

Decolonization of Academia: Is the Word Latinx a Form of Colonization?

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Abstract

There has been debate for some years around the term Latinx and how members of the community identify with it. Originally, the term emerged in academia as a gender-neutral option to counter the term Latino/a or Latin@ and to try to establish a differentiation from the general term “Hispanic” which many consider to not be representative of the community. However, the inclusion and adoption of the term have generated some debate. For example, members of the community have different views on if the term is applicable in a Spanish-speaking context, in which cases some might advocate for the term Latiné as being the linguistically gender-neutral word created by those in Spanish-speaking countries. Several studies have been conducted around the use and understanding of the term in different contexts, however, there has not been an extensive exploration of the topic in engineering.

The purpose of this work is to explore how engineering students -who identify as Latinx/a/o/é at a large research university engage with the term Latinx. We conducted a survey to ask students about their understanding and adoption of the term Latinx, their preferred term, and their familiarity with different terms such as Latin@, Latin*, Latinu, Latini, Hispano, etc. The survey was administered online and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to map students’ preferences and a thematic analysis approach to identify emerging themes in the open-ended questions (e.g., why do you identify (or not) with the term Latinx?). Our results provide a better understanding of engineering students' perceptions around various identifying terms, and we engage critically in a discussion of the importance of understanding how members of the community perceive themselves.

Introduction

"At this moment of our historical trajectory, it is a moral imperative to embrace decolonizing approaches when working with populations oppressed by colonial legacies." [1, p. 1].

As of 2021, the United States (US) Census Bureau [2] estimates that roughly 62.6 million people, or 19% of the nation's population identify as having Latin American ancestry. These are individuals with origins within Latin America, from Mexico down to Chile, as well as the islands linked to Latin America who within the context and history of the US have used various labels to identify themselves. Starting in 2014, the term Latinx started to appear in contrast to other self-identifying labels like Hispanic and Latina/o. Labels that in themselves create a monolithic cultural perception of Latin America and contribute to the erasure of non-Eurocentric identities. The appearance of the term Latinx was and continues to be confusing, in that people do not know what it means or how to even pronounce it [3]. In furthering our understanding of the meaning and use of the word Latinx, we bring it into the engineering space with the intention of decolonizing the term. As of Fall 2021, the American Society of Engineering Education [4] reports an estimate of 92,300 engineering students that identify as having Latin American ancestry. Salinas and Lozano [3], highlight that not enough research focuses on the meaning and use of the term Latinx.

Our research begins to fill this gap by providing greater insight into the perception that Latinx engineering students have around terms that are used to identify them in academic settings. It provides the opportunity for members of the engineering community to engage critically around how the growing population of Latinx engineering students perceive themselves and the terms used to describe them. As language is an ever-changing and adapting tool that people use to find connection, provide meaning, and understand the world around them, it becomes imperative for us to begin decolonizing and understanding. Hence, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 How do Latinx/a/o/é identifying engineering students engage with the term Latinx?

RQ2 What is the familiarity that engineering students have with the different terms such as Latin@, Latin*, Latinu, Latini, etc.?

Overview of the literature around the term Latinx

There has been an ongoing discussion about terminology to encompass people that identify as having Latin American descentance -more especially around the term Latinx- among researchers in higher education. Salinas & Lozano [3] provide a mapping of the evolution of the use of the term and propose some suggestions for recontextualizing it. The term Latinx emerged as a gender-neutral level for the commonly used Latino/a, having its first appearance on social media sites in 2014 [3]. Although not much research has been conducted around the background and history of the use of the term, Salinas & Lozano [3] did a literature review and could only find 9 publications that included the use of the term before 2016. The authors explain that the term Hispanic was the first one adopted as early as 1980, and later, the term Latino (which encompassed all genders according to the rules of the Spanish language) started getting traction around 2006. Both terms have been used as a label to represent a cultural and ethnic group, not a race [5]. The term Latinx, on the other hand, emerged from the LGBTQIA community in the U.S. as a way to move away from the masculine-centric, binary-embedded “Latino” term, however, the term has been used mostly in university settings by students and faculty members [3].

Following the mapping and the description of the historical background around the term Latinx, Lozano et al. [6] conducted an exploration of how people of Latin American descent engage the term Latinx in their personal and professional lives and identify implications of the use of the term. The authors explained that some of the research around the use of the term has focused on developing arguments in favor or against the use of the term [7]–[10] while some other research has focused on Latinx serving as a word to ungender (binary perspectives) the Spanish language [9], [11]. Lozano et al. [6] concluded that the term has been used in institutions as a way of promoting inclusivity over performativity. The use of Latinx should also promote critical consciousness and continued understanding of why the term is used (or not). One final aspect of the term Latinx is that it has been identified as a privileged word used in privileged higher education spaces, but that is disconnected from the realities of the communities where some of the students that identify as Latin American descendants come from. In these spaces, the term is less used and not widely accepted [12]. For more information on the different terms, please refer to Figure 1.

