

Understanding the Hispanic Culture

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, the Hispanic population has exhibited tremendous growth in the United States. Hispanics comprise about 11% of the U.S. population, including 3.6 million residing in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Approximately 31 million individuals are identified as Hispanics. The U.S. Hispanic population is the largest minority group in 2006. More than seventy percent of the Hispanic population is concentrated in fifth states - California, Texas, Arizona, New York, and Florida. Mexican is the largest ethnic subdivision of Hispanics in the United States, comprising about 58%, followed by Central and South American (9%), Puerto Rican (10%), Cuban (3%), Dominican (2%), and other Hispanics (18%).

Hispanic is a term created by the U.S. federal government in the early 1970s in an attempt to provide a common denominator to a large, but diverse, population with connection to the Spanish language or culture from a Spanish-speaking country. The term *Latino* is increasingly gaining acceptance among Hispanics, and the term reflects the origin of the population in Latin America.

Who Are We?

Definition:

People that come from at least 20 different countries, live in the United States, and see themselves as members of a group. They are often call Latinos or Hispanics.

Hispanic as a US term

There are no Hispanics in Latin America. They are either Colombian, Venezuelan, Mexican, etc. Here in this country we lump people from Latin American and Spanish heritage under the Hispanic classification. "Hispanic" is the official designation of the United States Census used to track population changes and trends. Hispanic is a term created by the U.S. federal government in 1970 in an attempt to provide a common denominator to a large, diverse population connected either by the Spanish language and culture.

Hispanic is not a race

Many Hispanics do exhibit mixed race characteristics and in an effort to classify them into race categories we have mistakenly used the term as a race.

While Hispanic is not a race, it is an ethnic classification. Hispanics are people that have been in this country for a very long time. The Hispanic ancestors include native Indians and early settlers. The earliest settlement in North America was in St. Augustine, Florida by people from Spain.

Where do we come from?

The great majority of all Hispanics come here for economic reasons. Some, like most Cubans, came to the US to escape communism.

Unlike other immigrants from Europe, few Hispanics immigrate for religious reason. The differences in the factors that motivate immigration create a very different mindset among US Hispanics.

- Argentina
- Bolivia
- Chile
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Panama
- Peru
- Paraguay
- Puerto Rico
- El Salvador
- Spain
- Uruguay
- Venezuela
- Nicaragua
- Panama

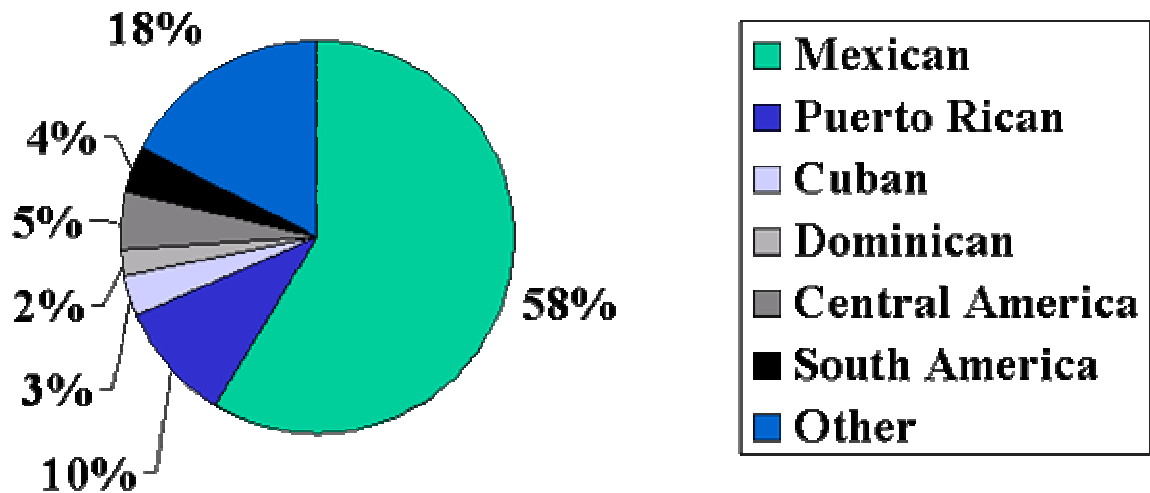


Are we alike?

