Hispanic-American Families - The Hispanics/latinos And Group Definition

The Hispanic ethnic group was created on May 4, 1978, when the U.S. Office of Management and Budget published the following regulation in the *Federal Register*: "Directive 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting" that defined a Hispanic to be "a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race" (p. 19269). This definition (refined, with minor adjustments, in 1997) largely focuses on the countries of origin (which may be generations in the past) and assumes that peoples in these countries share a common "Spanish culture" that is also shared by some people living in the United States.

According to this definition, Hispanics (or after 1997, Hispanic/Latino/Spanish) derive from twenty-six nations that differ in languages, economic resources, educational systems, status structures, and customs. In addition, individual countries are often ethnically diverse. For example, the native language of the majority of Bolivians is either *Quechua* (the language of the Incas) or *Aymara*. *Parana* is spoken by millions of Paraguayans; Mayan dialects by the majority of Guatemalans; and *Garifuna*—a Creole language derived from English, Native American, and African languages—in the coastal areas of Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize. There are a myriad of Native American dialects spoken in Mexico—itself a huge, diverse nation stretching almost 4,000 miles from Tijuana to the Yucatan. English is the official language in Belize and Guyana, French in French Guiana, and Dutch in Suriname.

These language differences are not trivial among Latinos in the United States. There may be hundreds of thousands of native Mayan speakers in the United States, for example, and certainly substantial numbers of Quechua speakers. Garifuna immigrants (comprising perhaps more than 100,000 persons in New

York City—they are not differentiated in the census tabulations) stage a large parade in Brooklyn each year.

The U.S. government, however, characterizes Latinos as members of an ethnic group, explicitly noting that "Hispanics may be of any race." In this the Hispanics are not unique. Since its creation, the U.S. government has mandated legal definitions of Native American tribes and the legal ascription of membership in a tribal group. If one is to negotiate and carry out treaties, for example, then the nature of the entity with whom one negotiates (e.g., *Cherokee Nation*) must be defined and the individuals entitled to services required by the treaty must be identified. For example, who is a Cherokee? Likewise, formal, legal racial definitions date to the Colonial era (Enloe 1981).

If one equates ethnicity and ethnic-group identity with cultural traits shared among a population (as few contemporary anthropologists do), then the Hispanic ascription may be confusing; Hispanics are culturally diverse and they did not tend to regard themselves as a collective entity until Regulation 15 was published in 1978. Most contemporary anthropological theorists, however, regard ethnic identity as being established through interactions of groups with other groups or social institutions as government bureaucracies or the military. The interaction establishes a *we* and a *they,* an *us* and a *them*. Ethnic identity is expressed in a dynamic process among a number of groups (Fredrik Barth [1969]; Abner Cohen [1974]; and Joan Vincent [1974] were pioneers in the rigorous development of this perspective). An entire shared culture is not necessary to define group membership: Sometimes a particular cultural trait may be sufficient. Tragically, religion alone—Roman Catholic versus Eastern Orthodox—defines the ethnic difference between Serbians and Croatians, yet this difference led to war and the establishment of separate nation states.

The Hispanic/Latino as an ethnic group does have a social validity, however, if only because one is required to so identify oneself to many of the society's institutions to receive services and legal protection against discrimination. Furthermore, if the larger society sees one as a member of a group, then persons

so ascribed tend to react reinforce common bonds for protection and to achieve common ends.

All too often, Latinos have had to confront stereotyping, discrimination, and oppression from the moment of their first step on U.S. soil (even if as a toddler). Common oppression has thus reinforced the rapid acceptance of the Hispanic/ Latino identity following the U.S. government's 1978 ascription. Latino ethnicity is thus a real and valid social category that profoundly affects on the lives of Latinos; this ethnicity should never, however, be regarded as the manifestation of a nearly universal suite of cultural traits. Although Latinos may hold much in common, common traits are rarely universal nor are most sufficient to define an individual as Hispanic, although a Spanish accent would be a sufficient social marker. Persons seeking information about and understanding of the Latino family solely by reference to a list of common traits and behaviors may find themselves doomed to a misunderstanding and misdirection of effort.

