnics, as opposed to native-born Latino men. As such, Latinas simultaneously struggle against sexism and nativism. This is consistent with Browne *et al.* (2001), who found that Latina immigrants are also burdened by their newness within firms. Furthermore, to the extent that Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites are similar to Catanzarite's (2002) "brown-collar occupations" (concentrations of Latino newcomers), the current study questions the pay penalty that native-born workers suffer in jobs with an overrepresentation of Latina/os. In the present study, nativity interacts with sex in that the pay penalties are suffered by immigrant women as opposed to native-born Latino men. It must be noted, however, that Catanzarite's work focuses on occupations with concentrations of men who are recent immigrants, and so it is not intended to examine the sex gap.

Third, the sex wage gap, on the other hand, is transformed in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites when its intersections with skin color are considered. As mentioned earlier, there is a sex wage gap disadvantaging women in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites, but when skin color is taken into consideration, having a lighter complexion not only eliminates wage disparities for women but translates into a wage advantage when compared with men (either dark or light complected). This provides some support for Hunter's (2002) thesis, which draws on the literature of colorism and Bourdieu's concept of "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), to argue that lightness is a form of social capital for women of color (again, Eurocentric beauty) that translates into economic capital. As such, lightness may be functioning as a form of social capital for Latinas by bestowing privileges through higher wages as opposed to Latinos. Moreover, the privilege of lightness for Latinas holds regardless of whether their physical appearance might matter for their job tasks through the interaction with customers/clients.

How else can the gendered aspects of skin color be reconciled? Some insights can be drawn from the history of colonization, which not only involves a system of colorism privileging "whiteness" but is also gendered. In the case of Mexico, the mythical Malintzin, the indigenous mistress of Spanish conqueror Cortes, is accused of aiding him in the conquest of her own people and is blamed for the "bastardization" of indigenous people. As such, Mexican women have historically been stereotyped as "sell-outs" to the white race (Moraga, 1986; Morales and Bejarano, 2008). In the present day, while light-skinned women have enjoyed some of the privileges of whiteness, they are also "tested" by their co-ethnic peers. Montalvo (2004) argues that light-skinned Latinas have the option of "ethno-racial passing," whereby people of color avoid their ethnicity and hide themselves in the appearance and lifestyle of the dominant group. This option can occur accidentally or intentionally and is

only available to light-skinned Latinas who can pass for whites or for those with intermediate skin who can pass for “Spanish.” As such, light-skinned Latinas are kept at a distance by darker-complected peers to see if they choose their ethnicity or prefer to reap the benefits of lightness (Montalvo, 2004). In addition, as mentioned previously, Morales (2008) found that dark-skinned Latina/os are more likely to be relegated to lower-paying co-ethnic jobsites, while lighter-complected Latina/os are more likely to be employed in racially integrated, higher-paid jobsites. Therefore, it is possible that light- and intermediate-skin-toned women are being rewarded, in terms of higher wages, for working with co-ethnics, as opposed to utilizing their option for employment in higher-paid, racially integrated labor sectors.

Some important theoretical implications arise. Can the wage gaps be attributed to the dynamics of racialized, nativist, and gendered structures, or are wage disparities attributable to intra-ethnic inequalities resulting from aspects of socialization in Latin American countries that immigrants may carry with them? Although this question cannot be directly answered at this time, some insights can be drawn from this study’s findings, which indicate that workers in Latina/o co-ethnic jobsites are *not* a part of what Light and Gold (2000) term the ethnic-controlled economy, in which it is possible for co-ethnics to exert power in the workplace, independent of ethnic ownership, through numerical clustering or numerical dominance. Despite being employed in jobs saturated by members of the same ethnic group, Latina/o workers with darker complexions and immigrant women do not have enough power to avoid wage penalties. Unfortunately, due to data limitations, the owners of these establishments and thus the beneficiaries of these wage disparities cannot be identified. Yet, based on these results, this study points to colorized, nativist, and gendered structures in the United States that have created labor markets that have more in common with segregated employment than with protected labor environments. An exception is Latinas with lighter skin tone, who receive wage advantages in co-ethnic jobsites. Otherwise, for Central Americans and Mexicans, employment in co-ethnic jobsites represents labor segregation with limited protection from discrimination.

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