Terms used to identify individuals of Latin American or Caribbean heritage in the United States.

Published in the *Handbook of Latinos and Education*, chapter 1 by Cristobal Salinas Jr. & Adele Lozano, 2021

Term	Description
Latino	The term Latino was adapted by the U.S. government to label individuals who identify as mestizo or mulato (mixed White, with Black and Native) people of Central or South America. The U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanic and Latino as an ethnicity that “refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” In contrast to the U.S. government, some people use the term Latino to refer to people from the Caribbean, as well as Mexico, and the countries that comprise Central and South America, even those countries that are not Spanish-speaking (Belize, Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname). Latino is used in English, Spanish, and other languages. Latino is gender neutral in English. In Spanish, the term Latino(s) is used to refer to only man/men, and Latinos is use as gender neutral and plural.
Latina	In Spanish, the term Latina(s) is used to refer to only woman/women. Latina has been adopted in English or Spanglish to refer to Latina woman/women.
Latina/o	Latina/o was adopted by Spanish speaking writers to represent the significant impact of Latinas/os in the United States. The term Latina/o has been used and adapted in conventional English grammar; therefore, when Latina/o is used this can be perceived as Spanglish. The (-a) is often place first before the (-o) to center women first before men.
Latin@	Similar to Latina/o, Latin@ is used to include both women and men, as opposed to the traditional Spanish grammar rule of “Latino” and “Latinos” encompassing both genders
Latinx	The (-x) suffix replaces the standard (-o/-a) ending of nouns and adjectives that are typical of grammatical gender in Spanish and signifies a broader and more inclusive perspective of gender.
Latin	Latin is used to identity natives of Latin America or their descendants, as well as those who speak one of the Romance languages. Latin has been used in the U.S. to name and label people from Latin America. Yet, people from Latin America started to use Latin American or Latino or Latina to be specific with an identity, as Latin is also an Italic language.
Latin*	Latin* is used as an umbrella term encompassing Latinx, Latiné, Latinu, Latino, Latina, Latina/o, Latin@, Latin, or Latin American, or any other terms that are yet to be included in the mainstream vocabulary.
Latiné	The (-é) suffix replaces the standard (-o/-a/-x) ending of nouns and adjectives that are typical of grammatical gender in Spanish. The (-é) is often used as a form of resistance to the (-x), as Latinx has being perceived as another form of systematic oppression in the U.S. to Latin American people. Latiné is easier to pronounce in Spanish rather than Latinx and it is more accepted in Spanish speaking communities within in the U.S. and mainly in Mexico and Argentina.
Latinu	Similar to the (-é), the (-u) suffix replaces the standard (-o/-a/-x) ending of nouns and adjectives that are typical of grammatical gender in Spanish. Latinu is another form of how some Latin American people self-identify, and it is another form of gender fluidity and extant identity labels that have yet to be included in the mainstream vocabulary. Latinu allows Latin American people who speak other language(s) beyond Spanish and English to be phonetically accepted in their language(s).
Latini	Similar to the (-é) and (-u), the (-i) suffix replaces the standard (-o/-a/-x) ending of nouns and adjectives that are typical of grammatical gender in Spanish. Latini is another form of how some Latin American people self-identify, and it is another form of gender fluidity and extant identity labels that have yet to be included in the mainstream vocabulary. Latini allows Latin American people who speak other language(s) beyond Spanish and English to be phonetically accepted in their language(s). Furthermore, Latini is originally derived from Latin language adjective.
Hispanic	The term Hispanic was first adopted by the U.S. government during the Nixon administration and was implemented in the U.S. Census in 1980. Similar to Latino, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanic is an ethnicity and “refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” Hispanic derives from the Latin word <i>Hispania</i> , which later became España (Spain). In contrast to the U.S. government, some people used Hispanic to refer to people who are from countries where the primary language is Spanish. Hispanic translates in Spanish to <i>hispanico</i> , and it means pertaining or relative to <i>Hispania</i> .
Hispana	The literal translation of “Hispanic woman” to Spanish language translates to <i>hispanica</i> . <i>Hispanica</i> is not a word that Spanish speakers would associate with individual human beings; therefore, Hispana has been adopted in English or Spanglish to refer to Spanish speaking woman/women in the U.S.
Hispano	The literal translation of “Hispanic” or “Hispanic men” to Spanish language translates to <i>hispanico</i> . <i>Hispanico</i> is not a word that Spanish speakers would associate with individual human beings; therefore, Hispano has been adopted in English or Spanglish to refer to Spanish speaking man/men in the U.S.

Adapted from: Salinas, C. & Lozano, A. (2021). History and Evolution of the term Latinx. In E. G. Murillo, D. Delgado Bernal, S. Morales, L. Urrieta, E. Ruiz Bybee, J. Sánchez Muñoz, V. B. Saenz, D. Villanueva, M. Machado-Casas, & K. Espinoza (Eds.), *Handbook of Latinos and Education* (second edition), (pp. 249-263). Rutledge.