In 1978, many newly minted *Hispanics* found this common assumption of cultural/ethnic identity at first confusing, not only because the term *Hispanic* had not previously been used. (If there were any term in common usage for the group as a whole, it was *Latino*.) At that time, most Latinos would have first identified themselves in terms of a nationality, such as Colombian, Dominican, or Argentinian. Exceptions would have included the *Spanish* of New Mexico and the *Chicanos,* who were mainly of Mexican derivation, although that ancestry might be traced back as far as the eighteenth century missions of California and Arizona. Eventually, the Hispanic identifier became more popularly accepted, and the sense of group identity was greatly strengthened once the U.S. government added *Latino* and *Spanish* to be used by those who preferred to use these names.

Citing this material

Hispanic-American Families - Hispanic/ latino Families: Demographic And Social Indices

Although aggregate statistics should always be interpreted with care to avoid stereotyping, they offer vital insights relating to the situation of Latinos and Hispanic/Latino families at both macro and micro levels. Keeping in mind the proviso that the average is not the individual—although many Hispanics are poor, some are wealthy; communication in Spanish may be common, but some Hispanics may know Spanish poorly or not at all— aggregate statistics do help outline some of the social characteristics of Hispanics as a group.

On the whole, the Latino family in the United States confronts great economic and social challenges, but with relatively few reserves to meet them. The social needs of the Hispanic families are underlined by their standing in five social indices (see Table 1).

Poverty. In 1999, 20.2 percent (one in five) of Hispanic families lived below the poverty level compared with a 9.3 percent poverty rate (one in eleven) for the nation's families as a whole, and 5.5 percent (one in eighteen) for non-Hispanic white families. The situation of married-couple Hispanic families is somewhat

better, 14.2 percent, but that of female-headed families can only be described as dire: 39 percent live in poverty and among Puerto Ricans, 47.4 percent. It should also be noted that Puerto Rican residents counted include only those living in the fifty states—residents of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (3.8 million persons) are not included in the totals for U.S. residents, although all Puerto Ricans are born as U.S. citizens.

As a point of reference, the U.S. poverty thresholds for families of three and four persons were $13,853 and $18,267 respectively in 2001.

Income. The median income (half make more, half make less) of Latino families is approximately 60 percent that of all U.S. families: $32,000 versus $52,000. The same income differential holds for married-couple families: $37,000 versus $59,000. However, the income levels drop dramatically for single-parent families across all groups, especially for female-headed families: $18,700 for Latinos, $23,700 for all U.S. families and $28,600 for non-Hispanic white female-headed families. Special note should be paid to the $15,600 income of female-headed Puerto Rican families. On the other hand, Cuban female-headed families receive almost as much income, $27,100, as do their non-Hispanic white counterparts. In sum, the majority of female-headed Latino families live in poverty or near poverty conditions (as defined by the U.S. government).

Age. As a group, Latinos are dramatically younger than the rest of the U.S. population. The median age for males is 26.3 and for females 25.5 years versus 34 and 36 years respectively for the total U.S. population. The median age is even higher for non-Hispanic white males, 36.9 years, and females, 38.8 years. Across the board, Latinos' median ages are approximately ten to twelve years younger than those of other groups, with the exception of the Cuban-Latino subgroup, for which the median ages are 40.4 for males and 42.6 for females, higher than any other major group in the United States. The high median ages for Cubans are primarily the result of the erratic nature of Cuban refugee immigration as well as an age bias in the refugee population. Young persons subject to military conscription, for example, have routinely been forbidden exit visas.

