



# Unveiling the Diversity of LatinX Identity





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# Introduction

This zine explores the multidimensional diversity of the Latinx community, delving into interconnected themes of race, gender, language, homeland, colorism, culture, religion, and social class.

This compilation seeks to educate and provoke thought by examining both historical contexts and contemporary challenges.

It emphasizes the community's diversity while identifying unifying threads that foster resilience and solidarity.

Zine Team:

- Ariel Castaneda
- Larah Posadas
- Tatyana Pollard
- Sylvia Vargas





## Class - By Larah Posadas

The definition of class is the perceived ranking of individuals based on their economic status and demographic. Unfortunately, in the U.S. many Latinos reside in lower economic classes. According to NCRC.org, the median wealth for Latino families is \$48,720. This is significantly lower when compared to the median wealth of \$250,400. Furthermore, to spotlight the inequality, 1 in 3 Latinos face materialistic struggles such as food insecurity and trouble paying bills.

There is a plethora of reasonings behind this wealth disparity. A good percent of the Latinx community consists of immigrants who are from economically challenged countries. Many immigrants are drawn to places with new economic opportunities. Reasonings behind immigration consist of push-pull factors. The push factors that make many want to leave their homeland is the lack of financial opportunity. Pull factors that appeal to individuals to immigrate are the chance of better job opportunities and financial prosperity. However, there is a catch to these new employment options. According to the NIH.org, “New places offer low-skilled and low-wage job opportunities not only for foreign-born but also for native-born migrants.”



## Colorism – By Sylvia Vargas

In the Latino community, **racism** and **colorism** are distinct yet interconnected forms of discrimination.

**Racism** refers to prejudice or discrimination directed at individuals based on their racial or ethnic background. Within the Latino community, this can manifest as biases against specific ethnic subgroups, such as Indigenous or Afro-Latinos, leading to unequal treatment and opportunities.

**Colorism**, on the other hand, is discrimination based on skin color, typically favoring lighter skin over darker skin within the same racial or ethnic group. In other words, Latinos discriminate against other Latinos. This bias is deeply rooted in colonial histories and persists in many Latino cultures, affecting social status, beauty standards, and economic opportunities. For instance, lighter-skinned Latinos may experience privileges not afforded to their darker-skinned counterparts, even within the same community.

The Pew Research Center's report, "Majority of Latinos Say Skin Color Impacts Opportunity in America and Shapes Daily Life," delves into the nuanced experiences of Latinos in the United States, emphasizing how skin color influences their daily lives and opportunities. The study, conducted in March 2021, surveyed 3,375 U.S. Hispanic adults to explore perceptions of discrimination and the role of skin color in shaping life experiences.

The report reveals that a significant portion of Latinos perceive skin color as a determinant in their daily interactions and opportunities.

Key findings include:

**Perception of Skin Color's Impact:** Approximately 62% of Latinos with darker skin tones believe skin color affects their daily life experiences, compared to 57% of those with lighter skin tones.

**Discrimination Experiences:** Latinos with darker skin report higher instances of discrimination. For example, 64% experienced at least one discriminatory incident in the past year, whereas 54% of lighter-skinned Latinos reported similar experiences.

**Intra-Community Dynamics:** Discrimination is not solely external; 41% of darker-skinned Latinos faced unfair treatment from fellow Hispanics, highlighting internal biases within the community.

**National Attention on Racial Issues:** The Latino community is divided on whether racial issues receive adequate attention in the U.S., with 37% stating there's too little focus, 36% believing there's too much, and 25% feeling the current attention is appropriate.

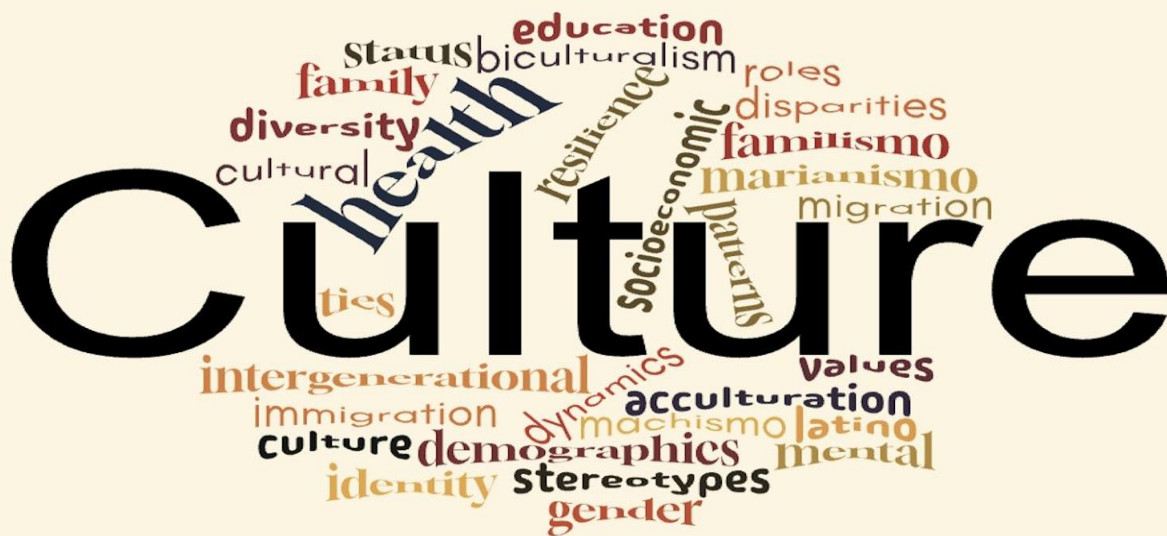
The findings underscore the prevalence of colorism within the Latino community and its broader societal implications. The higher rates of discrimination reported by darker-skinned Latinos suggest that skin color remains a significant factor in social stratification. The internal biases, where discrimination occurs among Hispanics, indicate that colorism is deeply ingrained and not merely a result of external prejudice.