There is very little in common among many of the subgroups. Even language can drastically vary. Many derived from the assumption that all Hispanics are alike.

We often think of Mexican cultural traits because we are very exposed to the Mexican culture. Yet, Mexico is different from the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean has their cultural differences as well.

Type of Origin



Source: 2000 U.S. Census

American culture is changing

The American culture is changing. The new immigrants do not come to this country with the same mindset of leaving the old life behind and starting anew. This new culture has often been referred as a salad bowl because the ingredients coexist together but do not mix. Assimilation is no longer the word now is Integration. **The influence of U.S. Hispanics is changing the American culture.**

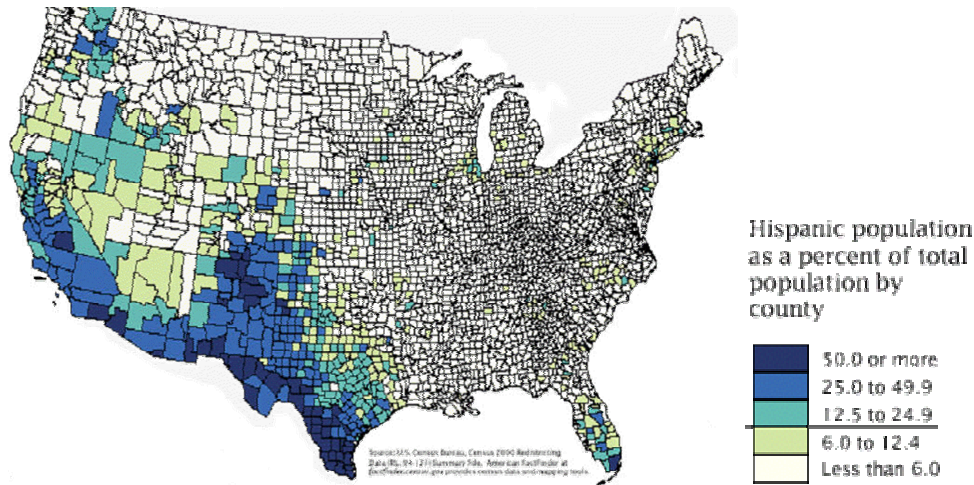
The American culture is changing. The Hispanic influence can be seen in every aspect of American life- from the food (tacos) to the entertainment (Gloria Estefan, Selena, Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony, Andy Garcia, Etc...). In fact, anything Latin is now fashionable in the U.S! **The influence of U.S. Hispanics is changing the look in America.** This inscription that appears in every U.S. coin is a reflection of our believe in diversity. The Latin words translate to "**In Diversity Unity**".

E Pluribus Unum

Half of all Hispanics live in two states:

California and Texas

Source: 2000 U.S. Census



Hispanic Culture

We talk of Hispanics as a group because there are some strong common traits among the Latino sub-groups. Some traditional and colonial Spanish values transcend the different Hispanic cultures.

Hispanics tend to be conservative / traditional in their cultural lifestyle. The men's "machismo" clearly separates the Latino male from his Anglo counterparts. The female also plays a very different role from that of the Anglo female. These traits are especially evident in new immigrants.

Most Hispanics exhibit a similar longing and nostalgia for their country of origin.

The US Hispanics community is not only changing rapidly in terms of numbers but also in how it is defining itself. Today's Hispanics are well established in the American infrastructure and are becoming increasingly active in politics.

Hispanics have evolved to seeing themselves as members of a unified group. There are distinct differences within the Hispanic community when it comes to aspirations, behaviors, and consumption habits. These are very much shaped by their experiences growing up.