Fertility. When the median age of a population is young then the proportion of women in the 15- to 44-year-old age cohorts, and especially in their 20s, will be high. This means that the fertility of the Latino population, with typical median ages a decade younger than the rest of the U.S. population, would be high. However, within all age groups Latina women give birth at much higher rates per thousand (about ninety-five) than those in other groups, which averaged about fifty to sixty-five per thousand women according to a June 2000 Census Current Population Survey (P20–543RV). Latina women accounted for 13.6 percent of the 60.9 million women in the childbearing years and yet gave birth to 19.3 percent of the 3.9 million children born in that period. In addition, the Latina mothers also tended to be younger, raising the likelihood that more of them will have more children.

TABLE 1

TABLE 1 Hispanic-American families (In millions or as a percentage of the total population)

		Hispanic		Puerto		Other	White	Black
Census Year	U.S. total	total	Mexican	Rican	Cuban	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
2000	281.4	35.3 (12.5%)	20.6 (7.3%)	3.4 (1.4%)	1.2 (0.42%)	10.02 (3.6%)	195.6 (69.5%)	35.4 (12.6%)
1990	248.7	22.4 (9.0%)	13.5 (5.4%)	2.73 (1.1%)	1.04 (0.42%)	5.01 (2.01%)	188.3 (75.7%)	29.3 (11.8%)
1980	222.6	14.6 (6.5%)						
			Social Characteristics					
				1999				
Families (millions)	72.03	7.6	4.8	0.77	0.385	1.6	53.1	
				Families, median				
income	$51751	$31663	$31123	$30129	38312		54121	
Married-couple	$59346	$37132	$35332	$41776	44025		59697	
Male-headed, no spouse present	$37396	$30425	$30710	$29882	39811		41656	

TABLE 1 Hispanic-American families (In millions or as a percentage of the total population)

Female-headed, no spouse present	$23732	$18701	$19313	$15568	27084		28627
Families in Poverty (%)	9.30%	20.20%	21.20%	23%	15%	16.70%	5.50%
Married-couple	4.80%	14.20%	16.70%	8.10%	10.30%	9.60%	3.30%
Male-headed	11.70%	16.80%	16%	19%	19.80%	17.60%	9.30%
Female-headed	27.80%	38.80%	38.40%	47.40%	33.80%	34.60%	18.60%
Median Age: Males	34	26.3	24	25.4	40.4		36.9
Median age: Females	36	25.5	24.9	30.2	42.6		38.8

The future composition of the Hispanic group is likely to be further shaped by another trend that emerges from Census Bureau Data. The fertility of Latina immigrants is far higher than that of those born in the United States. Among native-born women, fertility rates of Latinas were approximately eighty births per year per thousand as opposed to sixty births per thousand for non-Hispanic native-born women. Latina immigrants gave birth at an overall rate of 112 births per thousand. Thus the birth rates of Latina women, although high, are moving toward those of the general population— the trend for immigrant Latinas has not been established, but starts from a far higher level. Thus, the Latino/a child is far more likely to be born of an immigrant mother than would be suggested by the proportion of immigrant mothers in the of childbearing population as a whole.

Latina immigrant women are thus more likely to bear children, and they are more likely to continue having them than any other group in the U.S. population, although these differences may narrow in the future with acculturation and other social pressures.

Immigration. As enumerated through responses to the Census 2000, at least 16.1 million of the 35.4 million Hispanic/Latinos were born in another country—they immigrated to the United States. Latinos constituted 52 percent of all of the

foreign-born U.S. residents counted in the census. (Actually, the number of foreign born may be substantially higher; census counts of the foreign born have been consistently proved inaccurate—low— over the years.) At least 12.5 million Latinos immigrated since 1980, the majority during the 1990s, and these later immigrants now constitute the sub-group of Latinos with the highest fertility rate. Of the 761,000 Latina mothers giving birth last year, 423,000 (or 56%) were foreign born, although the foreign-born Latinas accounted for only 47 percent of the 8 million Latina women of child-bearing age.

Language. Census 2000 tallies indicate that 47.0 million U.S. residents spoke a language other than English in the home. Spanish was the language spoken by 28.1 million, of whom 13.8 million spoke English less than "very well." In a substantial number of families, no member speaks English beyond a level that facilitates the most basic social interactions outside a Spanish language environment. These are called *linguistically isolated families*; data on these families is as yet unavailable, but past experience indicates that there are millions of such isolated families.

