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THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE TERM *LATINX*

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Bios:

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The use of pan-ethnic labels to self-identify can be a fraught process for people whose ancestry is Latin American based. In fact, a Pew Research Center survey found that 50% of “Hispanic” adults preferred to identify themselves based on their family’s country of origin (e.g., Mexican, Colombian, Guatemalan), 23% preferred to use a pan-ethnic label (Latino or Hispanic), and 23% use American to describe themselves (Lopez, Krogstad, & Passel, 2020). Nonetheless, over the past 50 years, pan-ethnic labels for this population continue to evolve. The term *Latin*, which traditionally encompassed both male and female genders according to the rules of the Spanish language, has evolved within the literature and in daily conversations as *Latino*, *Latino/a*, *Latin@*, *Latinx*, and most recently as *Latin** (Salinas & Lozano, 2019; Salinas, 2020). The emerging term *Latinx* – like its predecessors, *Latino* and *Hispanic* – is often misunderstood and misused in higher-education settings, research, and practices. As people both inside and outside of the academy grapple with the meaning and use of the term *Latinx*, it is important for researchers, particularly those who identify as Latinx/a/o/*, to engage in self-reflection regarding their intersecting identities related to power, privilege, and oppression. Additionally, for those who do not identify as Latinx/*, using *Latinx/** requires an intentional understanding of the underlying complexities of the term.

Much of the extant literature on this topic centers on scholars' and activists' provided arguments in favor or against the usage of the term *Latinx* (Contreras, 2017; Engel, 2017; de Onís, 2017; Guidotti-Hernández, 2017; Logue, 2015; Milian, 2017; Torres, 2018; Trujillo-Pagán, 2018), and most recently on how university students understand and use the term *Latinx* (Salinas, 2020). As scholars of Latin American descent – one Latino and one Latina – we aim to provide a critical understanding of how our positionality and the process of reflexivity informs our understandings of the term *Latinx*. In this chapter we use the label *Latinx/a/o/** to be inclusive of all genders and languages that exist with Latin American descent people. In addition, we place the “x” first (i.e., x/a/o) to honor and center individuals who do not self-identify with the gender binary of “a” (Latina woman) or “o” (Latino man), as Latinx individuals have often been dismissed and oppressed by scholarship, law and policy, and cultural norms. And the * (asterisk) in *Latinx/a/o/** or *Latin** is used to create and promote an inclusive space for all genders.

Moreover, *Latin** is an umbrella term that encompasses 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 (Salinas, 2020).

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the history and evolution of the term *Latinx*, share our individual positionalities to analyze our understandings of the term *Latinx* as cisgender researchers, followed by final conclusions regarding the definition of the *Latinx* term and its impact within higher education environments. We argue that given the emergence and growth of this term, higher education researchers/scholar-practitioners must avoid the shallow or superficial use of “Latinx,” but rather seek to understand the underlying complexities of this the term.

Historical Overview of the Letter “X” and the Term *Latinx*

A body of literature continues to evolve on how academics and activists perceive social identity, explore the myriad complexities of the construct, and how the term *Latinx* is reproduced within higher education. The term *Latinx* has received much attention in academic spaces, yet there is little understanding or agreement on when and how the term originated. In this section a brief overview of the history of the letter “X” is presented, followed by a chronological history of the term *Latinx*.

The History of the Letter “X”

It is important to first acknowledge that the letter “X” was formed when Medieval Spanish scholars were translating the Arabic word الشياء (pronounced “*al-shayun*”), which in English means “the thing” but it can also signify the “unknown thing” or the “unknown something” (Moore, 2012). The word الشياء (the thing) appeared throughout early mathematics in the 10th century (AD 901–1000). Medieval Spanish scholars were not able to translate the word الشياء (the thing) because the Arabic letter ش (pronounced “*sh*”) cannot be rendered into Spanish, as the Spanish language does not have the sound “sh” (Moore, 2012). By conventions, the Medieval Spanish scholars borrowed the “ck” sound from the classical Greek alphabet in the form of the letter χ (chi; pronounced Kai). Medieval Spanish scholars simply replaced the Greek letter χ with the Latin letter “X.” Therefore, the letter “X” is rooted in the Arabic and Greek languages, and it is a symbol of the unknown (Milian, 2017; Moore, 2012).

Currently, using the “X” carries sizeable assumptions of being inclusive in the term *Latinx*. Yet, the “X” also connects to racism during slavery and discrimination toward non-Christians. African Slaves were not allowed to learn to read and write, therefore, the “X” was used as an identifier for African slaves during the beginning of colonial America. The “X” can be a reminder of how African ancestors were enslaved, kidnapped, raped, and chained and transported to Latin America (Pelaez Lopez, 2018). Furthermore, Christianity was introduced to African slaves in an attempt to

indoctrinate them into submissiveness. Subsequently, during the 1950s, a Black activist formerly known as Malcolm Little reclaimed the “X” when he changed his name to Malcolm X, as a way to cast off his enslaver’s last name and replace it with an “X” to represent his unknown African name (X & Haley, 1965). With this in mind, Christianity also has a relationship with the letter “X.” The “X” has been used in Christianity to represent Christ. In the New Testament, in Greek language, of the word Χριστός means Christ. The word Χριστός begins with the letter “X” or “chi.” Furthermore, the use of “X” in *Xmas* (Christmas) or other Christian church signs suggests it has become accepted as a representation of Christ.