The division regarding national attention to racial issues reflects varying perspectives within the community, possibly influenced by factors such as political affiliation, generational status, and personal experiences with discrimination. This split suggests a need for nuanced discussions that consider the diverse viewpoints within the Latino population.

The Pew Research Center's methodology, involving a large and representative sample, lends credibility to the findings. The study captures personal perceptions of skin tone by employing a self-assessed 10-step skin color scale, which are crucial in understanding individual experiences with discrimination.

In conclusion, the report sheds light on the significant role skin color plays in shaping the experiences and opportunities of Latinos in the U.S. It highlights the need for continued dialogue and policy interventions to address both external and internal forms of discrimination, aiming to foster a more equitable society for all individuals, regardless of skin tone.





## Culture – By Sylvia Vargas

Latino culture in the United States is a rich tapestry woven from diverse histories, traditions, and experiences. The term “Latino” encompasses individuals with roots in Mexico, Central and South America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and Spain, each contributing unique cultural elements to the collective identity. This diversity challenges monolithic perceptions and underscores the importance of understanding the nuanced realities of Latino families.

As of the early 21st century, Latinos represent a significant and rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population. The U.S. Census has evolved in its categorization, reflecting the complex identities within the Latino community. In the 2000 Census, over 42% of Latinos marked the “other race” category, and more than 6% indicated multiple racial affiliations, highlighting the community’s diverse racial backgrounds.

Central to Latino culture is the concept of *familismo*, which emphasizes the importance of family connections, loyalty, and solidarity. This cultural value manifests in strong intergenerational ties and a collective approach to family welfare. However, the portrayal of Latino families often falls prey to stereotypes, such as the assumption of uniformity in family structures or adherence to traditional gender roles. In reality, Latino families exhibit various configurations and dynamics influenced by socioeconomic status, education, and acculturation levels.

The acculturation process among Latinos in the U.S. is multifaceted, involving the negotiation between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to mainstream American society. This negotiation can lead to the development of bicultural identities, where individuals integrate aspects of both cultures. Research indicates that maintaining a

strong ethnic identity can serve as a protective factor against mental health challenges, as it fosters a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Conversely, the erosion of cultural ties may contribute to identity conflicts and psychological distress.

Educational outcomes within the Latino community are influenced by various factors, including socioeconomic challenges and cultural expectations. First-generation Latino immigrants often place a high value on education as a pathway to upward mobility. However, subsequent generations may experience a decline in academic engagement, a phenomenon known as the “immigrant paradox.” This paradox suggests that while first-generation immigrants outperform their descendants academically, the latter may face increased acculturative stress and diminished familial support, impacting their educational trajectories.

Latino families encounter specific health challenges, including limited access to healthcare services and higher incidences of certain health conditions. Cultural factors, such as traditional health beliefs and language barriers, can affect health behaviors and interactions with healthcare systems. Moreover, experiences of discrimination and socioeconomic hardships contribute to health disparities, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive healthcare interventions that address the unique needs of the Latino population.

Despite facing systemic challenges, Latino families demonstrate remarkable resilience. Protective factors include strong familial bonds, community support networks, and cultural practices that promote coping and adaptability. The concept of *familismo* plays a crucial role in fostering resilience, as family members often provide emotional and practical support to one another. Additionally, cultural values such as *personalismo* (valuing personal relationships) and *respeto* (respect) facilitate social cohesion and collective problem-solving within communities.

