

## **Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, and Latine Ethnicities**

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### **What is the term Hispanic and where did it come from?**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), Hispanic describes a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or descent. The category is based on ethnicity and does not consider race. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2015), race refers to shared physical traits considered significant by members of a group or culture. At the same time, ethnicity speaks to cultural characteristics, including ancestry, language, and beliefs. Thus, people who racially identify as Asian, Black, Indigenous, or White may also be Hispanic. Until 1970, people who are now labeled Hispanics were not considered members of a shared category and were classified as White in census reports. This, however, did not correspond to their lived experiences, often characterized by discrimination, segregation, and inferior access to education and other resources (Mora, 2014; Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.). These experiences often resulted in lower socioeconomic status. Although social movements and the media increasingly adopted pan-ethnic identities, activists of the late 1960s and early 1970s advocated for the creation of an overarching category that would give this heterogeneous group of people political significance, visibility, and power within the United States (Demby, 2021). Following a strong lobbyist movement, the U.S. Census Bureau adopted the Hispanic ethnic category in 1969 when a question on Hispanic origin was included in the survey (Haub, 2012). This meant that people of Latin American descent could now claim a shared ethnic identity in the U.S. The label,

nonetheless, also carries the risk of erasing the individual differences of people with starkly distinct geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Mora, 2014).

### **Hispanic or Latino?**

Hispanic and Latino are often used interchangeably, yet some people emphasize that there are differences between the labels. For some, the term Hispanic identifies people descending from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America or from Spain itself. On the other hand, Latino identifies Latin Americans regardless of language, including Portuguese-speaking Brazilians (APA, 2021; Lopez et al., 2018). Others believe that the fundamental difference between the two labels is wording: Hispanic speaks to a sense of community through a connection with Spain, whereas Latino refers to unity through a history of colonization by Spain (Mora, 2014).

There is still much controversy around the Hispanic and Latino labels, and many choose not to use them. A survey showed that 50% of Hispanics most often self-describe based on their family's country of origin, 23% employ the terms Latino or Hispanic, and another 23% see themselves as Americans (Lopez et al., 2020). When these respondents were asked which term they preferred, 32% chose Hispanic, 15% Latino, and 51% showed no preference (Lopez et al., 2020).

### **Latino/a, Latinx, and Latine**

Spanish and other Romance languages such as Portuguese are gendered, including a masculine-feminine noun classification. The letters “a” and “o” indicate female and male respectively, with Latino referring to a man, Latina to a woman, and Latinos implying more than one person. This male-female binary excludes those who do not identify as male or female. To

address this issue, Latinx has been proposed as an alternative gender-neutral or nonbinary term to the traditional Latino/a (APA, 2021).

The American Psychological Association has adopted these changing labels. Most recently, in an effort to increase inclusivity, the National Latina/o Psychological Association (formerly the National Hispanic Psychological Association) changed their organization name to National Latinx Psychological Association and their journal name to *Journal of Latinx Psychology* (Cardemil et al., 2019). Many scholars have also moved to the gender-neutral term Latinx.

Research shows, however, that Latinx is not widely used among people of Hispanic heritage. Whereas approximately one in four are familiar with the term, only 4% use it (Bustamante et al., 2020). Moreover, some argue that “x” is difficult to pronounce and conjugate in Spanish. Latine has recently been introduced as an alternative nonbinary label that better serves speakers of Latin languages (Caraballo, 2019; Pellot, 2019). Ultimately, each person of Latin American descent or culture is entitled to self-describe using Hispanic, Latinx, Latine, another term of their choice, or no label at all.

The fourth edition of the textbook, *Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination* (Kite, Whitley, & Wagner, 2022), typically uses the nonbinary term Latinx when discussing people who might experience prejudice due to their Latin American ethnicity. Still, the term Hispanic is also used when the research study being described used that term. Because participants in research studies often self-report their ethnicity, it is important to use the same label used in the study. In class, instructors often find themselves using multiple terms that reflect the communities where they live. For example, college-aged people in the Midwest may use the labels Hispanic or Latino, while individuals in California might use Latinx. Understanding the

changing nature of social category labels can be challenging, but respecting the labels a community wants to use is important in decreasing prejudice.

### **Educational Resources**

The following resources can be used by the instructor to further their knowledge or be shown in class and/or recommended to students:

#### **Book:**

Mora, G. C. (2014). *Making Hispanics: How activists, bureaucrats, and media constructed a new American*. The University of Chicago Press.

#### **Podcast:**

Demby, G. (Host). (2021, September 22). Who you calling 'Hispanic'? [Audio podcast episode].

In *Code Switch*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/20/1039053932/who-you-calling-hispanic?t=1646728693498>

#### **Videos:**

UCTVTips (2015, August 25). *Latino vs Hispanic - Constructing a new America* [Video].

YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1ueEvQXp6w>

HuffPost (2020, September 28). *Who Is 'Latinx' For?* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ayxrOHvR8E>

UC Davis Social Sciences (2015, April, 30). *Making Hispanics: How activists, bureaucrats, and media constructed a new American* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTjeAAIN018>

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<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines.pdf>
- Bustamante, L., Mora, L., & Lopez, M. H. (2020, August 11). *About one-in four U.S. Hispanics have heard of Latinx, but just 3% use it. Young Hispanic women are among the most likely to use the term*. Pew Research Center.  
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- Haub, C. (2012, November 7). Changing the way U.S. Hispanics are counted. PRB.  
<https://www.prb.org/resources/changing-the-way-u-s-hispanics-are-counted/>
- Lopez, M. H., Krogstad, J. M., Passel, J. S. (2020, September 15). *Who is Hispanic?* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/15/who-is-hispanic/>
- Mora, G. C. (2014). *Making Hispanics: How activists, bureaucrats, and media constructed a new American*. The University of Chicago Press.

Pellot, E. (2019, October 25). *This comic proves that the great debate on the word 'Latinx' rages on*. Mitú. <https://wearemitu.com/things-that-matter/heres-why-some-latinx-users-are-switchingto-latine-instead/>.

Public Broadcasting Service. (n.d.). *Timeline Latino Americans*. <https://www.pbs.org/latino-americans/en/timeline/>.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020, October 16). *About the Hispanic population and its origin*. <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/hispanic-origin/about.html>