In another perspective, the “X” has played a political role in the status of women in the United States’ within activist and academic spaces. In 1971, the term *Womxn* originated at the University of California Davis to be inclusive of non-cisgender women and women of color (Women’s Resources and Research Center, 2020). Similar to *Womxn*, the term *Womyn* was first used 1976 at the first annual Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival to reject the “man/men” in the word “woman/women” (Heinrichs, 2019). Other radical spellings of the word “woman,” including “Wimmin,” “Womin,” and “Wimmin,” have been continuously used in the feminist movement.

Similar to the use of “X” in *Womxn*, the “X” was first used in the Chicano movement by Chicana feminist Ana Castillo. Ana Castillo (2016) coined the term *Xicanisma*, and along with other Chicana feminist activists and scholars started to use the “x” at the beginning of Xicano to “change the nature of feminism while strengthening its place in any discussion of Mexican American life” (p. 260), to disrupt the hegemonic masculinity of the Chicano movement (1960s–1970s), and to make visible the cultural oppression of Mexican American women in the United States and in the Chicano movement itself. These Mexican American women, who identify as Chicana, first used the term *Xicanisma* to analyze their historical, political, economic, educational, and cultural intersections (Castillo, 2014).

Within the United States, the “x” is used in various contexts, including mathematics, sciences, government, the medical profession, and mainstream media. Some artists and activist have even adapted the X into their names. Other mainstream usages of “X” include Xbox, X-ray, SpaceX, iPhone X, Xmen, Project X, X-Files, TEDx, Generation X, among others forms (Milan, 2017). The “X” has crossed borderlands of languages and popular culture, yet it continues to embody divergent intellectual meanings, feelings, and fears of inclusion or exclusion.

The History of the Term Latinx

Within academic and activists spaces, some have embraced the “X” in the term *Latinx* to acknowledge people’s lives, gender, histories, cultures, languages, and bodies in the United States (Rodríguez, 2017). Milian (2017) provides examples of activists and news outlets who have voiced their reasons for adopting the “X” in the term *Latinx*, pointing to the “impetus for ungendering Spanish and the relationship among language, subjectivity, and inclusion” (p. 122). While there is no consistency when the term *Latinx* was first used, the examination of published literature conveys that the “X” was first used in a Puerto Rican psychological periodical to challenge the gender binaries encoded in the Spanish language (Logue, 2015).¹ Yet, other scholars have stated that it was first used at the front of *Chicano* (Xicano) as part of the civil rights movement for the empowering of Mexican origin people in the United States (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017; Milian, 2017). The first alteration at a university came in December 2014, when the Chicano Caucus student organization at Columbia University changed their group name to Chicaxx Caucus, to be a gender-neutral student organization (Armus, 2015).

In 2014, in a special issue of “Las Américas Quarterly,” Gómez-Barris and Fiol-Matta (2014) used the term *Latinx* to emphasize the possibilities of progress and its potential usage in Latin America and the United States, but did not make an argument on the usage of the term *Latinx*. In 2017, the first

special issue of “Theorizing LatinX” edited by Milian (2017), highlighted the political and cultural dissemination of the term *Latinx*. This special issue focused on the contributors’ in-depth reflections and analysis, with no consensus on the usage of term *Latinx*. In the same year, Salinas and Lozano (2019)² wrote the first article that tracked the usage of the term *Latinx* within higher education and student affairs’ academic journals, dissertations and theses, and academic conferences. They found that the term *Latinx* was used often in titles of papers and presentations and as a demographic label, but the term was not defined by a majority of scholars (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). Similar to Salinas and Lozano (2019), in Salinas, Doran, and Swingle’s (2020) analysis of how community colleges use the term *Latinx* found that this sector of higher education does not use the term at the same level than four-year universities do. Then in 2018, the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Latino Studies* stated that there are various iterations of terminology circulating – Latinx, Latino, Latina/o, Lati@, Latin, Latin American, and Hispanic – and encouraged writers to use any of the terms, to be consistent throughout their writing, and to provide a definition in a footnote for the readers that might not be familiar with the terminology used (Torres, 2018).

Salinas (2020) conducted a study of 34 self-identified Latinx/a/o undergraduate and graduate students in the United States to examine their perspectives, understandings, and usage of the term *Latinx*. Only three participants self-identified as Latina/Latinx women, 13 as Latino men, and 18 as Latina female. The findings of this study show that 21 of the participants first learned about the term Latinx via social media, and 13 of them learned in a higher-education setting.