Differences

There are so many misconceptions that it is impossible to list them all. Let's just say that what most people know about the Hispanic is probably wrong.

Important Differences

- Physical contact is very important.
- Personal space tends to be closer.
- Appearance is extremely important to all Latinos.
- Hispanics are more spiritual in nature.
- Hispanic homes are more decorative.

Group vs. Individual goals

Latinos care for the goals of the group. They feel very connected to their group and will work hard to help the needs of their community. For this reason, community programs like scholarships work extremely well with Hispanics.

Preference for friendly / amicable vs. Confrontational relationships

As a whole, Latinos tend to be less confrontational than non-Hispanics. They generally stay away from arguments and are less likely to be confrontational.

High group identification and loyalty

Hispanics place a lot of value in the importance of belonging to a group. This is why you often see Latinos using images that clearly label them as members of a particular segment.

Family Values

Traditionally, **the Hispanic family is a close-knit group and the most important social unit.** The term "*familia*" usually goes beyond the nuclear family. The Hispanic "family unit" includes not only parents and children but also extended family. In most Hispanic families, the father is the head of the family, and the mother is responsible for the home. Individuals within a family have a moral responsibility to aid other members of the family experiencing financial problems, unemployment, poor health conditions, and other life issues.

Family ties are very strong: when someone travels to another town or city to study or for a short visit (e.g., vacation, business, medical reasons), staying with relatives or even with friends of relatives is a common practice. Families often gather together to celebrate holidays, birthdays, baptisms, first communions, graduations, and weddings. Hispanic families instill in their children the importance of honor, good manners, and respect for authority and the elderly. Preserving the Spanish language within the family is a common practice in most Hispanic homes.

Family is the most important value that unifies the Latino community!

Family is the nucleus of Hispanic life. Hispanics show a strong identification with their nuclear and extended family members. Strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity are common among members of the same family.

Hispanics have a sense of obligation to provide material and emotional support to members of nuclear and extended family. One of the most pervasive values in the Latino culture is the importance of the family, including the extended family. The family affiliation is so important that “parenthood” is often seen as important as “partnerhood.”

In Latino families, the family needs usually override the individual’s needs. In fact, this is true to the extent that “An individual’s self-confidence, worth, security, and identity are determined by his relationship to other family members”. The concept of family can extend to a network of friends, neighbors, and organizations that all make up the community of which one is a part. This network is a means of support when addressing a variety of problems or crises that may occur. In general, the concept of family, or “familism”, helps the family survive the difficulties that occur throughout life.

Marriage

The primary goal of marriage, to the latinos, is to have children and the family life that ensues. In a study completed with Latino couples who had strong marriages, it was clear that the concepts of marriage and family were perceived to be the same. In response to researchers’ questions about marriage, participants provided descriptions of their family life including their children. They went on to describe the importance of the family, while ignoring the researchers’ references to marriage. The couples in this study also indicated that they typically did not want to engage in activities, including marriage education, without their children.

Members of the Latino community enjoy serve a variety of functions. There is extensive visiting and other exchanges among extended family members when they live in close proximity to one another. Although couples who had strong marriages valued their extended family connection, they made it clear that their spouse and children were their first priority. In fact, couples who had strong marriages concluded that supporting their extended family financially and emotionally was very important.

In the study of strong marriages, it was clear that men and women shared decision-making in the family, but had different roles in their family life. They talked through issues until they came to an agreement. According to one Latino man, “You just talk and talk until you come to a decision.” Of the participants in this study, men and women were likely to have traditional roles, with the man providing the income for the family and the woman providing for the care of the children and the home.

