

Discussions around Latinx

Term recently added to dictionary

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WAUKESHA — The word “Latinx” (pronounced La-

teen-ex) is a term that has gained popularity amongst activists, scholars, some journalists and the general public, but not all members of the Latino and Hispanic

community have adopted the term.

Latinx is the gender-neutral alternative to Latino and Latina and was recently added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in September.

Voces de la Frontera member Livia Rowell-Ortiz, who is also transgender, described the appearance of the word as a linguistic revolution. The word represents a shift in society to adapt language to include people of all identities, especially but not limited to those who do not identify as male or female.

“It’s one of the ways we have communicated without making assumptions and without referencing gender specifically,” Rowell-Ortiz said.

In Spanish, words are either masculine or feminine and though not in all cases, words denoting a gender have either an “a” for feminine or an “o” for masculine at the end of the word — a female cat is “gata” while a male cat is “gato.”

Moreover, the masculine version of a word in the Spanish language is considered gender neutral. For example, if there are 19 women in a room and one man, “Latinos” is the grammatically correct way to describe the group as a

whole.

In this regard, the term “Latinx” removes the gender bias found in the Spanish language while giving certain people “agency,” or the ability to determine or describe who they are without the framework of a language, Rowell-Ortiz said.

“It’s about empowering people who have a part of their identity erased by the language and the assumptions that we make about gender,” Rowell-Ortiz said. “I do think it’s important that trans and non-binary people gain recognition in the conversation.”

A generational difference

Still, not all generations of Hispanics and Latinos have adopted the term, said Anselmo Villarreal, president and CEO of La Casa de Esperanza.

“A lot of the people that emigrate, particularly in Waukesha, are very familiar with Latinos and Latinas,” said Villarreal. “But Latinx is new for them.”

Villarreal said from his perspective, the consensus among the Hispanic and Latino community is that they don’t necessarily disagree with the term, but also haven’t adopted its use.

“I think it’s just because of the strong Catholic faith that they were raised with and the strong environment

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in which they were raised,” Villarreal said.

Cecilia Tejeda, a member of Voces de la Frontera’s Waukesha chapter, said older generations tend to be more traditional and she’s not surprised that some Hispanics and Latinos in Waukesha haven’t adopted the term.

Tejeda has lived in Waukesha for 15 years and in her opinion, the Hispanics and Latinos in Milwaukee are more liberal-minded and less traditional, she said.

“The older generations just think female and male,” Tejeda said. “They don’t use words like gay or transgender because it’s still a taboo for them.”

When it comes to conversations about being gay, lesbian and transgender, religion can be a barrier in the conversation, Tejeda said.

“For me, the term is really important so that our families can accept the younger generations,” Tejeda said. “And I think this is

frustrating for new generations when they want to be excepted.”

While Voces de la Frontera frequently uses Latinx in their literature, La Casa de Esperanza does not at this time, Villarreal said. He said the organization respects the term and people of all backgrounds, but it is not an issue the organization has discussed at length.

“We respect it, but we are not taking any action to change things to Latinx,” Villarreal said. “These are times that regardless of our difference of opinion, we need to be united and work hard to improve the educational gap in the Hispanic community.”

Rowell-Ortiz also understands that not all people will understand Latinx, but said communicating about the topic in of itself shows a step in the right direction:

“Even if this word doesn’t work for some people, that we’re having a conversation about it is a win.”



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