Participants of this study define Latinx as “a term for people who do not identify along the European settler-colonial gender binary, and inclusive for all people of Latin American origin and descent,” and they often changed the “x” in Latinx to Latiné or Latinu (Salinas, 2020, p. 159). More interestingly, the findings reveal that most of the participants referred to their Latin American communities as Latinx to be “inclusive of all”; however, when referring to themselves only three participants self-identified as Latina and Latinx women. All other 31 participants (13 Latino men and 18 Latina women) stated that they were Latino or Latina but not Latinx. Latino men expressed that they did not care if others referred to them as Latinx. In contrast to Latino men, most Latina women stated that they preferred to be referred to as Latina and not Latinx, as they did not want to surrender the sociopolitical movement they have secured in the United States as Latina and women of color. In the same study, Salinas (2020) presented *Latin** – a new perspective to approach the variety of terms used to name people of Latin America descent (see Figure 21.1).

As an umbrella term encompassing the identities listed in Figure 21.1, Salinas (2020) defines *Latin** as:

an all-inclusive term that considers the fluidity of social identities. *Latin** is not a gender identity in itself, but rather creates a space that encompasses gender fluidity and identity labels that already exist, as well as those that have yet to be included in the mainstream vocabulary.

(p. 164)

*Latin** opens the conversation to consider people who do not identify with Latinx, Latino and Latina. *Latin** is not to *othering* people of Latin American descent. Rather, it gives one the power to claim a name based on how one choses to self-identify without diluting the power of the “x,” which, again, serves to center gender nonconforming folks. Last, “*Latin** is a response to the (mis) usage of the term *Latinx* as an all-encompassing proxy for Latinidad” (Salinas, 2020, p. 165). As stated earlier, *Latin** can represent Latinx, Latiné, Latinu, Latino, Latina, Latina/o, Lati@, Latin, or Latin American, or any other terms that are yet to be included in the mainstream vocabulary (Salinas, 2020).

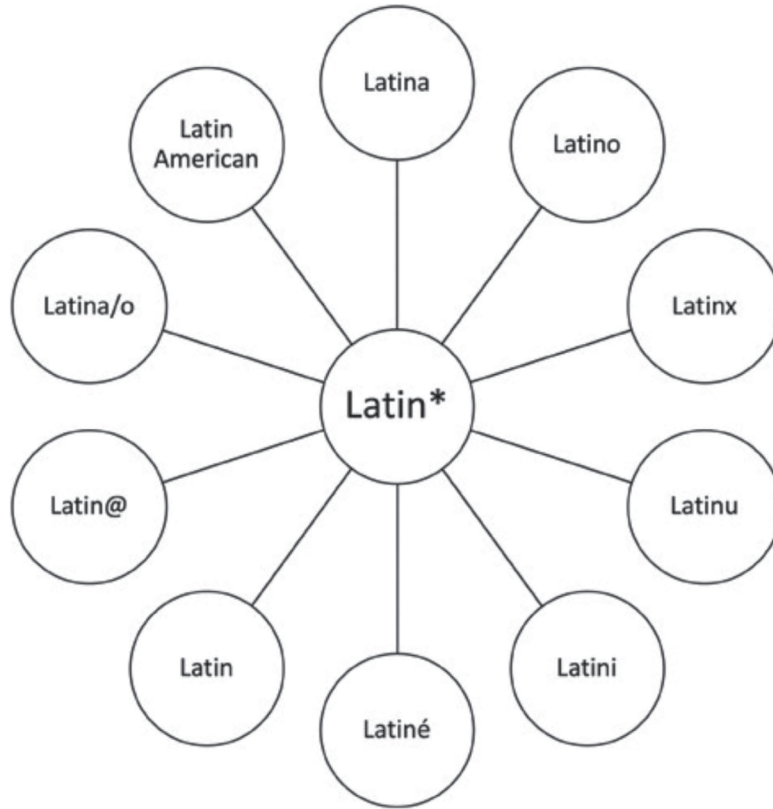


Figure 21.1 Latin* – a New Perspective on the Variety of Terms Used to Name People of Latin America Descent

An Overview of the Literature

The most common argument noted throughout the literature against the adoption of the term *Latinx* is that it has been grounded in Spanish language only. The second critique is that every time the term *Latinx* is Indigenized is it also Mexicanized. Another argument often made by users of the term *Latinx* is that it is inclusive of all. Lastly, writers have highlighted their own perspectives and recognition of the term *Latinx*, and most recently, Salinas (2020) documented how Latinx/a/o students make meaning of the alteration of the term *Latinx*.