In profile, the Latino family is young, poor, and especially in the case of the single-parent family, likely to be living in straitened circumstances. Almost half of Latinos were not born in the United States, with millions having arrived during the last decade. This high volume of immigration is expected to continue. Of course when we speak of the mean income or age, always keep in mind that half of all Latino families exceed the mean. There are many affluent Latinos: doctors, lawyers, skilled craft workers, teachers, executives, and business owners. Latinos as a group have, on the average, low incomes; an individual Latino, however, may have any income, may have lived in North America for fifteen generations, and may still speak Spanish at home.

Citing this material

Hispanic-American Families - National Origins: The Component Subgroups

The U.S. Census collects data on various Latino subgroups based on national origins. The primary subgroups are Mexicans (20.6 million), Puerto Ricans (3.4 million), and Cuban (1.2 million)—there were separate boxes to check off for these groups and various categories of *Other Hispanics* (10 million). Most numerous among the latter—the respondent had to write in the group—were 765,000 Dominicans (deriving from the Dominican Republic), 655,000 Salvadorans (El Salvador), and 471,000 Colombians. However, 6.1 million Hispanic respondents only checked off the Hispanic box or wrote in such terms as *Latino*. The origins of about a fifth of the Hispanic/Latino population are a mystery.

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Hispanic-American Families - Immigration And The Family

The overarching impact of migration upon the structure and relations within individual families cannot be overemphasized. In raw numbers, the fact that 16 million Hispanics are counted as "foreign born" minimizes the scale of Latino immigration: Persons from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are not counted as foreign born, for example. They are all U. S. citizens, and Puerto Rico is not counted as a foreign country. Yet in most respects—outside citizenship status—Puerto Ricans have been treated as though they were "foreign" to U. S. society, and the have suffered most of the social dislocations common among immigrants. Furthermore, for all groups the profound effects of migration clearly extend to each family member, not only those born abroad but also those born in the United States.

Latinos have migrated to the U.S. for many reasons: millions have been refugees, fleeing war-time conditions and political, religious, and racial/social oppression. Some of them were eventually granted refugee status while others were not. And of course, many millions have emigrated to the United States for (sometimes quite desperate) economic reasons and to provide their families with opportunities unavailable in their homelands. These migrations have also taken

many forms. Sometimes entire family groups emigrated; sometimes adult workers have migrated first and then reunited with their families later. Almost invariably, emigration disrupted extended family networks and supports.

The conditions leading to emigration and the emigration experience may offer important insights into the dynamics of particular families. For example, consider political refugees: the Cuban migration—particularly during the first twenty years of the Castro regime—is a refugee migration. However, the driving impulse of migration from El Salvador and Nicaragua during the 1980s was the need to escape ongoing wars. Likewise tens of thousands of Guatemalans (particularly Mayan speakers from the highlands), Chileans, and Argentinian immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s were fleeing violence and political repression in those countries. The initial phase of the immigration from the Dominican Republic in the mid-1960s was driven by refugees from political dictatorships and a civil war eventually ended by the occupation of the country by U.S. Marines in 1965.

In addition, since the 1970s, difficult economic conditions and a high population growth rate in parts of Latin America have encouraged emigration to the United States. This has been most dramatically true of immigration from Mexico, with its 2,000 mile-long common border with the United States, long-term historical ties, and recent history of economic mismanagement and recurrent economic crises. The classification of the cause of an emigration from the homeland can sometimes be arbitrary; the disruption caused by war and violent political dictatorships has often wrecked local economies leading desperate inhabitants to leave to obtain the most basic subsistence. The need for workers in the United States offers opportunities that have drawn immigrants north. *Immigrant narratives*. Virtually every immigrant family has its narrative of the journey, a narrative that affects the relations among family members and between the family and the external social world. Did the family leave as a unit, or did one or two persons leave first, as pioneers of a sort, and bring others later? What role did/does immigration status play in the narrative and in the continuing structure of opportunities available to family members? Often the narrative of migration is