Rituals and Religion

In the Hispanic world, religion has traditionally played a significant role in daily activity. More than 90% of the Spanish-speaking world is Roman Catholic. Catholicism is seen as the predominant religious belief in Latino communities in the United States. In recent years, other faith denominations have experienced growth within the U.S. Hispanic community. **The church influences family life and community affairs, giving spiritual meaning to the Hispanic culture.** Each local community celebrates its patron saint's day with greater importance and ceremony than individuals do for personal birthdays. As in other parts of the world, traces of the religions of the Indians and African-Americans of Latin America are found in the Catholicism that Hispanics practice.

We often think of religion as centering on a church or other place of worship. Although many religious practices take place in churches, there are also altars in public places and in homes where people can practice their faith.

Religion is central to marriage and family life in the Latino culture. Religious beliefs include an understanding of the Bible and other sources of religious teachings and provide guidance on how to live as an individual within the context of a family. Religious institutions such as the church are also a source of help and support for families in times of trouble.

Many Latinos believe that religion, and more specifically Catholicism, has been so much a part of Latino culture for centuries that it no longer can be separated from the cultural values of Latino people. Even if a person does not participate in organized religion, the religious beliefs are still part of family life. In addition, local religious institutions where Latinos are members are usually viewed as trustworthy and influential in the lives of Latino families.

Gender Roles

Traditional gender roles in the Latino culture greatly affect marriage and family dynamics. Machismo refers to maleness or manliness and it is expected that a man be physically strong, unafraid, and the authority figure in the family, with the obligation to protect and provide for his family. The complementary role for the woman is “Marianismo”, referring to a woman who is self-sacrificing, religious, and is responsible for running the household and raising the children. **Motherhood is an important goal for women in Latino culture, and a mother is expected to sacrifice for her children and take care of elderly relatives.** Although acculturation and the need for women to be employed have affected these gender roles, they still persist.

Ethnic identity

Latinos retain a strong sense of ethnic identity regardless of the length of time or number of generations in the U.S. or the level of education attained. The factor with some influence on cultural identity is that of age at immigration. Younger children (preschool versus adolescence) are more likely to have a bi-cultural identity, (a synthesis of U.S. and Latino cultures). Ethnic identity is manifested in a strong sense of community and in allegiance to Latino concerns.

Spanish language

Although Latinos learn English with each successive generation in the U.S., children are bilingual and continue to learn and use Spanish and English. This reflects positive attitudes Latinos have towards their language and the desire to preserve it as part of their culture.

Etiquette

Spanish speakers tend toward formality in their treatment of one another. A firm handshake is a common practice between people as greeting and for leave-taking. A hug and a light kiss on a cheek are also common greeting practices between women, and men and women who are close friends or family. The Spanish language provides forms of formal and “nonformal” address (different use of “*usted* vs. *tu*” for the pronoun *you*), polite and familiar commands, the use of titles of respect before people's first names such as “*Don* or *Doña*”). In nonformal settings, conversations between Spanish speakers are usually loud, fast, and adorned with animated gestures and body language to better convey points.

Hispanics usually give great importance to and place great value on looks and appearance as a sense of honor, dignity, and pride. Formal attire is commonly worn by Hispanics to church, parties, social gatherings, and work. Tennis shoes and jeans, however, are becoming more popular among Hispanics, particularly in non-formal settings. Hispanics tend to be more relaxed and flexible about time and punctuality than U.S. people. For instance, people who are invited for an 8 a.m. event may not begin to arrive until 8:30 a.m. or later.

Celebrations and Holidays

Hispanic countries celebrate the more popular international holidays, notably Easter, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Day, Our Lady of Guadalupe, other feast of Our Lady, and the Three Kings' Day. In addition, each country celebrates its *El Día de Independencia*. The term “*fiesta nacional*” refers to an official national holiday; *3las fiestas* refer to festivals - local, regional, or national - that may be held only one day or may last several days. Most holidays are centered on or have their origins in religion. Many celebrations of the Catholic Church are officially designated by the government as holidays. National government offices may be closed or have limited hours for local or regional holidays.