Figure 1. Summary of terms used, taken from Dr. Salinas Twitter account. [13].

More recently, work by Villanueva Alarcón et al. [14] problematize the different terms used to describe people with Latin American ancestry in the United States. The authors described the

challenges of being members of the community and trying to identify the appropriate term to be used in research. The purpose of their work was to engage in critical conversations around the historical challenges that exist around the use of these terminologies. The authors start by problematizing the use of the term “Hispanic” as (i) it lacks to recognize that Latin Americans’ identities are not monolithic, (ii) using it as a race leaves many groups not represented, (iii) using the term “Hispanic” as an identifier of an academic institution type (i.e., Hispanic Serving Institution) or a funding agency “restricts how sub-cultural and regional needs of students, faculty, and staff are situated and attended to” [14, p. 736], and (iv) many Latin American communities consider the term to be a representation of systems of imperialism, colonialism, and oppression. The authors then explain how “Latino” is the most common term, however, is a Spanish masculine term that fails to recognize gender-neutral language hence, some Spanish gender-neutral demonyms “Latinx” and “Latiné” have started to gain more traction as more inclusive approaches. One important aspect is the explanation of the term Latiné which “has been used as a form of resistance to the “x” in Latinx since it is perceived by some as yet another form of imposition by the United States” [14, p. 737] as Latiné is also easier to pronounce in Spanish. The authors end by recognizing that for some cultures, choosing to identify by one term over another has real-life implications and consequences. They suggest researchers consider the implications of selecting one classification over another, and the impact that decision can have on their research and the populations being researched. They highlight the importance of asking participants to choose how they prefer to identify. Hence, we considered that this study can continue this conversation by providing an overview of how engineering students identify and reflect on the use of the different terminology.

Methods

As the purpose of this work is to explore the perspectives of engineering students that identify as having Latin American origin, regarding the ways in which they identify themselves and how others seek to label them, this pilot study analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data to implement the beginnings of a case study. A pilot study allows the researchers to assess the feasibility of the work and to understand the ease in which participants were able to answer the questions generated for the survey. Additionally, with the initial examination of qualitative responses, researchers will be able to ascertain whether students’ perspectives could lead to a larger conversation about familiarity and feelings towards the terms and the usage by various groups of people.

Using Yin’s [15] definition of a case, the exploration of a phenomenon in its contemporary, real-life context, in which researcher(s) have little to no control of, this study enables the understanding of the how and why of engineering students’ perceptions of the language they use to describe and identify themselves [16]. Although case study is often criticized for lacking generalizability, this methodology lends itself to learning about a community of people within a context dependent phenomenon [17].

The authors of this paper come from various backgrounds and hold different perspectives of the use of identifying terms. Below are short introductions and glimpses into their consideration of the terms examined in this research:

One author is originally from a country in South America, where he lived for 30+ years and emigrated to the U.S. where he has spent the last 10 years. He identifies as a Latino and regularly uses the terms Latinx and Latiné. He considers the term Hispanic to be oppressive.

One author was born and raised in the United States, where their mother is an immigrant from a Central American country. They are not fluent in Spanish, not having the opportunity to learn until starting college. They identify as Latinx/Latine, switching between the two for English and Spanish respectively. They consider Latine as an opportunity to connect with their heritage while being able to represent themselves as non-binary and queer.

One author is originally from a Central American country, where she lived before emigrating to the United Kingdom at age 16. She has lived in primarily English speaking countries ever since. She identifies primarily with the country in which she was born and uses the term Latina in settings where other Latin American people might be included. She considers the term Latinx to undermine the efforts of Latin American communities to develop their own inclusive language.

One author is originally from a Central American country, where he lived until the age of 6 before seeking asylum in the United States through his parents. He has since lived in various states in the continental USA, where he learned English simultaneously with his Spanish. In pursuit of connecting with his Central American Culture, he elects to identify using his nationality wherever possible, but embraces the history and use of all other terms when appropriate.

The researchers see this paper as an opportunity to discuss those differences and elevate the voices of others in the Latin American community who are engineers at this institution. They recognize that they bring themselves to their research, and that their identities strengthen the work they commit themselves to. This pilot case study was conducted at an R1, Mid-Atlantic institution. Within the institution, “Hispanics of any race” (Language used by the institution) constitute 9.5% of the undergraduate population, not including those who identify as more than one race. Within engineering, the percentage remains about the same [18]. Of engineering graduate students, about 3.7% are Hispanic [19]. International/Residential Alien students are counted separately. A protocol was submitted to the IRB and the research was found to be exempt. No identifying personal information was collected in order to protect the privacy of participants.

