



Nuestras Raíces Oral History Project

General Guidelines for Conducting Interviews With Individuals Who Are of Hispanic Origin

- When referring to a Latino individual, his or her name is an important part of both his or her culture as well as identity. Every attempt should be made to spell and pronounce it correctly. Do not “Anglicize” a Spanish name.
- Formality is viewed as a sign of respect. Address all Latinos except minors by their surnames unless he or she initially requests that his or her first name be used. As your conversation moves along and you begin to warm up to a Latino person, he or she may ask that you address him or her on a more familiar basis, however, first names should not be used without his or her permission.
- With an older Latino, adding “Don” or “Doña” before the first name is a sign of respect, particularly if you are significantly younger than the person you are talking to. The Latino individual should not be addressed in such a manner without his or her permission first.
- Racially, Latinos range from Black to White. Ethnically, Latinos are neither Black nor White, instead they are Puerto Rican, Mexican, Colombian, Mexican American, etc.
- The term Latino is an umbrella term which refers to any individual with Spanish ancestry (e.g. Cubans/Cuban-Americans). Latino is a generic term similar to Hispano or Latino -- it is not a true ethnic identification.
- Avoid asking a Latino individual if he or she speaks “Puerto Rican,” “Mexican,” “Cuban,” “ etc. With the exception of slang, idiomatic expressions, regionalisms, and some sections of Spain (e.g. Catalán, Galicia), Spanish is Spanish!
- Most Latinos are bilingual, with at least half of the U.S. Latino population preferring to speak in Spanish.
- Speaking in Spanish enables monolingual Latinos and bilingual Latino with Spanish dominant language fluency to more honestly express their feelings and emotions.

- Speaking in Spanish allows for a significantly greater level of comforts in self-disclosure for Latinos. However, use your judgment, or better, ask directly whether the Latino individual prefers to speak in Spanish, English or both.
- A Latino individual will most-likely feel more comfortable interacting with Latinos as compared to non-Latinos under most circumstances.
- When the use of an interpreter is required, he or she should be an integral part of the project and knowledgeable of all areas of oral history interviews as well as the subject area being covered, for the sake of clarity, continuity and confidentiality.
- Latinos tend to be physically expressive, such as gesturing with their hands and face (e.g. eyes/eyebrows and mouth) while they talk.
- Many Latinos may feel uncomfortable with giving a person in authority much direct eye contact, as this is perceived to be disrespectful of the individual's position with whom he or she is interacting.
- Physical distances between Latinos are approximately half that required by non-Latinos in face-to-face interactions. Thus, a Latino individual may personalize the added distance between him or herself and a non-Latino as alienating or rejecting.
- The Latino family is the individual's primary source of social support and extends beyond a nuclear family configuration.
- The Latino definition of family extends to non-blood relatives, including compadres, comadres, padrino, and madrina -- a ritualistic kinship system.
- Hijos de crianza are also considered part of the extended family network, representing children who are or have been primarily reared by the mother in the family.
- An extended family member does not necessarily need to be a part of the household to wield influence. Often geographic distance is of little consequence in gauging a family member's power and influence.
- Latino relationships are hierarchical in nature. Status and authority are accorded by virtue of age and experience, with males holding the highest status.
- A Latino husband (or common-law mate) may insist on accompanying the wife to an interview. Do not take this personal. This is a strong Latino cultural trait. Working or speaking with women alone, especially about health care issues is not accepted in the traditional Latino culture. However younger more acculturated Latino women may choose to defy their culture, and agree to talk or work with you. They may, however, begin to feel guilty as the interview progresses. Be aware of this, and learn to respect it and most importantly, be flexible! However, it is to find a way to maintain their trust so that you can complete the interview or conversation. This way you will not only fulfill your goal of seeking vital information, but you will also learn to gain the highest trust garnered among women in the Latino community.

- Non-Latinos have defined machismo in terms of physical aggression, sexual promiscuity, dominance of women and the excessive use of alcohol. In reality, to be macho means love and affection for and protection of the family, dignity, honor and respect for others.
- Latinos frequently use humor, which may be misunderstood as not accepting a serious situation. Humor provides a viable coping mechanism.
- A Latino may make an offer of food or drink to anyone who visits his or her home. To reject this offer signifies rejection of the Latino, and your purpose for being there may fail.
- It is not unusual for a Latino to present a visitor with a small gift over the course of the interview. Non-acceptance is taken as rejection.
- Latinos have a different orientation to time than non-Latinos. For Latinos, it seems that the clock does not run, but it walks instead! Arriving late for scheduled appointments should not be taken personal. If a Latino arrives late for an initial appointment, the subsequent appointment might be set 15-30 minutes earlier than the expected time of arrival as a way of working within this orientation to time.
- If all else fails, the Latino individual will be your best source of information concerning where along a continuum of values he or she falls.