Eating Habits

In Hispanic countries, a light meal is served for breakfast. Lunch, referred as “*el almuerzo*”, usually is the main meal of the day for Spanish-speakers. In some countries, it is customary for adult family members and children to come home from work or school for about two hours to be together for this meal. “*La siesta*”, which is a rest period taken after lunch, is known to be a common practice among adult Hispanics. In the early evening, “*la merienda*”, a light snack of coffee and rolls or sandwiches, is served. This meal is often very informal and may be just for children. In the evening, often as late as 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m., “*la cena*”, a small supper, concludes the day's meals.

Once settled in the United States, most Hispanics adopt the three-meal system and skip the “*siesta*”. Midday and evening meals are important family or social events. Especially when guests are present, the meal may be followed by the “*sobre mesa*”, a time to linger and talk over coffee or perhaps an after-dinner drink. Usually when food or additional servings are offered to Hispanics, they tend to accept only after it is offered a second or third time.

Teaching and Learning Implications

To fully engage Hispanic audiences in the learning process, particular attention should be given to gaining and maintaining **trust**. Greater acceptance of educational efforts will occur by learners if Hispanic community leaders are involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of these educational efforts. Be aware that the physical distance between Hispanics when holding a conversation is much closer than in other cultures.

Exhibiting respect for learners is another important aspect of the Hispanic culture. Teachers need to pay individual attention to learners (e.g., greeting each learner, handing papers to each individual rather than passing them down the row, being sensitive to different cultures among Hispanics, writing educational materials at appropriate reading levels). Differences in educational levels, language skills, income levels, and cultural values among Hispanics need to be considered by educators and catechists when planning educational programs. Even though Hispanics share the same language, their cultures may vary considerably.

Churches, local libraries, and recreational centers (with child-care arrangements, if needed) may be appropriate places to hold educational programs with Hispanic audiences. Among Hispanics, information is passed mostly by word of mouth. Grocery stores and churches are the main places people meet, visit, and exchange information.

Challenges

Immigration from Hispanic countries, such as Mexico and Cuba, has followed adverse political and economic circumstances in such countries. The strongest waves of Mexican immigrants came between the late 1970s and mid 1990s when the value of the Mexican currency (the peso) dropped suddenly to half its value sending the country into an economic shock. Many of the people who have come from Mexico have been from the **lower classes**. **Many come from the poor parts of Mexico city**, the southern states with large Amerindian communities, and also the poor parts of the north of Mexico.

Education

Immigrants in general, but especially the unauthorized are considerably more likely than natives to have **very low levels of education**. For example, less than 2% of natives have less than a 9th grade education, but 15% of legal immigrants and 32% of unauthorized migrants have this little education. (Note that education in **Mexico is currently compulsory only through the 8th grade**, so finding this many with this little education is not surprising. Further, the level of compulsory school attendance was recently raised from 6th grade.) Hispanic Center "Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics.

Unauthorized **youth are much more likely to have dropped out** (that is, not completed high school)—50% of unauthorized youth versus 21% of legal immigrants and only 11% of natives. This result needs to be interpreted with caution when considering the implications for the education system, however. Many of the immigrant youth who are classified as "dropouts" never actually attended school in the U.S. Further, many stopped attending school before even entering high school. Also is important to consider that if they want to continue college studies they are denied to do so.

Labor – Work

26% of workers in the landscaping services industry are unauthorized; similarly, about 1 in 5 workers in meat/poultry packing is unauthorized. The following industries have more than twice the representation of unauthorized workers than the whole labor force.

Landscaping services	26%	Private households	14%
Animal slaughter & process.	20%	Traveler accommodation	14%
Services to bldgs & homes	19%	Restaurants & food services	11%
Dry cleaning & laundry	17%	Construction	10%
Cut & sew apparel mfg	16%	Groceries & related prod	8%
Crop production	16%		

Income – Poverty

Specifically, **average family income of unauthorized migrant families is more than 40% below the average income of either legal immigrant or native families.** In addition to education and occupation differences, another factor contributing to this difference is the lower labor force participation of unauthorized females that results in fewer workers per family than in the other groups.