Data collection

Data were collected using a survey that was disseminated online, through various channels and listservs where Latinx/Latino/a/Hispanic students were known to be present/served. This included group chats (Slack), newsletters, and listservs that identified or served the Latinx community. The survey was shared with the chats of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineering, the Latin American student association, the newsletter for the Hispanic/Latinx cultural center, and the graduate school listserv. Participants of this study are engineering students at a public land-grant research university who identify as Latinx/Latino/a/Hispanic. Regardless of status, domestic or international, or level of degree-seeking, undergraduate or graduate, all engineering students who fit the criteria were invited to share their perspectives of

the various identifying terms. The survey generated by the research team consisted of questions that first asked participants' demographics, followed by Likert-scaled questions that ask them to rate their familiarity with the identification of different terms. The remaining questions asked participants to re-identify themselves using the terms provided and to elaborate on their choice. Lastly, students were asked: What are your perceptions of the use of the term Latinx?

Our sample consists of 29 people who responded to the survey. Of the 29 respondents, 44.8% (13) identified as women, with an even division between undergraduate and graduate students. 6.9% (2) identified as non-binary and both were graduate students. Men respondents made up 48.3% (14) of the sample with a larger presence from undergraduate students. The breakdown of survey respondents can be seen in Figure 2.

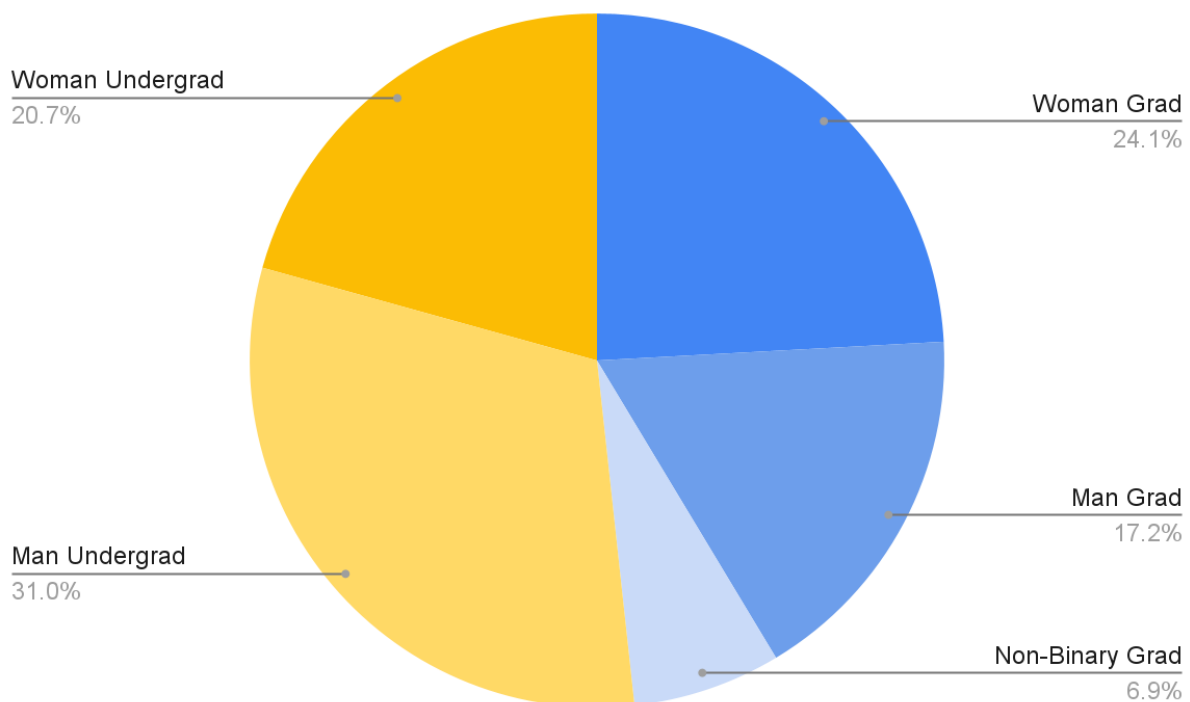


Figure 2. Gender identification of participants

Likert questions that were originally 1-5 were converted to 0-4 for readability and to make the results easier to understand. Gender responses were aggregated such that they fell under categories of woman, man, and non-binary/gender nonconforming, as opposed to male, female, etc. provided by participants as they are biological terms.

For this paper, we will focus on both the quantitative results of our survey and the qualitative results of the open-ended question to expand upon respondents' perspectives. The survey data is exploratory in nature as we continue to gather more data. Currently, we have collected survey results from 29 engineering students at an R1 public research university.

Data Analysis

The data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics to map students' preferences and a thematic analysis approach to identify emerging themes around our open-ended questions. Descriptive analysis entailed comparing familiarity of terms by groups such as gender and degree level. Differences between self-identified terms and terms used provided by the survey were also analyzed.

