Population in the United States: Stereotypes and Social Characteristics

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May 24, 2018

Abstract

Stereotypes and misconceptions about the Hispanic population have increased and become a social issue in the United States. One important way to dispel these stereotypes is to be aware of these assumptions and compare them with the reality. Using news, surveys, articles and social statics, the goal of this paper is to enable the Hispanic people to recognize their importance and raise awareness about Latinx stereotypes in the United States population.

Hispanic Population in The United States: Stereotypes and Social Characteristics

The United States is a country that has an enormous diversity of races and cultures. We can find people from all around the world. It is interesting to know how our ways of thinking, acting or living are different. Unfortunately, there are frequently misconceptions about races and cultures, especially about minorities. Hispanic culture is the largest minority is the United States **(Us Census Bureau, 2016)**. This makes *Latinxs* one of the cultures about which we have the biggest number of stereotypes. Wrong perceptions against the Hispanic population make them feel alienation and rejection. Stereotypes even affect the Latinx social development in the United States (U.S.), and build *wall-perceptions* among the Hispanic population and other races.

Overview of Paper

Using news, surveys, and social statistics, in this paper I will discuss some of the most common stereotypes and wrong conceptions that the U.S. community has against Latinx population. The purpose of this paper is raising awareness in the U.S. community. Also, this paper contrasts the most common stereotypes about the Hispanic population with the current reality.

Latinx: It refers to the people with Hispanic cultural ties, without consider their gender.

Wall- perceptions: Erroneous ideas that society has develop against certain cultures.

Characteristics of the Hispanic Population

Percentage of Population

The Latinx population has some interesting social characteristics that make them an important race to consider when we are talking about the U.S. development. When we discuss about Latinx population, many people perceive them like a minority. However, after white people, Hispanics are the race with higher number in the U.S. In 2015, Hispanics at 56.5 million became 17.6% of the total population of the United States **(Us Census Bureau, 2016)**. This may not look like a big percentage, but if we compare it with the Black community at 12.3% we see that Hispanics are a bigger group. Furthermore, If we put together the Black (12.3%) and Asian population (5.3%) they are the same percentage as the Latinx one **(Flores, 2017).** If we inquire into the future of this country, statistics say that in 2050 the Hispanic community will grow up to 143.53 million, close to 36% of the total population in the US, higher than one third (**Us Census Bureau, 2016**).

Although there are some states that have a higher Hispanic population than others, Latinxs are part of all states in the US. However, given their proximity to Mexico, it is not a surprise that California and Texas are the states with the highest Latinx population in the US**.** Moreover, most Latinxs in California and Texas are from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. After these states, we have Florida mostly with the Cuban community; then, New York with Puerto Rican and Dominican populations as a majority **(Ennis, Rios Vargas, Albert, 2010)**. In California, the Hispanic population at 39% is already larger than the White population with 38.8%. This is not the only state where the Hispanic population overtook the White race. In

New Mexico, the Latinx population at 47% is higher than the White community at 39.8%. In addition, in other states like Texas and Arizona Hispanic population are the second ones with 38.2% and 30.2% respectively (**Lopez, 2014**).

Average Age of Hispanic Population

The Hispanic population is a very young race. Statistics say that the higher percentage of Latinxs are "younger than 18" with 32% of the total community. In addition, 27.6% are Millennials (between 18- 33 years). This means that almost 60% of the Hispanic population are young or young adults. If we make the same comparison with the White population, we can notice that their higher dwellers are Boomers (between 50- 68 years) at 27.1%. Moreover, "younger than 18" are just 19.1%, and Millennials just 21.2% of the total population (**Pew Research Center, 2015**). This will impact the current and future Latinx impact on the labor, political, and economical force.

The linguistic Impact

Other very important aspects to consider, is that all these first and second generation of Latinxs will be key communicators in the global economy. They are growing up being bilingual and bicultural, important skills in this country. In the United States, and especially in California, being bilingual is an ability that students and professionals need to develop to be successful. New generations of the Hispanic population will speak English and Spanish, the second most important language in some states of the US like California, Texas and Florida; and one of the most widely spoken language in the world.

Stereotypes About Hispanic Population

These most common stereotypes are usually reinforced by media like television and American movies. Latinxs characters in movies, "generally have restrictive set roles including criminals, exotic lovers/ sex objects, servants/ blue- collar workers, and unintelligent objects of ridicule" **(Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yanchi, 2017)**. All these misconceptions about Latinxs that appear in the media, combined with common social stereotypes to build incorrect perceptions around Hispanic culture. Tukachinsky et al. reveal an interesting idea in their article. This state, "Theory and empirical evidence demonstrate that exposure to the features associated with racial/ethnic groups in the media contributes to a wide variety of intergroup outcomes for White audiences, such a stereotype endorsement, intergroup attitudes and behaviors, and social polity support" **(Tukachinsky et al., 2017)**. Television is the principal media upon which the US population based their personal thoughts about Latinxs; and this brings social consequences against the Hispanic population. Adults may have enough maturity and education to separate reality and fictions, but children and young people may base their judgments on media misperceptions. Even with the high percentage of Latinxs in the community, television and media are still a large source of stereotypes about Latinxs.

