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Introduction

People who identify as Hispanic and Latino/a are currently shaping, and will continue to shape, the face and fortunes of the United States. As of 2020, nearly one in five people identify as Hispanic or Latino/a.¹ Over the course of this decade, US Department of Labor projections suggest, this cohort will account for nearly eight in ten new workers in the labor force.² They are outpacing other groups in college enrollment, entrepreneurship, and purchasing power.³ Reaching a population of almost 64 million, this talent cohort is more visible than ever.⁴ Yet, they continue to be overlooked in the ranks of corporate America.

Building on our 2016 study, new Coqual data reveals how this cohort still feels undervalued, underpaid, and unsupported as they navigate obstacles related to career advancement, unwelcoming workplace environments, and a constantly shifting political climate. This both hurts the retention and progression of Hispanic and Latino/a employees and costs companies valuable time, resources, and talent.

“I’ve engaged in this work for many years, and it astonishes me that we’re still having the same conversations. We’re hypervisible from a demographic perspective, but we remain stubbornly invisible when it comes to meaningful investments.”

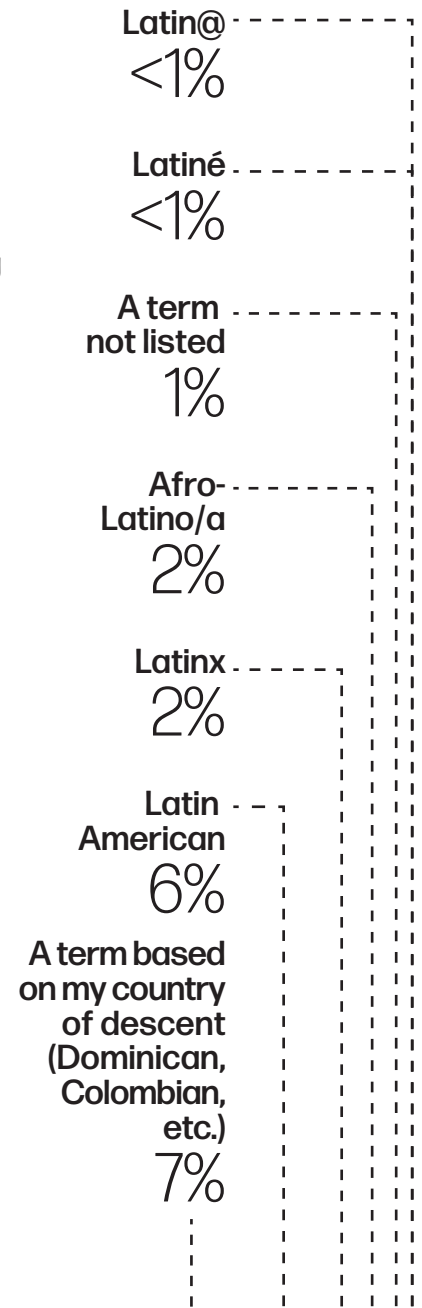
- Daisy Auger-Dominguez, Founder and CEO, Auger-Dominguez Ventures