There were two main phases within the thematic analysis, as guided by [20]. The first stage was generating a codebook to identify patterns among the qualitative survey answers. This was done by two researchers using open, emergent coding independently. Survey responses were analyzed line-by-line, focusing on the participants' descriptions of their identities and their opinions on the term Latinx. Researchers then met to determine consensus amongst the codes. This was followed by axial coding where the codes identified were compared to one another and relationships were highlighted. The second stage was to determine themes that arose from the codes. The codes/relationships were used to identify themes and patterns across the data.

Limitations

The survey used to gather data for this project brought some limitations. Firstly, it was not specified in the survey that students were expected to pick terms from the provided list. This led to some students introducing new terminology to identify themselves that we had not accounted for. Terms such as 'Chicano' and 'Chicana', as well as specific nationalities like 'Brazilian' were not part of the study.

Another limitation that arose from the survey was the use of the accent in the term 'Latiné'. Since the survey was written by Spanish native speakers, the accent was included. After the survey was deployed, it came to our attention that the accent was not recognized in some computers and instead showed up as a glyph. For future studies, the accent will be omitted to avoid confusion.

Results

In this section, we present our findings starting with the quantitative data from the survey where we present students' familiarity with different terms, breaking it down by demographics, and we also present data on how they prefer to identify. Following we present the results of the thematic analysis to our open-ended questions to explore deeper on the rationale behind some of those responses.

Quantitative Data

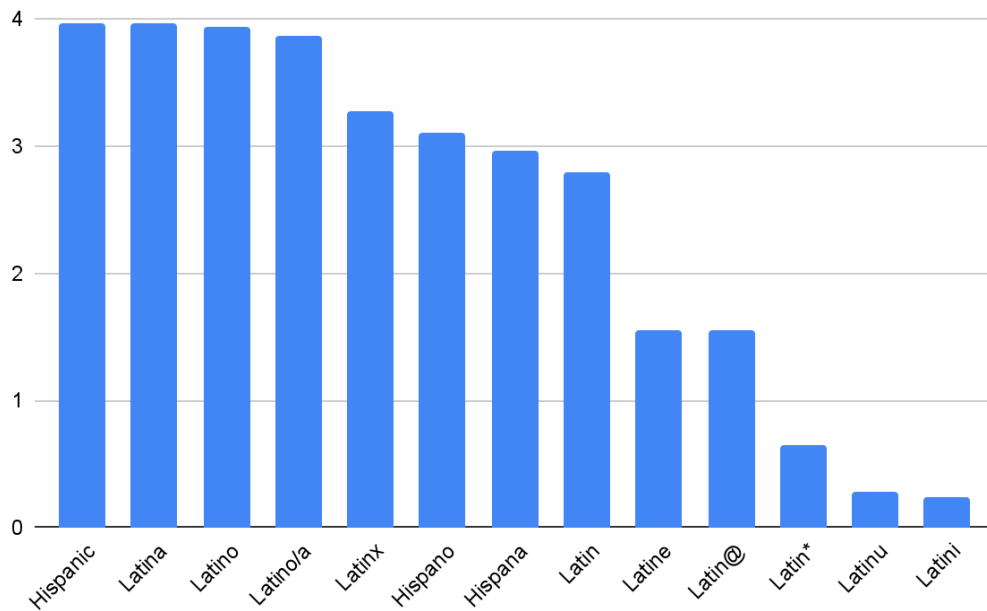


Figure 3. Familiarity with terms

As seen in figure 3, the terms that students were more familiar with were Hispanic and Latina which had a familiarity score of 3.97 out of 4 followed closely by Latino with a familiarity score of 3.93. This is consistent with the order in which terms have been adopted in the United States [3]. The gendered terms Hispano and Hispana were not as familiar to students as the gender-neutral term they are derived from: Hispanic. Moreover, the term Latinx received a familiarity score of 3.28 being the most familiar gender inclusive term after Latino/a.

