



Am I Latino?: Erased Indigenous Identities in Southern California

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Background

The terms “Latino,” “Latinx,” or “Hispanic” are used to categorize people from Mexico, Central, or South America. These terms are used to complete official paperwork, in academia, and in life in general. However, using these colonizing terms erases indigenous identities.

Indigenous communities continue to flourish and thrive in Mexico, despite Spanish colonization over 500 years ago. Most literature regarding indigenous populations of Mexico revolves around adult migrants, their demographics, and settlement/labor experiences. Of the literature that discusses second generation children of Mexican immigrant, there is very little scholarship on the narratives of the indigenous youth from Mexico and their identity development.

This research explores second generation indigenous young adults and how they navigate their identity in colonized spaces, highlighting the narratives of young, female, indigenous college students and what being indigenous in Southern California means to them.



Child from Oaxaca, Mexico. Source: Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/437764026284462380/>

Research Questions

How do young indigenous people identify themselves? Are they proud to be indigenous? Or have they been forced to use the terms “Latino,” “Latinx,” or “Hispanic”? What does being indigenous mean to them? What are some stereotypes or discrimination that the indigenous population from Oaxaca face?

Methodology & Approaches

- Participants must have origins from a Southern Mexican state (Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla, Veracruz, etc)
- 14 qualitative in-depth interviews done via Zoom or phone call
- Interviews range from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes, average interview is 50 minutes
- Interview guide contains about 40 questions to fully grasp the narrative of indigenous young person in Southern California
- No hypothesis going into interview - taking an inductive approach of finding trends within stories told

Trends

Discrimination within other Mexicans

“I started witnessing ... racism within Mexican [or] other Mexicans ... Like, they would call us like “Oxaquitas” or “indios” or ... make fun of us because [our] people are short and because of our skin color and the way we spoke and the way our parents spoke.”

- Cynthia, 19 years old

Discrimination of languages

“My mom picked me up [from school] and there was an aunt [of mine] who was there and they were speaking in their native tongue [of] Zapoteco ... other younger children [heard and started]... laughing because they didn’t know what the language was [and] they were like, “what is your mom speaking? Is she speaking Chinese?” ... I was like “that’s not Chinese....”

- Raquel, 20 years old

Erasure of identity

“Folks aren’t welcoming of native languages ... even Mexican people, or Latinos in general. They sit comfortably with the fact that ... there are Spanish speaking [people in Mexico] and not native speaking [people in Mexico] because they erase that part of their identity. So ... I didn’t want to be a subject of bullying or just be looked down upon, so I would just say I was Mexican.”

- Bianca, 21 years old



Oscar-nominated actress, Yalitza Aparicio, Photo by Andreas Rentz. Source: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/yalitza-aparicio-first-indigenous-woman-oscar>

Future Works

- Interview at least 25 indigenous college bound young adults, both men and women.
- Interview non college bound indigenous young adults.
- Explore Afro-indigenous identities.

References

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