Measuring *Latinidad*

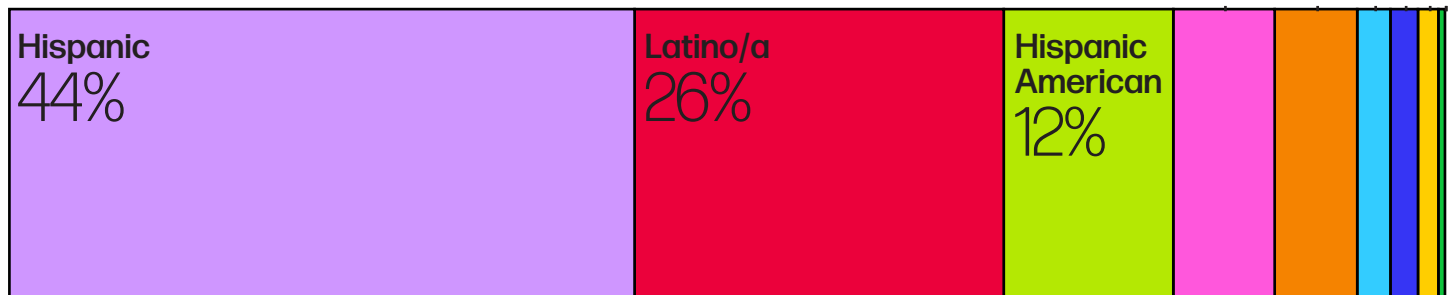
Coqual asked both Hispanic and Latino/a participants which terms they prefer to use when referring to their ethnic identity. While we found slight variation across age and ethnic heritage, the term “Hispanic” was the most preferred among respondents overall (44%), followed by “Latino/a” (26%). Notably, our data shows how a shift in preferred terminology is occurring among younger professionals: Gen Z respondents are the first age demographic to favor the term “Latino/a” over other terms. While we have utilized “Latinx” in previous reports, we found that terms used to invoke gender neutrality, such as “Latinx,” “Latiné,” and “Latin@,” were among the least preferred for participants within this study sample. Informed by these findings, throughout this report, we use the term “Hispanic **or** Latino/a” (abbreviated as H/L in this report) when referring to this population. We see a necessity to maintain the distinction between these two ethnicities and heritages. However, when our data applies to both groups, we use “Hispanic **and** Latino/a.”

“I want to emphasize the importance of creating our own labels, not having other people label us.... I want to have a say in what I’m being called.”

- Latino professional



How do we identify?



A brief guide to terminology

To effectively formulate culturally sensitive policies and practices that allow employees to feel seen, understood, and valued, company leaders should familiarize themselves with key terms used to identify this diverse community in social and structural ways. Refer to the full report for more detail about related terminology.

Hispanic vs. Latino/a

"Hispanic" and "Latino/a" are pan-ethnic terms that became popular in the US in the twentieth century.⁵ Both are US-based terms, with Hispanic generally referring to those of Spanish-speaking ancestry, and Latino/a referring to anyone with roots in the geographic region of Latin America.⁶

Latinx, Latiné, Latin@

"Latinx," "Latiné," and "Latin@" are gender-neutral variations of Latino/a.⁷ Despite noble aims, these terms are not common in popular use. For instance, a 2019 survey found that 76% of Hispanic and Latino/a participants had not even heard of the term Latinx.⁸ However, the emergence of these terms is a testament to the fluidity of the language of identity, with new terms constantly emerging, receding, and evolving over time.

Street race

If you were walking down the street, which race or ethnicity do you think strangers would assume you to be? The answer to this question could be considered a person's "street race," a measure of racial identity formulated by Dr. Nancy López, Professor of Sociology at the University of New Mexico. Contrasted with self-identified race, street race directly challenges the persistent myth that race is a scientific fact rooted in our genetics.⁹ It centers the idea that the way others perceive our race is as important as how we internalize our racialized experiences.

“Skin color is only one element of how people develop their sense of self, but...it's a prominent element of how people are 'read.'”

– Mara Ostfeld, Research Director, Center for Racial Justice
at the University of Michigan