The “x” in *Latinx* has disrupted language and culture norms and created opportunity to validate and recognize individuals who do not identify within the gender binary of man/woman. While some scholars have made the argument that the purpose of *Latinx* is to ungender the Spanish language (DeGuzmán, 2017; Milian, 2017), one must remember that people of Latin American descent speak other languages beyond English and Spanish (Salinas, 2020). Salinas (2020) made the argument that the term has not been analyzed in Portuguese (Brazil), French (French Guiana), Dutch (Suriname), and other Indigenous languages spoken in Latin American countries. Given that the term has only been analyzed in relationship to English and Spanish languages (Engel, 2017; Guidotti-Hernández, 2017; Trujillo-Pagán, 2018), current literature fails to examine how the term *Latinx* and the concept of gender are perceived, understood, and communicated in various languages. For example, in his scholarship, Salinas (2020) made the argument that while the “X” in *Latinx* is “is geographically inclusive of these countries [Latin America], it is not necessarily phonetically inclusive.” The “x” can be pronounced in various ways and is the most challenging

sound in Portuguese (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mestieri, 2016). Yet, published scholarship lacks an examination of how the term *Latinx* works (phonetically and conceptually) in Portuguese, French, Dutch, Creole, and Indigenous languages – all languages spoken in specific Latin American countries/regions.

Furthermore, Salinas (2020) noted that scholarship around the term *Latinx* makes the argument that the term *Latinx* is inclusive of all Latin American descent people. For example, some scholars made the argument that *Latinx* was inclusive of all LGBTQ Latin American people (Contreras, 2017), and of all transgender and queer folk (de Onís, 2017). Other scholars have used the following descriptors for *Latinx*: gender neutralize (Milian, 2017), gender nonspecific (Logue, 2015), gender-free (Finkel, 2017), gender neutrality and gender inclusive (de Onís, 2017), gender nonconforming (Salinas & Lozano, 2019), and genderqueer (Blackwell, Lopez, & Urrieta, 2017). While there are varying meanings of the term *Latinx* in relation to gender and sexuality, and scholars aimed to be inclusive of all Latin American people, the term has also attempted to “neutralize gender as a form of inclusion and could result in ignoring oppression around gender identity and sexuality” (Contreras, 2017, p. 185). To expand on how *Latinx* could potentially oppress gender, Salinas (2020) poses the question “How is *Latinx* (mis)gendering people?” For instance, individuals who have transitioned from a Latino man to a Latina woman (or vice versa) may feel strongly about using one of the binary terms (Latina/Latino) to self-identify their gender. Thus, we as scholars, teachers, practitioners, and members of institutions of higher education cannot make assumptions about what the term means to others or whether an individual wants to be referred to as *Latinx*.

Many individuals and institutions have adapted the term *Latinx* to be inclusive and raise awareness of gender and sexual orientation diversity within people of Latin American descent. The term *Latinx* has been perceived as a symbol of progress and transformative action that continues to challenge and reject the gender binary of “Latino and Latina” that exists in the Spanish language (Milian, 2017, p. 123). Viego (2017) points to the inherent paradox of the term *Latinx*, arguing that it “creates space for every subject – we should understand it as the impossibility of doing so, even in the very attempt to do so” (p. 154).

Guidotti-Hernández (2017) noted that the “X” marks the Indigenous mythical homeland of Aztlán in the Southwest United States, including “claims to land during the Mexican period, even though those lands were occupied by native peoples before the Spanish arrived and established the colonial empire that would eventually produce the Mexican nation-state” (p. 142). Rossini (2018) asserted that using the term *Latinx* can be perceived as providing visibility to Indigenous communities of people. For example, Engel (2017) argued that the term *Latinx* is fundamentally connected to Nahuatl language (mostly spoken by Nahua peoples who live in central Mexico), and Salinas and Lozano (2019) maintained that it is rooted in the Zapotec languages (mostly spoken by Zapotec peoples who live in southwestern-central Mexico).

Various arguments have been made that the term is grounded in Indigenous languages, however Salinas’ (2020) critique of this connection between the term *Latinx* and Indigenous languages is that the term has been Mexicanized within Indigenous communities and languages.

Given that there are over 37 language families and 448 languages, of which over 70 are unclassified, spoken in countries across Latin America (Santos, 2017; Thompson, 2013) and how scholars have associated the term *Latinx* to Indigenous communities and languages, there is not enough evidence to explain how the term *Latinx* is related to other Indigenous communities outside of Mexico (Salinas, 2020). For example, the Quechua language – spoken primarily in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, and Columbia – and Garifuna – spoken primarily in Belize, Guatemala, and Nicaragua – does not have the “x” in their alphabet. Therefore, Salinas (2020) suggests that it is important to consider how the term *Latinx* might be unpronounceable for some people of Latin American descent as the “x” does not exist in Quechua, Garifuna, and other Indigenous languages. Throughout the analysis of the literature there is inconsistency on how and to whom is the term inclusive of. Usage of the

term *Latinx* in scholarship seeks to be inclusive of all, yet it is important to acknowledge that the term *Latinx* will also exclude people. For example, from the language perspective, both terms – Hispanic and *Latinx* – dismiss people from Latin American countries including Belize, Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname, because they speak a language other than Spanish or speak an Indigenous language.