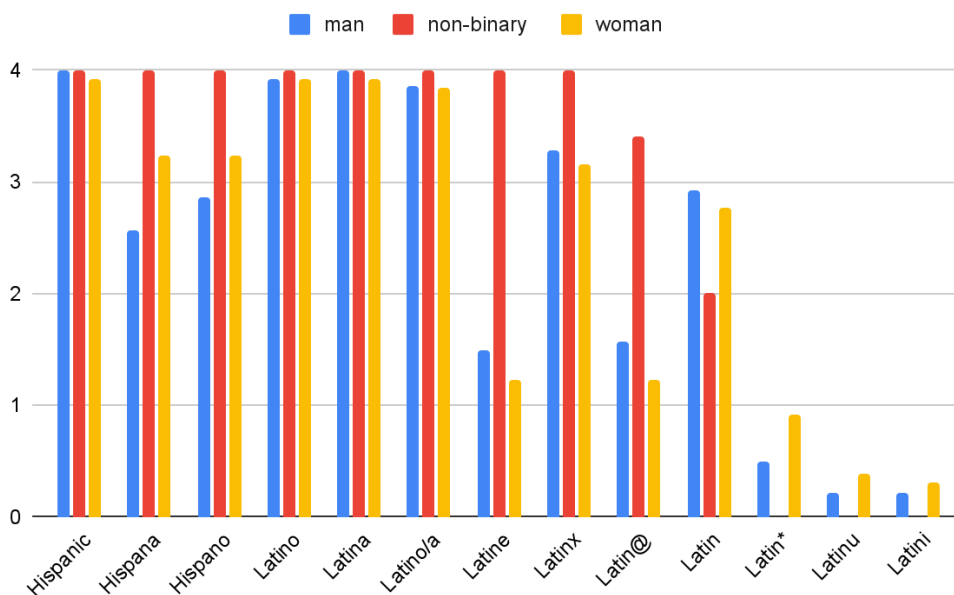


Figure 4. Familiarity with terms by gender

Figure 4 shows the difference in familiarity with the terms by participant gender. There are noticeable differences in levels of familiarity between the groups, especially between the non-binary participants and the other genders. For example, non-binary participants were considerably more familiar with gender-inclusive terms like Latine, Latinx, and Latin@. Non-binary participants were also more familiar with some of the gendered terms like Hispana and Hispano. On average, non-binary participants scored 2.88 out of 4 in terms of familiarity while men-identifying participants scored 2.42 and women-identifying participants scored 2.47.

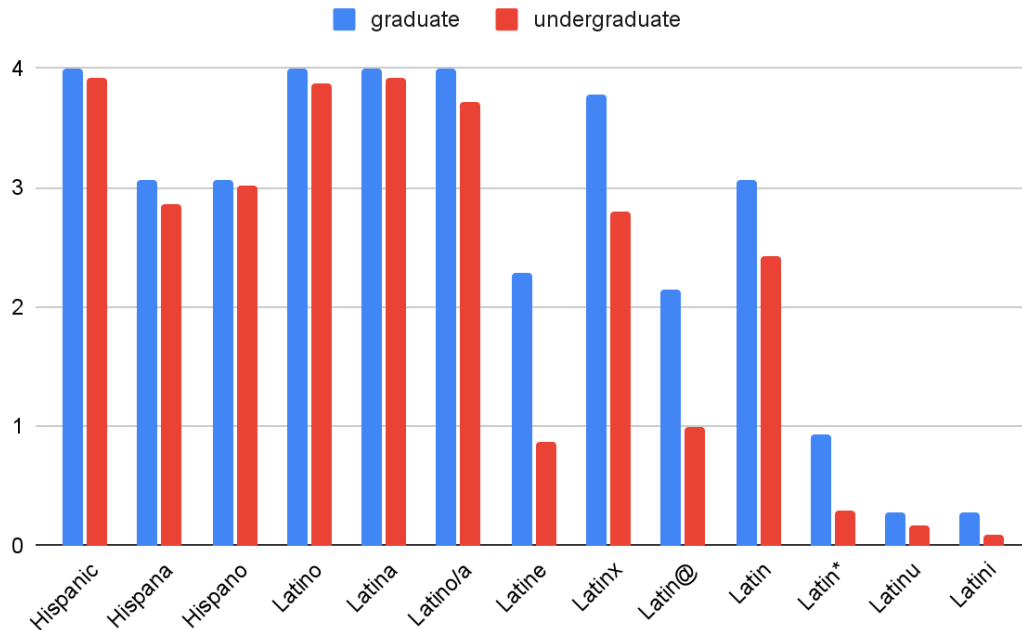


Figure 5. Familiarity with terms based on student academic standing

In terms of familiarity difference between graduate students and undergraduate students, figure 5 shows that although the sample size (29) is too small to calculate significance, there is a noticeable difference between the two groups. While graduate students are more familiar with most of the terms, there is little difference in the levels of familiarity for the most common terms like Hispanic and Latino. The biggest differences in familiarity are seen in the terms Latine with a difference of 1.42, Latinx with a difference of 0.99, and Latin@ with a difference of 1.14. There is also a difference in average familiarity scores with graduate students scoring an average of 2.69 out of 4 points while undergraduate students scored 2.23 points on average.