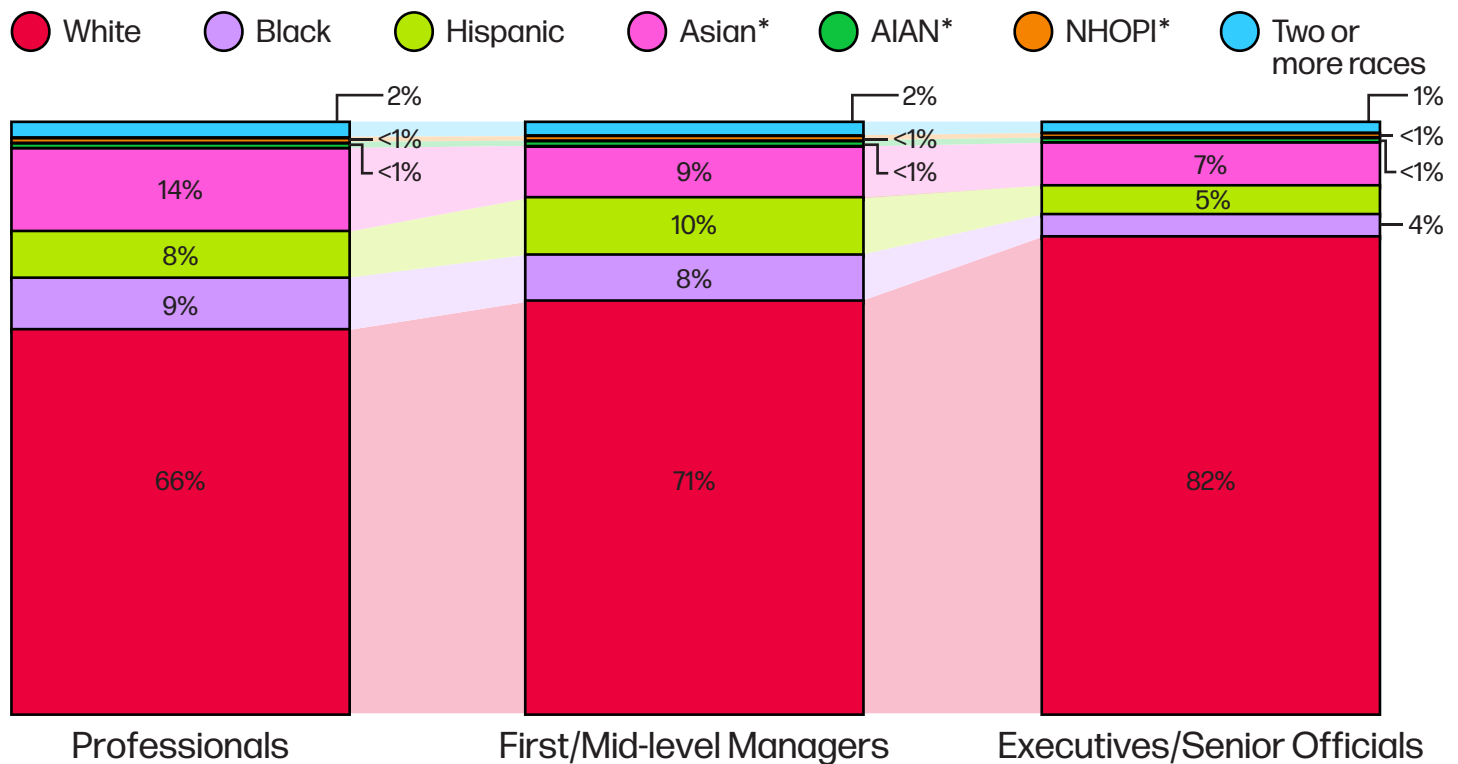
The labor force landscape

The rapidly-growing Hispanic and Latino/a population in the US has not kept pace in terms of corporate representation. Combined, people of H/L heritage make up 19% of the overall US population.¹⁰ However, this group represents only about 8% of the professional labor force according to 2021 US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) data. This data also shows that 10% of managers and just 5% of executives and senior officials in the US workforce identify as H/L.¹¹

“We don’t have as many individuals that look like us in leadership roles that we can aspire to be like. It’s still a struggle.”