in part a narrative of trauma. The movie *El Norte* offers an extreme example, but millions of Latinos have been, cheated, had to pay bribes, or have been physically threatened or abused during the journey to the United States. Moreover, even if one had not been traumatized, the narrative of immigration trauma is common among most Latinos' acquaintances. If one had to choose a single factor that most directly affects the lives of immigrants, it would be the residence status (legal right to live and work in the United States) of family members. Furthermore, legal status frequently varies among family members, especially if children have been born in the U.S.

There are myriad answers to such questions. For some, immigration brings immediate economic loss—a physician from Chile works as an orderly, for example, or an engineer scrapes by as an automotive mechanic. If these people are middle aged when they arrive, it may be nearly impossible to professionally recertify or to find positions offering equivalent social class status in the United States. For many others, economic benefits may be almost immediate; the United States is a land of opportunity that rewards their labor. For most, the struggle is demanding and the rewards are mixed.

Citing this material

Hispanic-American Families - Latino Family Roles

In large part, the Latino family is a family in transition. Within a generation or two the family may not only have immigrated to the United States but may have also migrated from a rural to an urban setting. During this same period, great social and economic changes have been affecting all families in the United States and all social roles within the family. The vast majority of Latinos have been and are being transformed by all of these changes.

Social status may be gained or lost as roles are redefined within the family. Both opportunity and need often encourage females to participate in the workforce resulting in more independence as well as more demands on their time and energy; quick language acquisition for a child may gain him or her sometimes inappropriate power as a translator/negotiator with the outside world; a husband or father, accustomed to controlling relations between the family and the rest of the social universe may have to adjust to at the least a partial result of this control. Moreover, persons in the community previously regarded as supporting relatives (such as godparents or distant cousins) may no longer regard themselves as having the same responsibilities.

The underdevelopment of state systems in most Latin nations led to the dependence on the family for support of the individual. Family systems tended to be patriarchal, and men were the prime protectors, mediators with an often-hostile world outside the bounds of the family. A number of common cultural strategies developed to protect the family. One was simply an extreme form of patriarchal relations, sometimes called the *machismo/marianismo* dyad, which served to reinforce the prestige of the male in this difficult mediating role. Another, called *compadrazgo,* served to extend the boundaries of the family through a system of godparent relations—a godparent is a *compadre* or *comadre*. The godparent assumed a certain responsibility to care for and guide the godchild in ways that extended beyond his or her spiritual well-being.

Machismo/marianismo. A man's proper role, at least in the language used in much of Mexico, is to be *macho,* and the ideal of the woman was to be like Mary, the mother of God. The *machismo/marianismo* dyad has never been a realistic metaphor for the relationship between men and women in the family, and in particular, the concept of *machismo* has been badly distorted as understood in U.S. popular culture. There is historico-cultural truth behind these concepts, however; although patriarchal, they are not as demeaning to either sex as one would infer from the popular stereotype.

The term *macho* has never been universal in Latin culture, and care should be advised when using it; in some places every male would have been offended to be referred to as *muy macho*. In Mexico, however, the word has historically had more positive connotations. A man who was *macho* was one who engendered respect, and not incidentally, also respect for his family; closely allied to that respect was a sense of dignity and often a forcefulness of personality. Therefore, to be *very much a man* is to have a forceful, dignified presence (almost in the Latin sense if *dignitas*), a strong (though not unreasonable) will and sense of purpose, reliability, and courage. These qualities are used in support of, protection of, and defense of the family—this is the ideal. *Machismo* in such a man can be a loving, certainly caring, trait and certainly need not be expressed through sexual conquests; a man could be *muy macho* and faithful to his wife.

