

History and Uses of Terminology for the Latino Population

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The term Latino is adopted in this presentation to reflect the terminology adopted by the institute.



History

- “Conceptually, the only element that all Latin American countries share is not language, race, or culture, but political: the presence of United States foreign policy as pronounced in the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. The political relation between the US and Latin America has colored US domestic policy toward its populations of Latin American origin. From the beginning of US-Latin American relations, there has been a constant confusion of race for national origin, compounded by the adoption of euphemistic terms such as ‘Spanish surname’.”

-Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987, p.61



“At the heart of the terminology debate is the historical experience of Raza. Invasion, military occupation and racist control mechanisms all influence the evolution of words describing people who have lived through such trauma. The collective memory of every Latino people includes direct or indirect (neo-) colonialism, primarily by Spain or Portugal and later by the United States.”

-Martinez, 1998, p.3



Census Classifications

- 1960: first year the Census included race as a self-report question
- 1970: first year that Hispanic origin was included in the Census
- 1980: the government officially adopted the term Hispanic
- 1990: the Census placed other questions in between race and questions about Hispanic origin, which confused Latinos
- 2000: the government's official position is that race and Hispanic origin are separate classifications
 - first year that the term Latino was used as a self-classification option

-Hitlin et al., 2007



The Question of Race

- Terms such as Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano do not indicate race
- An individual fitting under such terminology may actually racially be:
 - White
 - Black
 - American Indian
 - Alaskan Native
 - Asian or Pacific Islander

-Trevino, F. M., 1987



The Question of Race

- It is difficult to determine race exactly as many Latinos have a mixed heritage, which may include:
 - Indigenous (from pre-Columbian times)
 - European (from the Spanish and Portuguese invasions)
 - African (from the many slaves brought to the Americas, including at least 200,000 to Mexico alone)
 - Some include Chinese from a Chinatown in Mexico that dated to the 1500's
- Martinez, 1998



Race versus Ethnicity

- Race: Phenotypic differences (observable appearance differences) and genotypic (genetic) differences between groups (although this is somewhat contested)
 - Ethnicity: Captures a more cultural dimension, including country of origin, self-perception and identification
 - Social Groupings: “Involve sets of meanings that are culturally attached to salient social categories, though the content may be different to members of those categories as opposed to external observers” (p. 592)
- Hitlin, et al., 2007



Race versus Ethnicity

- It is important to understand that “race is a biologically meaningless concept that has vast social significance” (p. 591).
- Meaning that these biological differences are essentially meaningless, that the true impact of racial differences is in the social consequences that humans construe, and the racial classifications that they create, rather than the ones that truly exist.

-Hitlin et al., 2007



Racial and Ethnic Self-Perceptions

- The 2000 Census suggests that many Latinos do not understand the difference between race and ethnicity, as 40% classified themselves racially as “other.”
- Some believe this is due to a belief that being Latino is a separate race.
- Does the census capture the subjective self-understanding of Latinos’ race and ethnicity? What could they do to fix this?

-Hitlin et al., 2007



Social Identity

- There is a difference between the governmental classifications, an “outside-in” perspective, and the social psychology of how individuals perceive themselves
- “Government sanction serves to define and either mobilize or repress named ethnic groups” (p. 591).

-Hitlin et al., 2007



Social Identity Theory

- Self conception falls into two domains:
 - Individual self: the part of a person that they believe makes them unique and different from others (idiosyncrasies)
 - Collective self: encompasses social groups the person believes they belong to, i.e. from “I am Guatemalan” to “I am a Cowboys fan”
- Collective identity can be shaped by influences internal and external to the person
 - For example, the term “Hispanic” may make people believe that they belong to a larger ethnic group, or it may make them feel they have little connection to the label being imposed on them

-Hitlin et al., 2007



What does that have to do with the terminology that is used?

- “Individuals self-identify differently depending on context and their stage in the life course” (Hitlin et al., 2007, p. 595).
- “Many Hispanics view race as a cultural, rather than a physical, property of individuals” (Hitlin et al., 2007, p. 596).



“Hispanic”

- A pan-ethnic label that was intended to capture a broader array of individuals from this population (first used in the 1970 U.S. Census, officially adopted by the government in 1980)
- Not generally accepted by Brazilians (as they speak Portuguese) (Martinez, 1998)
- An English language term, this is not generally used in other countries that primarily speak Spanish (Rodriguez, 2010)
- Is the more commonly used term in certain parts of the country



“Hispanic,” continued

- It is argued that the term Hispanic:
 - Should be kept so as to not re-label data, and because of this it is preferred to use in scientific publications
 - It is a more universal term, while Latino is used more regionally
 - Includes those from Spain (but not from Brazil)
 - The term Latino can be legally problematic as some groups (French, Italian) can claim Latin decent, although their families have never lived in Latin America
 - The term Latino negates indigenous and African heritages

-Martinez, 1998; Rodriguez, 2010



“Latino”

- Is a Spanish language term
- Usage has continued to increase since the adoption of the term Hispanic by the U.S.
- It is argued that the term Latino:
 - Is more culturally neutral
 - Better reflects racial differences and national origin
 - Reflects that not all Latinos speak Spanish
 - Less associated with Eurocentric Hispanistas (who were wealthy conservative landowners)
 - Has been found to be most used in bilingual editorials

-Rodriguez, 2010



“Chicano”

- Originated in the 1960s and 1970s during the progressively-based movements as a way to show pride for one’s heritage and culture, and to renounce assimilation into the dominant culture.
- Term was once used to refer to a lower class, and was sometimes used in a derogatory way by other Latinos in reference to self-proclaimed Chicanos.

-Martinez, 1998



“Chicano”

- Many Latinos in the Southwest have been here long before the Southwest became part of the United States, and have also been continuously infused with new immigrant populations and the dominant culture. Therefore, there are “old” and “new” roots, that have led to a wide variety of ways of thinking about and referring to themselves (Martinez, 1998).
- “Too many Americans see only the recent arrivals, remaining blind to those earlier roots and what they signify” (Martinez, 1998, p. 3).



“La Raza” or “Raza”

- Means “the People,” is a term that originated in the community, and is commonly used to refer to the group, i.e. in lieu of “us Latinos” or “us Hispanics.”
- Some believe it refers mostly to Mexican and some Central American origins, while excluding other Latin American countries.

-Martinez, 1998



Nationality

- Perhaps the most accepted way to classify and refer to Latinos is by their nationality, i.e. Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, etc.
- However, this may negate the implied unity expressed in terms such as Latino and Hispanic.

-Martinez, 1998



So what does this all mean?

- There is no term that is accepted by everyone, nor any universal term that can be used to refer to a certain group, population, or nationality
- It is important to ask the client how they prefer to be referred to
- What a particular term “means” can vary from client to client
 - Make sure to ask what that means to them, i.e. “what does it mean to you to be Latino?”



“Terms can be useful, even vital tools,
but the house of La Raza that is
waiting to be built needs many kinds.”

-Martinez, 1998, p.4



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