Positionalities on the Term *Latinx*

As cisgender researchers who are engaged in the process of examining and recontextualizing an emerging identity label, it is important for us to share our own positionalities and reflexivity on the term *Latinx*. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) explains positionality and reflexivity as:

a way of ensuring rigor . . . involves how critical reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research process – what sorts of factors influence the research’s construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up the research.

(p. 275)

Positionality is a form of sharing personal narratives as they relate to interactions between our social identities, personal bias, beliefs, and values (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Reflexivity is necessary for researchers to reflect “critically on the human as instrument” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 45). Through our positionality and reflexivity, we explain how we developed our understanding and awareness of the term *Latinx*. Furthermore, we demonstrate to the readers “how [we] situate [ourselves] historically and geographically, as well as [our] personal investment in the research” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 46). We share our positionalities to recount the experiences related to social identities, power, privilege, and oppression, and how, through our social identities and roles as researchers, we make meaning of the term *Latinx*. We begin with how we, as colleagues and scholars, came to focus our research on this nascent term.

During the 2016 NASPA Conference, we met to discuss our current research projects and share ideas for possible future collaborations. During our conversation, we discussed a recent phenomenon we both noticed: the use of the term *Latinx*. As stated throughout this chapter, the term *Latinx* is meant to serve as a gender-inclusive alternative to the commonly used binary labels of Latino, Latina/o, and Latin@. As we delved into the complexities of this new way of self-identifying and what it means for a pan-ethnic group to which we belong and to which we have dedicated our individual research agendas, we agreed that this term needed to be explored further.

As researchers, we became aware of the term *Latinx* around the same time, yet our initial reactions to the label were different due to our divergent backgrounds and experiences. Thus, it is essential to share our own individual positionalities and reflexivity on the term and how they shaped our approach to this study (Guillemin & Gillam; 2004; Finlay, 2002). We use positionalities in this chapter as a form of restorative and healing practice for how we have been institutionalized, oppressed, and colonized through the usage of ethnic labels/terms. In this section, we provide our individual reflections regarding how we encountered and came to understand the term *Latinx*.

Contextualizing our positionalities within the larger discourse on what *Latinx* is, who *Latinx* is intended to define, and how we come to use *Latinx* requires a geographical analysis of our social positions. In locating our own understanding of the term, we situate and are influenced by the locality of the Midwest. This is an important distinction that must be made when we engage in the politics of naming one’s identity. A long history of naming exists in the *Latinx/a/o* community with other terms that have been used to classify our community (e.g., Hispanic, Latino/a, Spanish, Chicanx/a/o, Tejano/a). Specifically, we have come to understand how the history of people of

Latin American descent informs our regional comprehension of the evolution of the term *Latinx*. This, in turn, provides one of many possibilities in the way Latinx manifests within our own individual lives simultaneous to the collective community.

Furthermore, when aiming to further understand the term *Latinx*, and as it continues to gain popularity within scholarship and activists spaces and the mainstream media, there are concerns that have not been explored with regards to how the term continues to evolve and intersects with sexuality, gender, language, race, ethnicity, culture, geography, and phenotype (Salinas, 2020).

Bringing in the politics of location as a site of analysis regarding how we understand the term *Latinx*, coupled with our positionalities, allows us to interrogate how we define ourselves politically (Mohanty, 2003). As we examine the term *Latinx*, we also place importance on historicizing the Latinx/a/o community, with respect to the geography of location of individuals, before applying a collective understanding of how we come to define the term *Latinx* in community. Throughout our positionalities in relation to the term *Latinx*, we have a political relation to the geography and history of the Midwest people of Latin American descent. The Midwest is a forgotten space that encompasses a unique history of people of Latin American descent outside of the extensive narratives that live on the coasts of the U.S. and the southern U.S. border. Therefore, throughout our positionalities on the term *Latinx*, we interweave our relationship to this specific geographical region while acknowledging how we have navigated new regional contexts throughout the country, personally and professionally. Utilizing this method of analysis gives context to the multiplicity of understanding that has come to fruition as the term *Latinx* becomes more nuanced in its utilization of naming individuals and communities.

Cristobal Salinas, Jr.

The first time I saw the term *Latinx* was via social media when one of my student affairs colleagues and friends was promoting the *Latinx* Leadership Retreat at Iowa State University (ISU), formerly called the Latina/o Leadership Retreat. It is important to note that Adele, was a founding member and staff advisor for the Latina/o Leadership Retreat at ISU. At the time of the development of this retreat, we both (Adele and I) were working as full-time employees in the Division of Student Affairs at ISU, where we were also doctoral students. Adele invited me to help her facilitate the *compadres* coffee hour (a male-only, round-circle, where we discussed challenges that Latino male students faced at the university). Adele facilitated the coinciding female-only circle, the *comadres* coffee hour. At the time, I remember Adele and I engaging in conversations with students about how problematic it was to have male-only and female-only round-circles for students. We understood that this was not inclusive to those students that did not identify with either sex or gender. Students who helped plan this retreat also were invited to participate in the conversation and decision making regarding the *comadres* and *compadres* coffee hours. At the time, it was decided to keep the event as a gender binary in name (*comadres/compadres*), with an understanding that not all students identified with either the man or woman gender, and that students participating in the leadership retreat would have the opportunity to choose either of the coffee hours, it was not restricted to gender appearance.

