



WILLIAM & MARY

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Inclusive Leader Insights

What's in a Name?

Over the past weekend, National Hispanic Heritage Month concluded. While as an institution we celebrated and acknowledged the month as Hispanic/Latinx or Latinx/e, we did not engage in dialogue about any of the terms that have been used to identify this very broad and diverse group of individuals.

Although the term "Hispanic" had been used previously when President Lyndon Johnson started Hispanic Heritage week in 1968, it was not until the Richard Nixon administration in the 1970s that it became an official name to group individuals together from the Latin American diaspora through the U.S. Census. Although the term "Hispanic" was not universally loved, it was eventually selected. The result allowed different groups who formally identified with their country of origin (Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba) to have additional political clout and significantly reduced the undercounting of Hispanics in the 1980 Census.

Given the history of how it was developed, one might understand how the term "Hispanic" can be problematic. The term "Hispanic" itself refers to a collective group of individuals with connections to Spain, Spanish culture and tradition. If you were from Spain, you would be included in this description. However, if you were Brazilian, you would not fall under this umbrella term. On the other hand, the term Latino, connected people from the Latin America diaspora through their shared history of colonization. This normally would include Brazilians and exclude Spaniards.

In the early 2000s, the masculine term "Latino" and the feminine "Latina" began to pick up steam in a variety of different circles. In mid 2010s, coupled with a desire for a gender-neutral alternative to "Latino", the term "Latinx" began spreading throughout college campuses across the nation. Outside of higher education, however, the name did not catch on. Many felt that the term "Latinx" was elitist and made-up word that had no actual translation in Spanish. Some may not be as familiar with the term "Latine" that has recently been used in the media and publications. Like Latinx, it is also a gender-neutral version of Latino/Latina that was created by gender non-binary and feminist communities in Latin America. Unlike Latinx, however, the "e" exists within the Spanish language as a word that encompasses all genders. An example of this is "estudiante".

None of the alternative names have supplanted the term "Hispanic" and it is still very much used. The younger generations, particularly those on college campuses, are decidedly against using it. One must consider that people within the Latin Diaspora are not a monolith and there will continue to be many varied opinions. There are no easy answers when it comes to language.

This Leadership Insight is not a definitive piece on what to, and not to, call persons that are from the Latin Diaspora. Instead, it is designed to highlight the complexity of identity and how it continues to evolve.

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