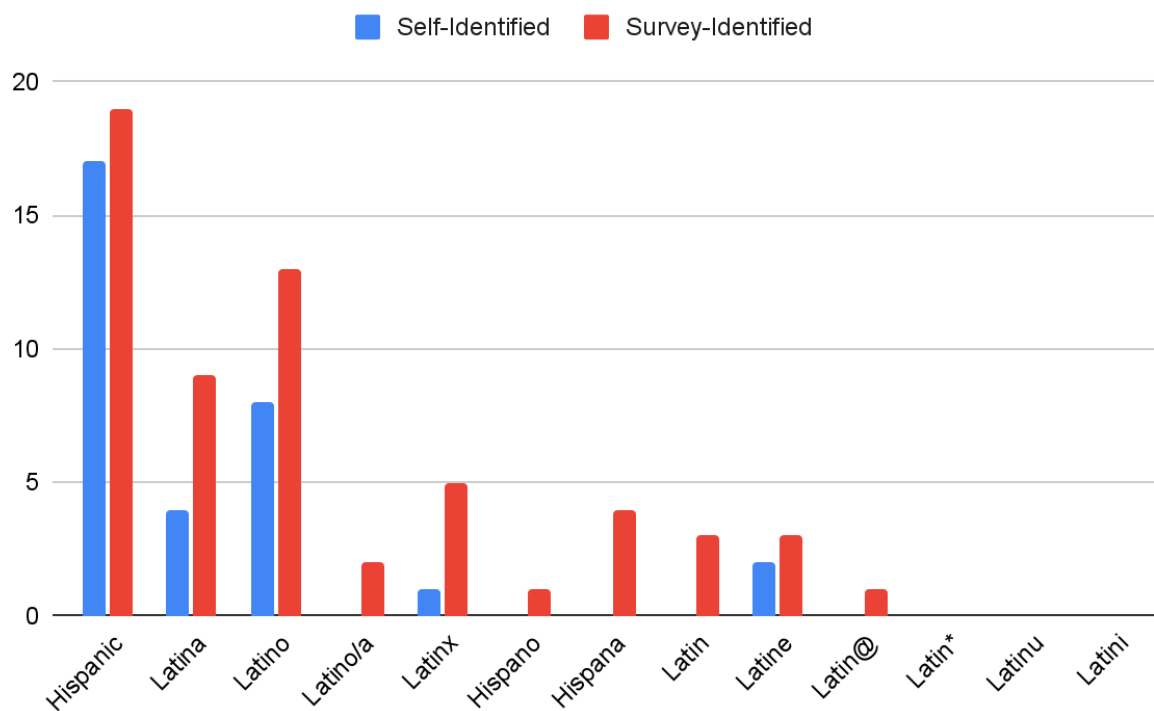


Figure 6. Students identification

The students were asked to share their own identity and identification twice. In the first instance, students were asked to disclose their identity in terms of race and ethnicity. In the second instance, students were asked to choose the terms of interest with which they identified. Figure 6 shows the number of students that identified with each of the terms presented in the survey during both instances. Similarly to results presented in figure 3, the term that most students identify with is Hispanic, followed by Latino and Latina. During the self-identification portion of the survey, the majority of the students did not identify with any of the gender-inclusive terms. Once students were presented with options, more participants identified with gender-inclusive terms, especially with the term Latinx.

Qualitative Data

Code identification on identity terms

As part of the first open-ended question, students provided explanations of their identity terms. A common approach to answering this question was explaining their identities and referring back to the chosen concept. From there, the code *Self* was present when students used their gender to justify the selection of terms. For example, one student said “I’m a Hispanic by ethnicity, a male biologically, and a man by [identity] thus I’m a Latino.” Similarly to self, the code *National Context* was introduced when students mentioned a specific country or nation in describing their identity terms. For example, when talking about the different gender-neutral terms, another student said “I was born in Peru, not the states. So the culture back home uses the @ at the end to differentiate between male and female”.

Besides using their own gender identities and nationality to describe their chosen terms, some students showed two competing views on why certain terms represent them. On one hand, students selected terms based on *Familiarity*. These students explained their chosen terms based on how they have seen society describe the community. For example, one student elaborated on their identity by saying: “I just grew up using those words for my identity, since my family uses them.” On the other hand, there were students that chose their identity terms after *Learning* more about them. An example of this code is a student who changed their identifying term recently. They say: “I used to use Hispanic more frequently until I learned more about the differences between the two” and as such, they identify more often with the term Latina.

Finally, a common code that was present throughout the answers was a feeling of *Inclusion*. In this code, students noted their or others’ need for a term that is more inclusive of gender. One student explains that, although they identify as Latino, when speaking about the broader community they will use Latinx because they think that the term is more inclusive.

Code identification on perceptions of the word Latinx

When asked specifically about the term ‘Latinx’, students had mixed opinions. The three overarching groups are acceptance, indifference with respect, and resistance. Regardless of their personal opinion on the term, the majority of participants mentioned that Latinx is used as an inclusive term. These instances were coded as *Inclusion*. It is important to note that there was no consensus on what the term Latinx encompasses. For example, some students considered it a way to “describe people from Latin America” while some others used it specifically to describe gender non-conforming people with Latin American origins. Within the accepting students, a comment that arose several times was that the term was “good for English,” but that other identifying terms worked better with the Spanish language. These instances were grouped under the code *Spanish/English*.

The code *Indifference with Respect* was used when participants had neutral opinions of the term but were willing to use it based on others’ preferences. For example, one student said “I personally do not mind it but don’t use it much, simply because I grew up using other terms. I honor the use of the word for those who prefer it.” There were two different types of students in the resistance group. The first type considered the term *Unnecessary* and rejected the idea of gender-neutral terms. The second type considered the term to be *Lacking* compared to other gender-neutral terms. For example, one student expressed that while Latinx is meant to be an inclusive term it “is often used in a way that homogenizes groups of people with vastly different lived experiences.”