- Mexican woman in talent acquisition

Percentage of role, by job level



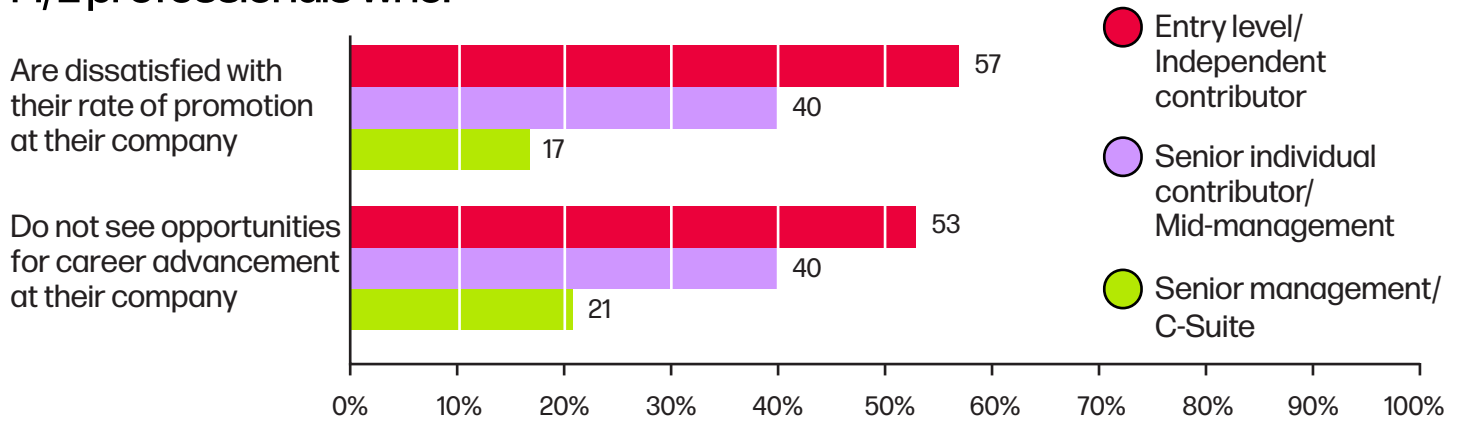
Source: "Job Patterns for Minorities and Women in Private Industry (EEO-1)," US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, accessed February 7, 2024, <https://www.eeoc.gov/data/job-patterns-minorities-and-women-private-industry-eeo-1-0>.

*EEOC data uses the term "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander," abbreviated here as NHOPI. EEOC data also uses the term "American Indian or Alaskan Native," abbreviated here as AIAN. EEOC also uses the term "Asian" while Coqual uses "Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander" (A/AA/PI).

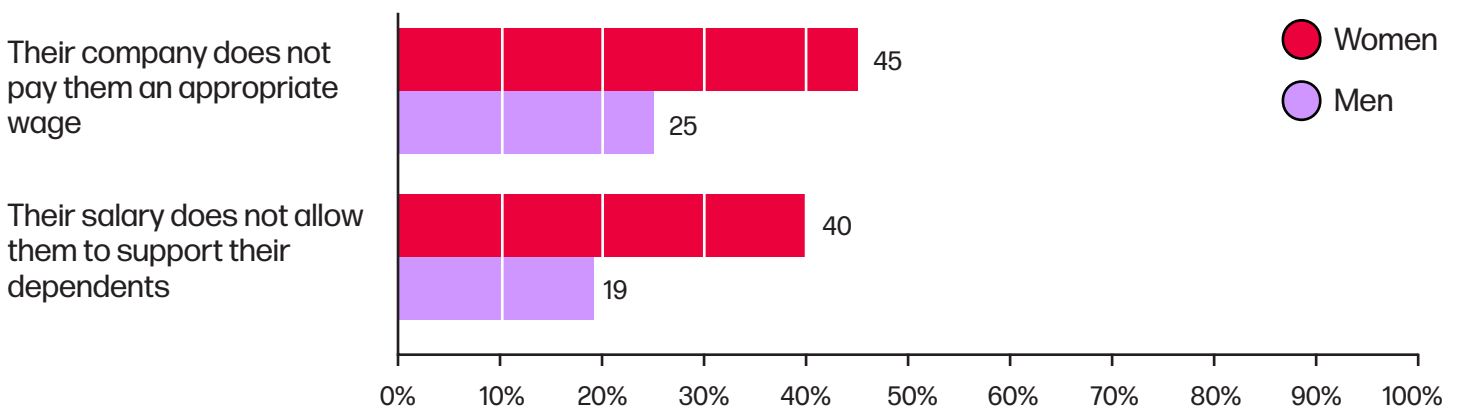
Among entry-level H/L respondents across all age groupings, nearly three in five (57%) professionals say they are dissatisfied with their rate of promotion. While this number drops slightly with mid-level managers, still two in five (40%) H/L professionals report dissatisfaction with their career advancement or do not see opportunities for further growth.