The retreat became an annual event that continued after I finished my doctoral program and left ISU. When I first saw the change of the Latinx Leadership Retreat, I questioned why they changed the name, and wondered whether students were involved in the decision making. I contacted another of my former colleagues from ISU to ask about the decision to change the name of the retreat from Latina/o to Latinx. I remember being upset about the word change during that conversation, but acknowledge that the reason was due to my lack of understanding of the term *Latinx*. Also, during the conversation I was told that the decision was “student driven.”

As time passed, I continued to follow the usage of the term *Latinx* within the U.S. and Mexico. Over the past years, I have heard multiple opinions, feelings, and beliefs towards the term *Latinx*.

I have engaged with family and friends that live in Mexico, inquiring whether they know about the term *Latinx*, and, if so, how do they use it. All of them have expressed to me that they were not familiar with the term. While in the U.S. there have been various standpoints with regards the term *Latinx*, it was clear that the term had been mostly used via social media and online news and blogs. As a professor, I was looking for scholarship, or statements from higher education postsecondary institutions, an association/conference, or organization that would have made a statement with regards to the definition of the term *Latinx* and its implications for language, identity, and culture.

Over the past two years of research I came to understand the importance of the usage of the term *Latinx*. Reading and engaging in critical conversation with colleagues and friends helped me understand the significance of the term *Latinx*. Through these conversations we challenged and confronted our fears and challenged our stereotypes of other social identities rather than our own. In my own position, the term *Latinx* is a word that begins to recognize individuals who do not identify with a gender, either man or woman. After the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016 – while this was a personal attack and painful – I gained a better understanding of the main purpose of the term *Latinx*. The term *Latinx* is inclusive for Latin American descent people who do not identify with a gender – either man or woman. In this sense, *Latinx* was the best word that could describe some of the Pulse nightclub shooting victims, as some of them were not out to their families and friends, we might never know how they self-identified. In lieu of the fact that culture, society, language, law and policy, have oppressed *Latinx* people, I do not want to uncenter the term from the gender nonconforming population who created it and recenter it on cisgender communities.

Adele Lozano

I first heard the term *Latinx* early in 2015 as I was working on a book focusing on Latina/o college student leadership. I began to see the term being used in social media, although at the time it was not widely used. I understood the intent behind the “x” and agreed that the Spanish language, which is gendered in a binary way, makes using Latina/o or Latin@ problematic because it ignores anyone that does not subscribe to the gender binary of man and woman. At the same time, I was not sure this nascent term would catch on and was not even sure how to pronounce it. As I finalized my book manuscript and prepared to send it to the publisher, I considered whether to change the title from *Latina/o College Student Leadership* to *Latinx College Student Leadership* (Lozano, 2015). The decision to use Latina/o was based on the fact that *Latinx* was still a relatively new term that was not as widely recognized in higher-education scholarly literature as Latina/o, which might impact the ability of the public to locate my book using an online search, particularly if the term *Latinx* did not catch on. I did not make this decision lightly, knowing that how we self-identify is deeply personal, complex, and political. My book was an edited volume with 12 chapter authors, of whom only one used the term *Latinx* in his chapter title and throughout his chapter. By the time my book was published in December 2015, the term *Latinx* was becoming more widely used on social media and within professional organizations, although still not as much within higher-education literature.

Nevertheless, I felt regretful that I did not use *Latinx* in the title to avoid the gender binary. At the same time, had I used *Latinx* in the title instead of “Latina/o,” I would have been using a term that, at the time, I did not fully understand.

Around the same time that I was working on my book, I learned that a student organization I had worked closely with at my previous institution, Iowa State University, had changed the name of their leadership retreat from the Latina/o Leadership Retreat to the Latinx Leadership Retreat. When I learned of the name change, my immediate reaction was one of emphatic agreement: *Of course, they changed the name – good for them!* The students involved in the name change were young (18–22 years old) and most likely very connected to social media, so it made sense that they would

immediately embrace a new term meant to be inclusive of students with nonconforming gender identities. However, like Cristóbal, I wondered how much time they committed to gathering various perspectives on this change and critically examining the impact. Those of us for whom Spanish is not our first language might not feel an emotional impact when it comes to changing or ignoring a formal Spanish language grammar rule. Likewise, Spanish speakers who are not part of the higher education system or have not been introduced to the concept of gender nonconforming identities may not relate to the term *Latinx*.