Finally, the code *Political* arose from the comments that students made where they associated the term with political discourse. On one end of the political spectrum, one student described it as “PC [Politically Correct] propaganda” while on the other end, another student said the term has “been manufactured into a “controversy” by American conservative media.”

Theme identification

Based on the codes found in the qualitative analysis, two main themes arose. The first one focused on the impact of language and culture on the students' identities and the second one focused on the inclusivity aspect of gender-neutral language and identities.

Language and Culture

Student answers for both questions showed a connection between identity terms and language. This theme presented itself in two different ways. First, codes like self and familiarity showed that students are likely to use the identity terms that the community around them uses. This was more salient with the use of the term Hispanic and its gendered derivatives since it is commonly used to describe people who speak Spanish or have Spanish ancestry. When describing their chosen identity terms, one participant said: "I'm Hispanic because my heritage is from a Spanish-speaking country." In addition, some students acknowledged that history and culture play a role in their perceptions of certain terms. For example, a participant said that they "understand why many people have a preference of Latino over Hispanic due to historical background" and thus they most commonly identify as Latina instead of Hispanic.

The second way in which this theme appeared was within the codes *national context* and *spanish/english*. Many participants showed a difference between term choices depending on what language they were speaking. This was particularly prominent among the non-binary participants, one of which said: "I use Latine when speaking in Spanish because I believe its the gender-neutral version of Latino, Latina. [...] I use Latinx when speaking in English because it marks that you are purposely being gender inclusive." Similarly to language, the national background of some participants played a part in their identity. Some participants, especially international students, were more used to the terms that originated in Latin American countries than the ones that originated within the United States. For example, when talking about the term Latinx, one student said: "United States [differentiation] to represent Latinos and Latinas since they don't use genders. Not used in Latin America in my case." As such, there was a large group of participants that felt like some terms such as Latinx are an imposition of US culture on Latin American communities. "North America/the US has imposed their culture enough; we are capable of our own evolution and progress" is just one of many quotes that showcase this resistance. This was further emphasized by the resistance of Latin American culture to change to the extent that one student pointed out that "[w]e Latinos were never the best at changing our ways."

(Non)Gender Inclusion and Respect

Either referring to their own or someone else's, the majority of students connected identity terms with gender. This theme was most prominent when discussing the transition from a gender-binary to gender nonconformity. One of the participants explains that they expect the language used to describe the community to change with the times since "non-binary is more openly known of/accepted." Across the answers and codes from both questions, there was a sense of need for inclusion and respect towards others and their chosen identities. Even though many students showed indifference towards adopting gender-inclusive terms for themselves, they were open to using them to refer to others.

Conclusion and Future Work

The qualitative results showed that one of the main influences in the students' identities is familiarity. This was further supported by the results from the survey that was administered. The term that students were the most familiar with and that they identified with the most was Hispanic. As shown by the literature, the term Hispanic was introduced to the U.S. Census in 1980 and the government ran advertisements through several media avenues to familiarize the community with the term and its meaning [14]. As such, it is not surprising that students are most familiar with this term compared to the newer alternatives. During the self-identification portion of the survey, the only terms that students identified with were Hispanic, Latina, Latino, Latinx and Latine. Once students were presented with options, the identification with other terms, especially gender-inclusive terms increased.

Similar to the results shown in the literature review, we found that each term had its issues [5], [12], [14] and thus not one term could be used to identify every participant. For example, likewise to the results in [3], we found that the term Latinx does not have fixed meaning and that some participants use it as a gender-inclusive alternative to Latino for gender-nonconforming people while some participants use it as a genderless variant that encompasses all genders. This affects the adoption of the term since some definitions are more widely accepted than others.

Finally, similarly to [14], we found that these students are critical of the identity terms based on their origin and their connection with Latin American culture and languages. For example, we saw criticism surrounding the word Hispanic for its origin as an attempt to homogenize people of Latin American descent in the United States. Similarly, there was some pushback on the term Latinx for its detachment from the Spanish language. There were also arguments in support of terms that have originated in Latin American countries such as Latine in comparison to words that have originated in the context of the U.S.

This study explored how engineering students -who identify as Latinx/a/o/é at a large research university engage with the term Latinx and other identity terms. Based on the results, we identified different avenues for future research. We hope to expand our participant pool and to explore student perceptions further through interviews. Since the researchers are part of the community being represented, we hope to use culturally relevant interview procedures such as *Pláticas* [21] in order to build trust or rapport with the participants. This includes leveraging the fact that interviews can be conducted in Spanish or English depending on the preference of the interviewee. We also believe that this discussion should be expanded to include students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions as well as students in Latin American countries since one of the findings of this research was that the national context of the participants has great influence on their identity. Finally, we hope that this research will inform the general academic community that the Latinx/a/o/é community is not a monolith and thus the discussion around identity terms should be continued.

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