Gender also plays a role for other career outcomes among H/L professionals. In terms of pay inequity, we find that nearly half (45%) of H/L women in our sample disagree that their company pays them an appropriate wage, while two in five H/L women (40%) indicate that their salary does not allow them to support their dependents.

H/L professionals who:



H/L professionals who report:

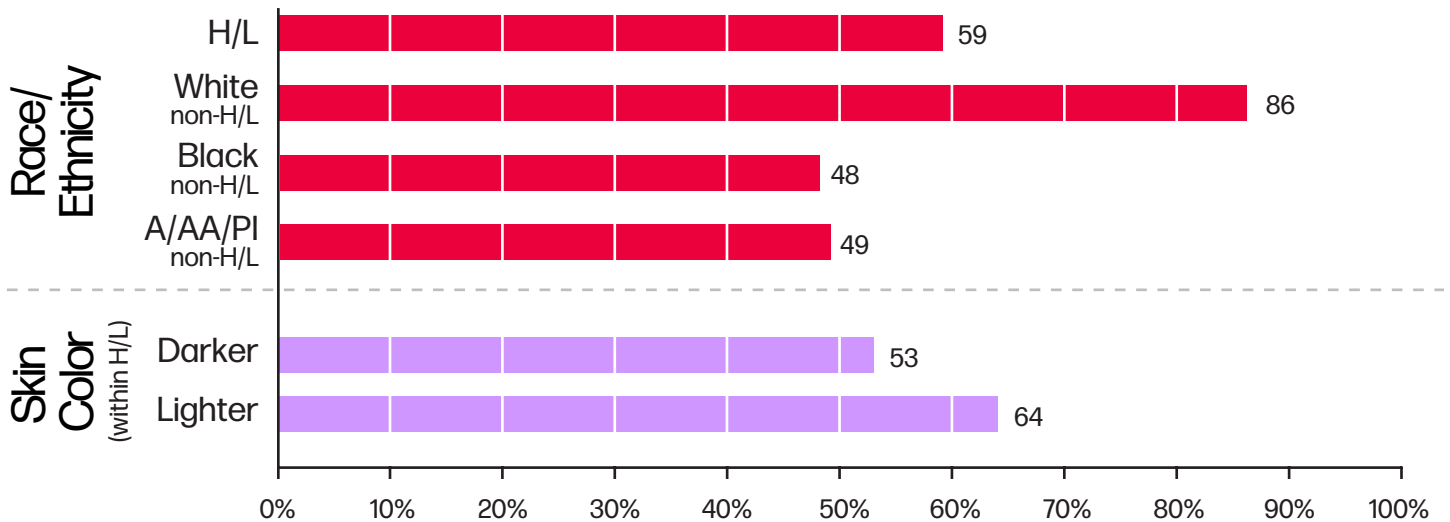


Perceptions about race play a significant role in whether employees see themselves reflected in leadership. Among our respondents, three in five (59%) H/L professionals feel people of their race or ethnicity are well represented in senior leadership at their company. When we examined the dynamics of street race on this item, perceptions increased to nearly two in three (64%) for White-passing H/L professionals while dropping to 46% among those who were perceived to be Black. Similarly, H/L professionals from our sample with darker skin reported an

11 percentage point reduction in seeing people who look like them at the top.

