

NIS SKIN COLOR SCALE

The New Immigrant Survey measured respondent skin color using a scale designed by Douglas S. Massey (one of the Principal Investigators) and Jennifer A. Martin (NIS Project Manager), based on an idea originally developed by Massey, Charles, Lundy, and Fischer (2003) in their work on the National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen.

The scale is an 11-point scale, ranging from zero to 10, with zero representing albinism, or the total absence of color, and 10 representing the darkest possible skin. The ten shades of skin color corresponding to the points 1 to 10 on the Massey and Martin Skin Color Scale are depicted in a chart, with each point represented by a hand, of identical form, but differing in color. The Scale was constructed with assistance from a graphic designer. The M&M Scale is for use by interviewers, who essentially memorize the scale, so that the respondent never sees the chart.

A facsimile of the NIS Skin Color Scale appears in Figure 1.

The Martin and Massey NIS Skin Color Scale was first printed in an appendix to the Field Interviewer Manual during the baseline round of the New Immigrant Survey. The Manual included the following instruction:

As you know, human beings display a wide variety of physical attributes. One of these is skin color. Unfortunately discrimination on the basis of skin color continues to be a reality in American life. Substantial evidence suggests that lighter skinned people fare better in a variety of social and economic settings than those with darker skins. In order to detect such discrimination, it is important that the NIS include a measure of skin color. We therefore ask interviewers to use the Scale of Skin Color Darkness as a guide to rate the skin color of each respondent on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is the lightest possible skin color (such as that of an albino) and 10 is the darkest possible skin color. Please rate the skin color of ALL respondents upon the completion of the interview, be they of European, Asian, Latin American, or African origin. It is very important that we obtain this information for everyone, not just those of obvious African ancestry.

It is important that you become familiar with the scale so that you do not access it during the interview. Respondents should never see the scale.

Users of the NIS Skin Color Scale are requested to kindly notify the NIS Project staff by emailing the Project Manager, Jennifer A. Martin (nis@opr.princeton.edu).

Suggested citation:
Massey, Douglas S., and Jennifer A. Martin. 2003. The NIS Skin Color Scale.

Scale of Skin Color Darkness



REFERENCES

Massey, Douglas S., Camille Z. Charles, Garvey Lundy, and Mary J. Fischer. 2003. *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.