Understanding Latino culture requires an appreciation of its diversity and the dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation. Recognizing the myths and realities surrounding Latino families is essential for developing informed and effective policies and practices that support their well-being and integration into the broader society. By acknowledging the complexities of Latino identities and experiences, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable environment that honors the rich contributions of this vibrant community.



embrace a larger range of gender expressions. Ultimately, being part of the Latinx community can both challenge and strengthen one's journey of self-discovery, as cultural traditions and modern sensibilities intersect to shape new possibilities for gender identity.



## Homeland - By Ariel Castaneda

In the Latinx community having connections to their homeland plays a significant role in shaping a person's identity, offering a diverse blend of cultural heritage, language, and traditions that influences a person's everyday lifestyle. For many Latinx individuals, the homeland is more than just a geographic place or a place where they were born—it represents a deep connection to family, history, and a shared sense of belonging. One quote that goes with this from knowledge Chicago U is "James Fearon (1992) argues that a modern concept of 'identity' within the field of International Relations is rather complex, and underdeveloped. However, he proposes that identity is commonly used in two interconnected ways, which he refers to as 'social' and 'personal' identities. In the social sense, 'identity' represents a social category, a group of individuals identified by a label and defined by specific rules regarding membership and perceived characteristic traits. On the other hand, personal identity refers to distinctive characteristics that an individual takes pride in or considers socially significant, usually seen as relatively unalterable (Fearon 1999, 2)." This connection to one's country where they are from often stems through cultural practices such as food, music, festivals, and language, which are essential to both individual and collective identity. These traditions help maintain a sense of pride, providing a foundation upon which people can build their identity, even if they are living outside of their homeland.

However, the experience of being part of the Latinx community is not uniform; it is shaped by factors like migration, displacement, and the varying degrees of connection to the homeland. For some, the process of living in the United States or another foreign country may create a feeling of being torn between two cultures—one that is rooted in the homeland and another that is shaped by the dynamics of their new environment. This duality can create a unique identity that merges the values and customs from their home country with those of the broader society

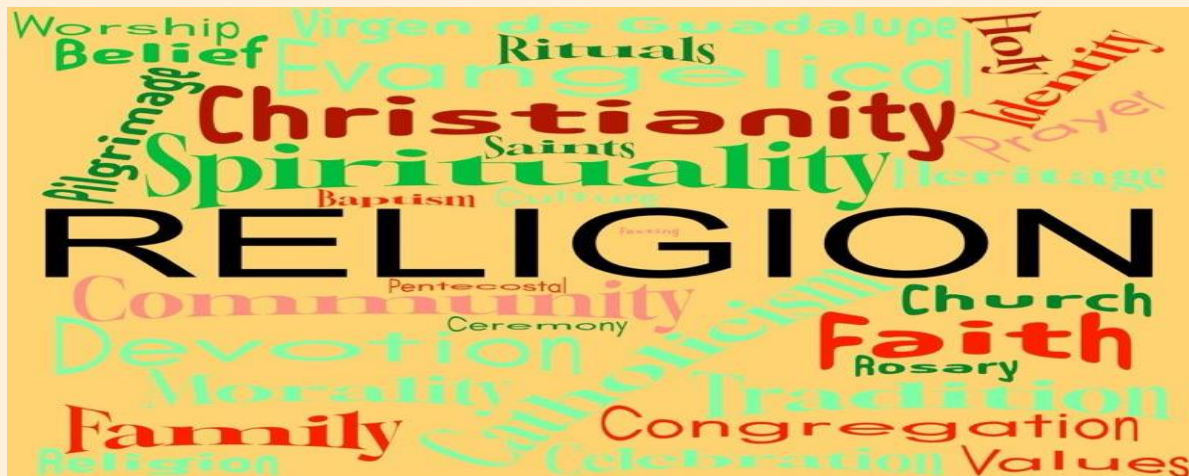


in which they live. For others, the distance from the homeland can evoke feelings of nostalgia or a desire to preserve cultural practices in order to maintain a link to their roots.

In some Latinx identities, the homeland is also a source of empowerment, mainly as political and social movements related to immigration, human rights, and cultural pride gain momentum. People's homeland often serves as a symbol of resistance and resilience, inspiring people to advocate for social change and to embrace a range of identity that honors their heritage. Whether through efforts to preserve the language they speak in their homeland, fight for immigrant rights, or maintain connections with family, being part of the Latinx community and their homeland creates a dynamic and evolving identity that is rooted in both personal and collective experiences.







## Religion - By Larah Posadas

Religion plays a significant part within the Latino community. Because of its deep roots in Latin American history, religion, and especially Catholicism, has become integral to the cultural identity of many Latinos. Religion is so ingrained within the culture that a person's tie to it can also help determine their connection to their culture.

