

The Reality of Code Switching For **Queer** Latin Populations and How to Practice Self-Authenticity and Safety

By: Sam Martinez

Sam (they/them) is a supervisor for a queer national suicide crisis line and has worked as a Peer Support Specialist in Sacramento county. They are a queer non-binary Hispanic who grew up in East Los Angeles with a Mexican immigrant father and 3rd generation Mexican-American mother. Growing up queer in a Catholic Hispanic community has come with its own blessings, trials, and tribulations that has led Sam to experience code switching in order to protect themselves. Through this, the importance of safely practicing self-authenticity has become crucial to maintaining their mental health.



Let's practice some self-love

affirmations

If you are in a safe and comfortable place feel free to say this outloud
or lovingly in your mind.

I am who I am and that is enough.

I am worthy.

I love myself and all past versions of myself.

I choose to be happy and grateful for my beautiful
and abundant life.



Presentation Objectives

- Understand the importance of Hispanic Month and its connection to wellness
- Understand what code-switching is and why it is used by the queer Latine communities
- Learn about culturally relevant self-care
- Know how to practice authenticity safely
- Learn about practices to be a better ally
- Get connected to resources that are specific to Latine Queer identities



Hispanic Heritage Month and Wellness

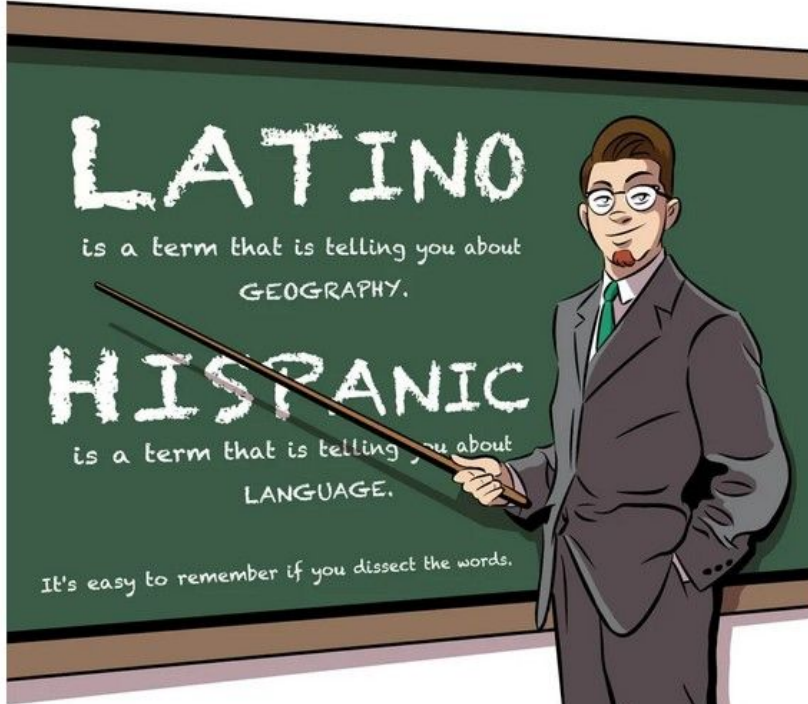
- Celebrated from September 15 to October 15
- A time to “recognize and celebrate the many contributions, diverse cultures, and extensive histories of the American Latino community.” (U.S. Dept of Education)
- “celebrates the independence days of several Latin American countries, including: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua on September 15th, Mexico on September 16th, and Chile on September 18th” (U.S. Dept of Education)
- Hispanics make up nearly one-in-five people in the U.S at 19% of the population in 2021
- Harmful dialogues and rhetoric about Latin communities has made the celebration and recognition even more significant and fosters inclusivity
- Cultivates cultural resilience and self-acceptance



Terms to Know

- **Hispanic**- a person from a country whose primary language is Spanish (Duke Univ)
- **Latino/Latin**- a person from Latin America (Duke Univ)
- **Queer**- an umbrella recently reclaimed to include gender and sexual identities outside of cisgender and heterosexual
- **Cultural resilience**- “considers how cultural background helps individuals and communities overcome adversity...suggests that individuals and communities can deal with and overcome adversity not just based on individual characteristics alone, but also from the support of larger sociocultural factors.”
- **Code switching**- “is now used in discussions about how members of marginalized communities adjust their voices, speech patterns, mannerisms, and behavior to blend in across various social settings” (Vice)
- **Authentic**- true to one's own personality, spirit, or character (Merriam-Webster)





LATINO MEANS: FROM LATIN AMERICA.
LATIN AMERICA REFERS MOSTLY
TO EVERYTHING BELOW THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
INCLUDING THE CARIBBEAN.