I am a third-generation Iowan raised by bilingual parents who spoke English-only in the home. My view of the term *Latinx* is inextricably tied to my identity as a Chicana and to my cultural background. As the child of parents who were children of Mexican immigrants, I was raised to assimilate into White Iowa culture. My grandparents conversed mainly in Spanish, but my parents were fully bilingual. Yet, they raised my eight siblings and me to speak only English. Thus, in the span of one generation, our mother tongue was lost. My parents, in giving their children what they thought would be a key to success, inadvertently left us linguistically deprived. Eventually, I came to understand, appreciate, and embrace my Mexican cultural heritage. I recognized how white supremacy, power, and privilege impacted my parents as they struggled to raise nine children in a small Iowa town during the 1950s through the 1970s. Living and working in other states made me realize that my Iowa upbringing shapes my view of the world and is an essential part of my culture along with my Mexican heritage. I also have accepted the fact that, as a person whose first language is English, and background is grounded in Iowa culture, my cultural connection is often more closely tied to other English-speaking people – including *Latinx/a/os*. Language, whether spoken or signed, is an essential way of sharing ourselves with others. This is particularly true when it comes to expressing emotions (love, hate, sorrow, etc.). And yet due to my knowledge of the historic and systemic oppression of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in this country, along with pride of my ethnic roots and the struggles of my ancestors, I am fiercely *Latina*, despite my lack of Spanish fluency.

I share this information to stress the fact that for me, changing *Latina/o* to *Latinx/a/o* does not create any linguistic cognitive dissonance because I am not cognitively or emotionally connected to the Spanish language in the same way a person whose first language is Spanish would be. In other words, my identity as a Chicana/Latina is not tied to my knowledge of proper Spanish. At the same time, my understanding of privilege (including my own) makes it difficult to ignore the problematic nature of the binary term *Latina/o* and the importance of using the gender inclusive, albeit somewhat phonetically awkward, term *Latinx*.

As a cisgender woman, I also use the term *Latina* when identifying within the *Latinx/a/o* community. I do not want to lose my *Latina-ness* – my connection to other Latina women – particularly considering the historical and cultural marginalization and oppression we, as Latinas, have experienced under white supremacy, toxic masculinity, and Latino patriarchy. I do not feel compelled to choose between the terms *Latinx* and *Latina*. I understand myself to fall within the *Latinx* label when it is being used as a “gender inclusive” pan-ethnic label. At the same time, I self-identify as *Latina* for the reasons just stated, and I recognize the privileges that come with identifying as a cis-woman, as well as the transphobia that exists within my own ethnic group. I acknowledge the responsibility that comes with using each of these terms, particularly the need to understand the “x” in *Latinx* as more than just a passing fad or a bandwagon, but rather, a resistance to marginality and a constant reminder of the individual’s inherent right to human dignity.

Discussion and Implications

We do not have to agree on the meaning and usage of the term *Latinx*. However, we must recognize that people live in the borderlands of gender, between the man and woman gender binary, and other identities that intersect. *Latinx* has crossed borderlands between English and Spanish languages in

ways that are not always accessible in conventional translations. The “X” in Latinx has been used as a way to reclaim history of racial and ethnic resistance (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). Yet, other people have reclaimed Latiné, Latinu, and Latini to resist the term *Latinx*. While the term *Latinx* interlocks with race, gender, and language, there is a need for more research that aims to examine how race, gender, and language influence other identities (i.e., religion, social class, in different cultural, familial, institutional, and society contexts). Terms and labels are important to people and are connected to the politics of identity, and other emotional attachments. While terms and labels for people are not perfect, they matter and provide political statements.

Furthermore, the “X” has provided gender neutral options to people with gender fluid identities and it has started to gain attraction from states across the U.S. As of June 2020, there are 19 states along with the District of Columbia in the United States that allow gender change options for citizens’ driver’s licenses and identification cards. The gender change options typically include the option of “Male,” “Female,” or “X” for gender nonconforming or gender neutral.

Yet, each state has its own processes or requirements to complete a gender change. For example, Indiana, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, and Ohio require physician clearance for a gender change. However, it is important to note that both New York and Ohio do not allow citizens to select “X” as their gender, they can only change to male or female. Utah offers a “gender-neutral option”; however, it must be court approved. In addition, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia, offer a “gender change” with no additional documentation required. And, Hawaii offered a gender-neutral option on July 1, 2020, while Illinois will offer the option in 2024 (Witich, 2019).

In this chapter we have provided an overview of how the “X” has a significant impact on the history of language and race-gendered identity and continues to play role in the politics of bilingualism between the Spanish and English-speaking communities. Either one tries to conform to the pre-determine structure or ones breaks away and introduces news structures of language that recognize and represent forms of gender identity. For example, Latino(s) can be understood as gender neutral in English (both singular and plural; i.e., Latino and Latinos) and Spanish (plural only; i.e., Latinos) Yet, people have introduced new structures that challenge language and culture, and recognize and represent gender identity (i.e., Latin@, Latina/o, Latinx, Latiné, Latinu, Latini, and Latin*). Furthermore, the “X” has evolved, and it has various epistemologies, to represent how it was used, the meaning it has in the present, and the endless possibilities it will have in the future.