Religion first made its way into Latin America via Spanish colonization. The Spanish sought to spread Catholicism and establish it as the dominant religion within their Latin American colonies. Catholicism gained dominance using a multitude of tactics, such as the forced conversion of the indigenous peoples as well as the creation of many Catholic missionaries. The results of these efforts remain prominent to this day. According to the Pew Research report, around 69% percent of adults within Latin America identify as Catholic, and 84% grew up as such. A subtle trend to note is the contemporary shift to converting to Protestantism for some adults. The Pew Research Center also found that while only 9% of Latinos grew up as Protestant, the number increases to 19% for how many Latinos currently identify as Protestant, suggesting that there is a rise in Protestant converts. The effects of mainstream Christianity have a plethora of cultural effects within the Latinx community.

The Church and its involvement is a way many Latinos stay connected with their culture. In a journal report titled "Religious Involvement and Group Identification: The Case of Hispanics in the United States" by Hoi Ok Jeong and published in The Social Science Journal, a study examined the correlation between Church involvement and racial group identification. To determine the results of this study, five sectors of Church involvement, including Church attendance, prayer, the importance of religion for an individual, belief in God's love, and religious affiliation, were all examined and surveyed. The findings of this result reveal that only Church involvement affects ethnic identification. The more often somebody physically attends church, the more likely they are to identify with other Latinx

individuals. A major reason behind this is the prevalence of predominantly Latino congregations. In places where there's a large Latinx population, there tends to be



## Interviews

To further understand the diversity within the Latine community, a handful of people were interviewed to discuss their shared and unique experiences growing up as a Latinx person. In these interviews, a handful of questions were asked below.

- How has being a Latinx person shaped your experiences?
- Do you ever feel disconnected from the Latinx? If so, why?
- Do you speak the language? (Spanish, Portuguese, other languages your family speaks)
- How has language affected your connection to culture?
- Are there any other identities to you that affect your Latinx experience?

### Savannah

Savannah is a proud Mexican-American Latina woman who attends Western Washington University. She exclaims that being Latina has allowed her to connect better with those who share the same cultural identity.

However, this part of her identity separated herself from the rest of her peers due to constantly living in predominantly White areas. There were some incidents of racism she faced such as being called “Dora” in a demeaning manner and receiving weird looks for being the only brown girl on her volleyball team. There are also feelings of separation between her and her Latinx identity due to her not being fluent in Spanish. Savannah says that she never fully felt Hispanic enough but also never felt like she fit in with White people. Not speaking Spanish has also put some distance between her other Spanish-speaking family members because there were certain things they couldn’t talk about due to the language barrier.

Another major part of Savannah’s identity is her queerness. Because being part of the LGBTQ+ is still often looked down upon by many Latinx individuals, I decided to ask Savannah how being queer affected her Latinx experience. While her parents were eventually very accepting, due to them growing up Catholic, it took a lot of educating to get to that point. Savannah said they didn’t know much about the difference between gender and sexuality and other important concepts pertaining to queerness.

However, many of her family members still had the idea in their head that if you were gay, then just be quiet about it. Savannah’s identities have seemed to shape much of her life experiences and her story is something I’m sure many other Latinx folks resonate with.

### Alondra

Alondra is also a student who attends WWU. While her experiences share some similarities with Savannah, it also greatly differs. When she was younger, Alondra wasn't as connected to her culture however this changed when she moved to Mexico where her parents grew up. This immersion of culture allowed her to be better educated about her heritage and led to a growth of appreciation of her roots.

Now in the present day, Alondra is very proud of being Mexican and according to her, "It makes me feel that it's part of who I am." She says a lot of her personality and values is due to her culture. Speaking Spanish has also greatly helped her in feeling culturally connected. Alondra explains that it's much easier for her to connect deeper with those who also speak Spanish due to that immense shared commonality.

As the interview was coming to a close, I wanted to ask one question about colorism and if she's had to face that type of discrimination in her life. Her answer was really peculiar. Alondra explained that people in her life actually put her on a pedestal because of her lighter complexion. She was often complimented for her skin color which made her feel weird. This answer gave such an interesting perspective on the issue of colorism. Alondra's experiences of being a proud Latinx woman is very beautiful.

## Ernesto

Ernesto's experience of being Latino varies greatly from Alondra's and Savannah's accounts. Part of this is because he's also Filipino. Growing up both Guatemalan and Filipino in a majority White area caused a lot of cultural confusion. Ernesto's dad didn't teach him Spanish or pass down much of his culture to him so in turn, Ernesto felt very separated from his Latino roots. Oftentimes he resonated more with more of his Filipino side because that was the culture he primarily was exposed to. This led to further separation of his identities.

Ernesto also constantly faced bouts of racism from his peers at school and would even be called slurs. The teachers would sometimes look down on his intelligence and think he wouldn't succeed in life. According to him, Ernesto thought this was partially because of his heritage.

All of this backlash made it a struggle for Ernesto to reclaim his cultural identity. While he still struggles with speaking the language and embracing his heritage, Ernesto is reconciling with his different identities and seeking to educate himself further on his background.

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