HISPANIC MEANS:
FROM A COUNTRY WHOSE
PRIMARY LANGUAGE IS
SPANISH.

BUT NOT EVERY COUNTRY IN LATIN AMERICA



(Duke University School of Medicine)



Why Code-Switch?

Many people code-switch.

Largely, code-switching is used in reference to racial and ethnic minorities when they change their mannerisms, speech, behaviors, appearance and more to assimilate into different social settings.

Code switching can also be as small as not referring to your abuelita as “abuelita” and saying grandma instead based on your audience.

However, code switching can also be a matter of life or death in certain settings for racial minority LGBTQ+ individuals, especially trans individuals.

Hispanic and Latin cultures place a lot of importance on family relations. The “don’t ask and don’t tell” narrative can be pervasive due to not wanting to offend or rupture La Familia.



Code-Switching as a Superpower

Code-switching is not inherently inauthentic or negative.

The ability to assess a situation and understand how to survive and/or thrive within the context you are provided is a strength because you can then decide to how to engage or not to best prioritize yourself.

In systems of power where the unconscious bias to favor those similar to us, such as at “work, schools, or any ‘official’ community space,” there tends to be a need to act the “right” way to get the care, service or respect that *should be* inherently available but sometimes isn’t.

(Diversity Explained)



Practicing Safe Self-Authenticity

- Choose to come out **IF YOU WANT** not due to expectations to do so
 - Understand that if your safety is at risk at you can't share/participate in your identity- this is **NOT** a reflection of inauthenticity
- Find community support in ways that are accessible and safe (ex- online platforms)
- Consume media that allows you to feel seen and represented
- Practice and remind yourself that there is nothing wrong with your sexuality or gender identity
- Practice culturally-representative self-care (Parents)
 - Baños and Limpias (spiritual baths)
 - Smudging (to purify or cleanse the soul)
 - Meditation/Prayer



How to be an Ally

- Don't make or be passive to anti-gay or trans jokes
- Work on self-reflection and address any subconscious or conscious homophobia or transphobia you may hold onto
- Listen to and hold space for your LGBTQ+ friends and family to share their experiences and challenges with you
- **NORMALIZE ASKING PRONOUNS!!** (add the caveat that a person can share their pronouns if they would like to or feel safe to do so)
- Understand that **sexuality and gender identity are different**
- Never ask anyone about their genitals, surgery plans, or how they have sex



How to be an Ally (cont.)

- Understand that sometimes people have and maintain different identities with different communities in their lives- ask how to best support them and refer to them
 - Do not accidentally “out” someone (do not assume that someone has told everyone about their gender or sexual identity)
- Don't assume gender identity (ex. Clothes do not equate to gender)
- Educate yourself on LGBTQ+ terms
- Normalize educating others as an ally when homophobic or transphobic comments are made to take the burden off and avoid outing an individual



Key Takeaways

- Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to highlight and uplift our community to foster culture resiliency and wellness
- Code-switching is the act of changing mannerisms and/or presentation to best serve you
- Code-switching can be a means of self-preservation
- Practicing self-care is a means of connecting back to your authenticity
- Being an ally is a part of holding space for people's authenticity



Resources

- <https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/talking-about-lgbt-equality-with-latinos-and-hispanics.pdf> (how to talk about LGBTQ+ equality with Latin lens)
- <https://www.familiaesfamilia.org/> (LGBTQ+ public education program for Latine families)
- <https://www.trevorspace.org/> (safe online space for LGBTQ+ youth 13+)
- <https://wearemitu.com/wearemitu/entertainment/10-lgbtq-latino-movies-to-watch-on-netflix-this-month/> (Latino LGTBQ+ Netflix Movies)
- <https://www.parents.com/parents-latina-magazine/3-latinx-self-care-rituals-that-center-your-wellness-and-culture/#:~:text=Ba%C3%B1os%20and%20Limpias,setting%20a%20self%2Dlove%20intention.> (Latin Wellness examples and instructions)
- <https://glaad.org/transgender/allies/> (Tips for Allies)



Crisis Lines

GET HELP 24/7:



THE TREVOR PROJECT
Saving Young LGBTQ Lives



The Hotline

Our free crisis Hotline is staffed entirely by operators who are trans identified. If you're trans or questioning and experiencing crisis, or if you just need to talk, please call us.

USA: 877-565-8860

CAN: 877-330-6366

   @translifeline

**Thank you and gracias for being here, for
being open to learning and for doing the
work to prioritize our Queer Latine
community's safety and well-being!**

Questions?



References

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