TRIPLE PENALTY IN EMPLOYMENT ACCESS: THE ROLE OF BEAUTY, RACE, AND SEX

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This article reports the results from a first experiment specifically designed to disentangle the effect of beauty from that of race in the observed labor market discrimination, for both females and males in Peru. We randomly assigned Quechua and white surnames and (subjectively perceived) attractive or homely-looking photographs (or no photos) to 4,899 fictitious résumés sent in response to 1,247 job openings. We find that candidates who are physically attractive, have a white-sounding surname, and are males, receive 82%, 54%, and 34% more callbacks for job interviews than their similarly-qualified counterparts, thus imposing a triple penalty on homely-looking, indigenous, and female job candidates. We further find that the intensity of discrimination by race and physical appearance differs for males and females; the intensity of discrimination by physical appearance and sex differs for Quechua and white applicants; and the intensity of racial and sexual discrimination differs for beautiful and homely-looking persons.

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I. Introduction

Requests for fair employment opportunities take place everywhere, but they are particularly sturdy in mixed-race emerging countries, with large groups of descendants

from indigenous people and foreign migrants, such as Peru. The outstanding macroeconomic performance attained by this country over the last decade has not sufficed to achieve a substantial reduction in income inequality and other well-being indicators, a result that has awaken claims for redistributing the benefits from economic growth to those groups traditionally excluded from it, namely people living in rural areas, largely populated by indigenous people.

While there is a widespread belief that Peru is a discriminatory society, little robust evidence exists on this matter, especially regarding the extent of discrimination in the labor market (being Galarza and Yamada 2014, and Moreno et al. 2012 the only exceptions, as far as we are aware). Official statistics are of not much help here, and can only be used to estimate gender and racial wage gaps. Thus, while Yamada, Lizarzaburu, and Samanamud (2012) find potential racial gaps in the range of 11% and 22% for indigenous versus non-indigenous workers in Peru, they cannot be wholly attributed to discrimination.

Unlike the most recent literature on labor discrimination that only analyzes the impact of race or beauty on labor market outcomes (e.g., Kantor, Shapir and Shtudiner 2015, López Boó, Rossi and Urzúa 2013), our paper exploits a large-scale résumé audit study, specifically designed to detect the role of beauty, race, *and* sex, in the hiring decisions. We constructed fictitious résumés with similar human capital, and randomly assigned surnames (our proxy variable for race), sex, and headshots (deemed as either beautiful or homely-looking). This random assignment should result in statistically similar average call-back rates for all groups, in the absence of discrimination.

Our results provide novel evidence about the extent of discrimination that can be attributed to each of the three dimensions mentioned earlier. We find statistically significant beauty (82%), racial (54%), and sexual (34%) gaps in call-backs against homely-looking, indigenous, and female job applicants in Lima, Peru, all of which imposes a sizeable triple penalty in the access to employment on the homely-looking indigenous females. This result implies that the quest for equal employment opportunities in an emerging, fast-growing country, such as Peru, has a long way to go.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section II reviews the related literature. Section III describes our experimental methodology and the procedures we followed during the field work. Section IV discusses the results, and Section V concludes.