Reconstructing language in academe and in policy can be a pedagogy of empowerment for marginalized communities while at the same time continue to enact oppressive structures that may not always be community centered. Therefore, in Table 21.1 we present a list of terms that have been used to identify individuals of Latin American or Caribbean heritage living in the United States. Furthermore, the terms within Latin* serve as social markers of identity for many individuals who are of Latin American descent. The use of these terms represent gender identity within Latin* and it can be a form of political resistance to the gender binary of linguistic determinism and rooted in how language is used. Yet, one cannot ignore how one selects language to use to identify within various spaces and how people are identified by others. Last, Latin(-) suffix results as a U.S.-based set of identifiers, which required the particular set of sociopolitical context, relationship, and specification of gender to emerge. The term *Latino* and sequentially all iterations (a/e/*) are and will become more accepted internationally due to U.S. imperialism and neoliberal driven globalization.

A critical aspect of understanding the extent to which Latinx is used as a term to define a community requires an introspective analysis of oneself. As described earlier in our positionalities, our relation to the term *Latinx* differs due to our social position of identities with respect to gender, sexuality, transnational experience, language, in addition to our professional trajectories. Individuals must take into account how they are positioned within the conversation as the term *Latinx* continues

Table 21.1 Terms Used to Identify Individuals of Latin American or Caribbean Heritage in the United States

Term	Description
Latino	The term <i>Latino</i> 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 <i>Latino</i> 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 <i>Latino(s)</i> is used to refer to only male(s), and Latinos is use as gender neutral and plural.
Latina	In Spanish, the term <i>Latina(s)</i> is used to refer to only female(s). Latina has been adopted in English or Spanglish to refer to Latina female(s).
Latina/o	Latina/o was adopted by Spanish speaking writers to represent the significant impact of Latinas/os in the United States. The term <i>Latina/o</i> 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 females first before males.
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.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
Hispanic	The term <i>Hispanic</i> 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 <i>España</i> (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>hispánico</i> , and it means pertaining or relative to <i>Hispania</i> .
Hispana	The literal translation of “Hispanic female” 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 female(s) in the U.S.
Hispano	The literal translation of “Hispanic” or “Hispanic male” 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 male(s) in the U.S.

to be contested as a marker of social identity even while becoming institutionalized within higher education.

In determining the best approaches to inclusivity, we urge researchers and practitioners to assess the needs of the Latin* community on their campuses. For example, Rivera-Ramos, Oswald, and Buki (2015) used a Community Readiness Model (CRM) to collect data that would help them determine the readiness of the Latina/o campus community to address lesbian, gay, and bisexual concerns. This model guided them in looking at six dimensions of community readiness, which include campus climate; knowledge of Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) issues; knowledge of Latina/o LGB efforts; leadership; preplanning; and preparation/initiation (Rivera-Ramos et al., 2015). In conducting interviews with multiple stakeholders (i.e., faculty, staff of Latina/o programs, students in Latina/o student organizations, sexual orientation programs, and student services programs), they determined that the Latina/o campus community possesses a vague awareness of addressing concerns of sexuality given the limited resources provided by programs and students organizations on campus (Rivera-Ramos et al., 2015). Using this model, higher education professionals can engage students in determining how they incorporate interconnected struggles of identities for the Latinx community.

Within the realm of diversity and inclusion work, language is an important component. Language determines the humanization we attach to our work of social justice issues and serves as a way to include others if used with inclusion in mind. Several national associations, practitioners, and scholars have moved forward in using the term *Latinx* (e.g., programming, statements of support, scholarly research, etc.). Simultaneously, several institutions of higher education continue to change and rename previous initiatives using Latino, Latina, or Latina/o/@ to now Latinx. And, as institutions with increasing Latin* student populations continue to develop programs and initiatives targeted at this community, the decision on how to name these in alignment with the current Latin* campus community will become important. As we mentioned in our positionalities, the use of Latinx for each of us manifested differently but provided us with a foundational understanding of the interconnected complexity of identity in using the term. In our own professional trajectories, we have actively worked with Latin* student populations within the realm of diversity and inclusion. Positioned within academia, our scholarship contributes to the understanding of the Latin* community within higher education.

Given our commitment to furthering the conversation on the complexity of the Latin* community, specifically, Latin* students in higher education, we want to challenge the notion of using Latinx as a form of *one-size fits all* practice for naming Latin* students on college and university campuses.

Notes

1. The original psychological periodical has not been able to be located by the authors of this chapter. However, Logue (2015) and other activists have referred to the periodical as the first time the “x” was used to disrupt and ungender the Spanish language. For example, instead of *los niños* or *las niñas*, *lxs niñxs* was used.
2. Salinas and Lozano’s (2019) study titled *Mapping and Recontextualizing the Evolution of the Term Latinx: An Environmental Scanning in Higher Education* was published “online first” in 2017, and later assigned to a 2019 issue.

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