Despite the importance of the Latinx population in the country, the US community still relates Hispanic people with negative words, such as "terrible", "horrible", "nasty", "evil" and "failure", more than any other race **(Biagas and Bianchi, 2016)**. Also, Hispanics are pictured as more unintelligent, lazy and impoverished than other minority groups **(Biagas and Bianchi, 2016).** Along this project, using news, social statistics and articles, I will go through some of the

most common stereotypes reinforced by media and the community in general. In this paper I will compare these stereotypes to facts and reports from reliable resources to see if they are the social reality or simple stereotypes.

Hispanic Population: Jobs Competition and their Most Common Jobs

One day, I was talking with a friend who is a white and native English speaker. I was telling her that I was getting tired of working in restaurants, and I will look for something new soon. She told me that she was tired as well of working in restaurants, but she cannot get a different job because almost all the jobs around need their employees to speak English and some Spanish. I told her that there were other alternatives than just restaurants, and she answered that because her low educational level she could not get another job. We kept talking for a while, but I did not think too much about it. While I was doing this research, I remembered that history and I thought: Is she a white native English speaker citizen in California complaining because she could not get a better job, and one of her reasons was that she could not speak Spanish? Maybe she was exaggerating, or she did not really say it seriously, but it was an interesting situation.

If we look through some common stereotypes, we can see that Latinx people are often pictured as not strongly inclined to work hard (**Menéndez, 2014**). This could be a misperception of real social data. It is true that Hispanics are the second population with the higher unemployment rate in the US, just next to the African- American population, most likely due to resource gaps and discrimination (**Bureau of labor statistics, 2017**). Although say that Latinxs

are lazy this is a mistaken stereotype. Latinx people work as many, if not more, hours than any average US citizen. Research demonstrates that Latin Americans work more hours on average than Anglo- Americans **(Menéndez, 2014**). Usually Hispanics work more hours than average because the salaries are low, in comparison with the high cost of living standards. In consequence, a large proportion of Latin Americans work long days to increase their income **(Menéndez, 2014).** I can corroborate this personally. I work in a restaurant where almost all employees are Latinxs, and the majority work two or even three jobs; sometimes without taking days off along the week. Also, if we talk about Latinx immigrant workers, they are hard workers and would work for long hours with very little pay and no benefits (**Kaba, 2008**).

Some months ago, there was a picture in social media where a group of citizens were making a protest again Mexicans and Latinx people in general. Their banners said something like "Latinos are stealing our jobs". Someone commented on the picture and said, "If a Latin immigrant person, with no connections and sometimes without documents, steals your job maybe they are not the problem". Hispanic people and Latinx immigrants are not stealing jobs, but as we saw earlier they usually work long hours, sadly with less pay and no benefits. Some American citizens may want to keep fair wages and working conditions in the country; However, the need for labor, especially cheap labor, has contributed to the US to allow not only legal immigrants to work, but also undocumented immigrants (**Kaba, 2008**). Basically, Latinx workers legal or undocumented, are cheap work. Also, most U.S. employers of any ethnic/ racial and gender backgrounds tend to prefer Hispanic immigrants for jobs because their work ethic, reliability, calm temperament, and their willingness to work for wages that most citizens

would not accept (**Kaba, 2008**). Hispanic people are not stealing jobs, they are taking less pay

on no benefit jobs that other citizens would not accept.

Thanks to stereotypes in the media, many people think that the most common jobs that

Latinx people have are gardeners, cook, maids and cleaning, and other blue- collar jobs. It is

very common to see Latinxs in movies usually pictured as gardeners or restaurant workers, and

Latinas as maids or even sex servers. Notwithstanding, if we look at the actual statistics, we can

see that the most common jobs that Latinxs has are sales. After that we have construction,

extraction, farming, fishing and foresting. Afterward, we have ground cleaning (**Pew research

center, 2015**). Additionally, Latinas are typically able to find jobs as nannies, domestics,

restaurant, and factory workers (**Gonzáles, 2017**). Media usually relates Latinxs with these

white-collar jobs, but this is just another stereotype.

English Proficiency of the Hispanic Population in the U.S.