Immigrants tend to have somewhat larger families on average than natives, with little difference in family size between unauthorized and legal immigrants.

A key element of income is the amount available per person in the family. Because unauthorized **families tend to be larger with lower incomes than natives**, the difference in average income per person* is even larger than the difference in income. Thus, the average income per person in unauthorized families (\$12,000) is about 40% less than legal immigrant families and more than 50% below the per capita income in native families.

Immigrant adults are more likely than natives to live in families with **incomes below poverty level**. Unauthorized migrants are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty as native adults.

Children have higher levels of poverty than adults across all groups. However, children of immigrants have much higher levels of poverty than children of natives. The status of the child has a separate effect on poverty as U.S.-born children of immigrants have somewhat lower levels living below the poverty level than immigrant children of immigrants. This pattern reflects the status of the children's families, but a principal determinant of the difference is probably duration of residence in the U.S. Immigrant families with U.S.-born children tend to have been in the U.S. longer on average than immigration families with only immigrant children.

More than half of unauthorized adults **do not have insurance**. A principal factor affecting this pattern is that the occupations and industries in which the unauthorized work tend to be those where employers do not provide insurance.

Marriage

When dealing with Hispanic couples that want to receive the Sacrament of Marriage you could encounter one of these situations:

- They live together. – Needs to request a Marriage License in the nearest Court.
- They are married by the civil law in Mexico. - (Convalidation) No need of Marriage License, just a copy of the Marriage License in Mexico.
- They have not live together. (They were waiting to be married in the Church.) - Needs to request a Marriage License in the nearest Court.

- He/She married civilly in Mexico and wants to be married by the Catholic Church in U.S. with another partner. – If he is Catholic, like most of them are, first he needs to divorce civilly from his wife. After that he needs to request an annulment for that marriage and after is granted then he can begin doing his preparation to married again.

Spanish Language

More than half of today's immigrants come from Spanish-speaking countries and so arguably have less of an incentive to learn English than the immigrants in the cities a century ago. Additional structural factors that influence the persistence of cultural differences:

- Immigrants come from a contiguous country, making it easier to travel back and forth and retain ties to their country of origin;
- The persistence of the migratory flow provides continuous inputs of traditional values and customs;
- A large number of illegal Mexican immigrants are unwilling or unable to participate in mainstream social and political institutions;
- The concentration of Hispanic immigration in enclaves near the Mexican border reinforces the capacity to sustain a social and economic life conducted in Spanish.

Religion

Immigrant families experience several difficulties. Currently, they do not have the assistance required for a successful transition. **One of the most common difficulties faced is losing the domestic church.** They find it difficult to compete with the new culture their children are exposed to. **This deficiency invites their children to quickly adopt a death culture** that leads them to an empty life, one based on liberalism; consumerism, greed, alcoholism, abortion, drugs and independency. We need to provide the much needed assistance to build a life culture; one that will make them stronger, more confident, organized, and disciplined. It will give them the sense of freedom to pursue happiness and to take advantage of all the resources available to them to improve their personal life and relationship with God. By providing this help and support, they will assure their faith in the Catholic Church, preventing them from changing to other faiths.

In this process the whole family needs catechesis. **The program of Family Catechesis is very useful as a catechizing tool for Hispanic families.** As vulnerable families they are exposed to many anti values threads like: sexual liberalism, materialism, “light” religions, drug addiction, etc. For Hispanic teens open a new possibility to have sexual activity at a younger age without being married, (birth control).

Parents need to acquire and incorporate new values from the new country while strengthening their own cultural and religious values. Parents can assist in transmitting these new values to their children making them better people, stronger Christians with solid values. Children of Immigrant families' needs to maintain their family, moral and religious values while acquiring good values from their new culture.

The desired goal for the future is a new generation of Christians that have the moral and Catholic values acquired from their parents/families and completely integrated into Church life.