American actors Gary Cooper and Humphrey Bogart would have been *muy macho*. A braggart trying to pick up a woman in a bar is definitely not *macho*; indeed, a braggart must have many other fine qualities to overcome such a flaw and make the grade. Regarded in its patriarchal essentials, the male's role outside the home entails a moral sacrifice. In negotiating the family's safe passage through the social world, a man will sometimes be forced to compromise much that he ought not, submit to the will of others who may not be worthy, make mistakes, and even accept that his flaws, errors, and humiliations will be public and reflect on the family. All too often the public life is a series of diminishments

for a man who realizes that he alone may not be able to ensure his family's well-being.

The woman/mother, inhabiting a more private sphere, does not need to undergo these humiliations; her ideal—*marianismo*—is to be like Mary, the ultimate source of nurturance and moral authority in the family, free from the need to engage in moral compromises necessary to ensure the family's survival. This is not the role of a weakling. On the contrary, the mother is the moral and practical rock upon which the family is built—she is the source of value. Again, *marianismo* and *machismo* are cultural ideals, not rational expectations to be lived in daily life. And rarely, outside of Mexico, would the terms, as opposed to the underlying concepts, ever be used in an approving context.

While *marianismo* and *machismo,* as used by an anthropologist, never (for example) by an Uruguayan housewife, are linked terms, the concepts are not symmetrical. They are ideological constructs that when put into practice in any modern society tend to reinforce the oppression of women and to perpetuate inequalities of social roles between men and women. In essence, the ideals reflect a need for manipulation resulting from powerlessness. The *macho* man is a presentation, a front, perhaps backed up by other forms of power, perhaps not. The successful patriarchal Latino man is manipulating his social presence for the benefit of his family. In practice, it is but a small step from the self-sacrificing patriarch to the manipulative egotist who uses an ideology of the protective role as a pretext for exercising total control over other family members.

Assuming the moral authority of the mother of God likewise has obvious potential for manipulative abuse within the family. *Marianismo* and *machismo* (even if practiced as habits of thought and not called by those terms) seem to have developed in societies in which relatively few persons were empowered, especially among those who were poor, who were members of groups who suffered racial or even caste-like discrimination, and who had little formal education or opportunities for independent employment. Extreme patriarchal relations may have in part been the result of a dysfunctional colonial

socioeconomic system in some Latino homelands. In the United States, whatever the deficiencies in protective social nets, the same conditions do not exist.

Compadrazgo. In religious life the function of the godparent is to ensure that the appropriate spiritual education is provided a godchild. In Latin America acceptance of the godparent role led to the assumption of much broader responsibilities: the godparent ideally would oversee the wellbeing of the child in all respects. Godparent relations have been referred to as a form of fictive kinship, and networks of godparents certainly helped ensure the safety of family members. The relations are complex; for example, deference and respect is paid to someone who is willing to assume a role as a *compadre* to one's offspring. In some traditional societies there was an aspect of social gamesmanship involved: the higher the social standing of a compadre, the more opportunities available to a child, and indirectly to the entire family.

As in so many other ways, immigration often altered or severed some of these kin bonds. Most commonly, the godparents might be in another country or another part of the United States, or perhaps no longer have supporting resources. Although the social importance of these bonds may be attenuated, some social service agencies have successfully sought out godparents for children in need of foster-care placements, and it is still not unusual for a child to be sent to live with a godparent for a period of time.

The social context of the Latino family is in a constant state of flux. Language acquisition, fluctuating economic conditions, acquisition of residence status and U.S. citizenship, and continued immigration of Latinos—including family reunification— ensure that Latino families will continue to undergo massive transformations. Given the size and birthrate of the Latino group, the ability of these families to provide a physically, emotionally and intellectually healthy environment to raise their families and meet their own needs will do much to determine the social course of the nation in the next generation.

See also: ARGENTINA; ETHNIC VARIATION/ETHNICITY; GODPARENTS; IMMIGRATION; LATIN AMERICA; MEXICO; PERU; SPAIN; UNITED STATES; VENEZUELA

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