Another common stereotype is that Hispanics usually do not speak English, even that

they are not good at learning it. To examine this, we must make a division among Latinxs who

are born in US, and Latinxs who are foreign born. This stereotype is usually related with foreign

born and immigrant Latinxs, and this is partly true because just 34.6% of them speak English

(**Suh, 2015**). This may be because most usually work in blue- collar jobs where speaking English

is not necessary, and Spanish speakers are predominant in the community. In contrast, we have

Latinxs who were born in the U.S. The percentage of Latinxs born in US that speak English is

89.7% (**Suh, 2015**). Thus, almost 9 out of 10 US born Latinxs speak English well. If we put

together foreign born and US born Latinxs, the percentage comes down to 69.0%, which means

the majority of Hispanic people in the U.S. do speak English. Therefore, the stereotype mainly

came from foreign Latinxs, and is miss applicable to all Latinxs. In any case, the general

percentage of Latinxs that speak English (including born in US and foreign born) has increased

significantly. In 2000, it was 59.3%, and in 2010 it increased to 64.8%. In 2015, it rose again to

69.0% and it is still increasing **(Suh, 2015**). The stereotype that Latinx population do not speak

English is partly accurate if we talk just about Hispanic immigrants. However, if we talk

generally about the Hispanic population the largest part of them (69%) speak English, and that

has been increasing. In addition, 89.7% of Latinxs born is U.S speak English, the vast majority.

Hispanics Immigrants and Crossing the Border

The low knowledge that the US population has about undocumented immigrants, has

built some misconceptions around the act of crossing the border. Media usually discusses about

their situations and social issues in the U.S., but the media rarely considers all that immigrants

must go through first to come to this country. Many of these immigrants are extremely brave

and determined people than overcome enormous challenges to get here. Another frequently

misunderstand reality is that immigrants and undocumented Hispanics that cross the border

are not just Mexicans. They are Salvadorians, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, among

other countries of Latin America. Additionally, it is common to think that immigrant who come

to the US are the poorest people, but this is not true for one simple reason: crossing the border

is expensive. The price of cross the border in 2017 was $7,000 dollars (Personal conversations,

2017, 2018). Simply, if it is difficult to earn this amount of money in the U.S., it is harder to do it

in any country of Latin America because the economic situation. Furthermore, it is not just

expensive, it is unsecure. All the crime and drug cartels make it harder to cross the border. In addition, strict legislation, militarization, lack of legal options and immigration law, not only increase hardship for immigrants, but decrease rates of returning immigration (**Gonzáles, 2017**). Crossing the border entails not just physical issues (such as heat stroke and dehydration, hyperthermia, hunger, rape, and injuries to name a few), it causes psychological problems as well. The dangers of crossing the border can be traumatic. Futhermore, immigrants usually have experiences of discrimination and negative relations with caregivers and strange family members (**Gonzáles, 2017**). A large percentage of Latinx immigrants come to U.S. just to work, earn some money, help their families, get a better education, and sometimes go back to their countries. But many Latinx immigrants feel alienated with the American people and lifestyle. Some people may think that they decided to come to this country, and they should already know what they will go through. Immigrants come as whole families, with children who do not decide to come here. They come with their parents because they have to and are too young to choose. Often during immigration families are separated. The separation of families has negative psychological and emotional effects. All this creates challenges to the wellbeing and educational and Laboral success of immigrants children (**Gonzáles, 2017**).

Hispanic Conduct in the Community

Another typical stereotype is saying that Hispanic immigrants are violent or even criminals. Again, with the assistance of media, movies, and television these erroneous ideas were develop. A couple of years ago, our now president during his campaign said some comments against Mexican immigrants. He said: "They are bringing drugs. They are bringing

crime. They are rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (**Reilly, 2016**). I mention this

because it is a good example of building a stereotype. When an influential person such a

presidential candidate, now president, states these gross misconceptions to a whole country, it

directly affects the way of thinking and acting of some of the U.S. society members. One

interesting point is that almost all the mass shooting in the U.S. have been committed by white

men and adolescents, not Hispanic people. Furthermore, criminal statistics show that most

crimes are committed by white not Hispanics (**Neiwerd, 2017**). However, research shows that

Mexicans, and in general Latinx immigrants, are not criminals. Hispanics are neither nonviolent

nor violent on average (**Timberlake, Jeffrey and Rhys, 2012**). Although media usually pictured

Latinx population as violent people or criminals, Hispanics are not more violent than average

U.S. citizens. This is not to say that there are not Hispanic criminals, but this is not a race issue.

Is there a race that has no criminals?

Some possible solutions to dispel these stereotypes could be educated the children

about different cultures, Hollywood and media taking responsibility for the potential

stereotypes and more accurate representing groups. Additionally, the broad sharing of real

statistics, and further research in this area. Violence, intolerance and discrimination against

Hispanic populations is not the solution to these social issues

Conclusion

Unfortunately, Latinx are the population that have more stereotypes, and thoughtlessly

a huge majority are negative stereotypes. Commonly, these stereotypes come from media like

television and movies. People take these misconceptions to the society and create a misperception of the reality. By consequence, the society establishes labels to people based on their social constructed perception. Latinxs are labeled as maids, gardeners, cooks, farmers, lazy, criminals, etc., and these are just misperceptions and exaggerated images of the social reality. The Latinx population is a race that still developing and integrating into the U.S. community. According with the integration of Hispanic community to the U.S. culture, some stereotypes will be dispelled, and others will change. Nevertheless, Latinxs are strong and hardworking culture. In the future we will see a higher number of Hispanic professionals, and they will be key communicators in the global community.

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