Within this inequitable labor force landscape, we also find that H/L professionals are 41% more likely than White professionals to plan to leave their company within a year. More than one in three (35%) H/L professionals surveyed are actively looking for a new job—and nearly one in three (31%) plan to leave their current company within a year.

Professionals who feel that people of their race or ethnicity are well represented in senior leadership at their company



“One of the things that drew me to [my company] and specific role was the fact that my team lead was Latina. Representation matters.”

- Peruvian woman in finance & insurance

“From the [Hispanic and Latino/a leaders] you do encounter, I would say it’s actually very supportive. It comes as a breath of fresh air. But admittedly, the sample size isn’t that great. I’ve been at three different organizations since college and haven’t really been exposed to senior Hispanic or Latino/a professionals in executive roles, or even in managing director roles, unfortunately.”

- Latino professional in finance

“I had a manager who would say, ‘So-and-so’s an undercover Latino.’ From his perspective as a manager, there was a whole set of people who had benefited by being proximal to whiteness and resisting and repressing being Latino at all costs. It was survival.”

- Black Dominican woman

Relationships, stereotypes, authenticity, and assimilation

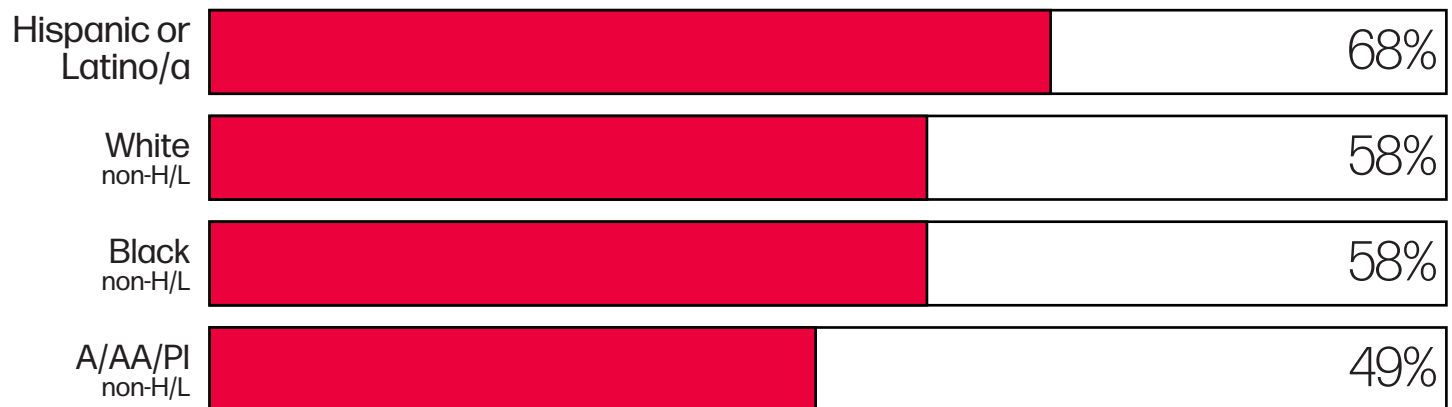
Following a primary finding from our 2016 report,¹² 40% of Hispanic and Latino/a professionals still grapple with pressure to cover up aspects of themselves to advance within their companies.

Coqual's research has demonstrated how sponsorship can be an enabling force for advancement. However, only 39% of H/L professionals in our present study report having an active sponsor relationship. Furthermore, more than two-thirds say their senior advocate has encouraged them to assimilate to office norms.

40%

of H/L professionals say it is **necessary to change aspects of themselves to succeed** at their company

Professionals whose sponsor encourages them to assimilate to office norms



Undermined and underestimated

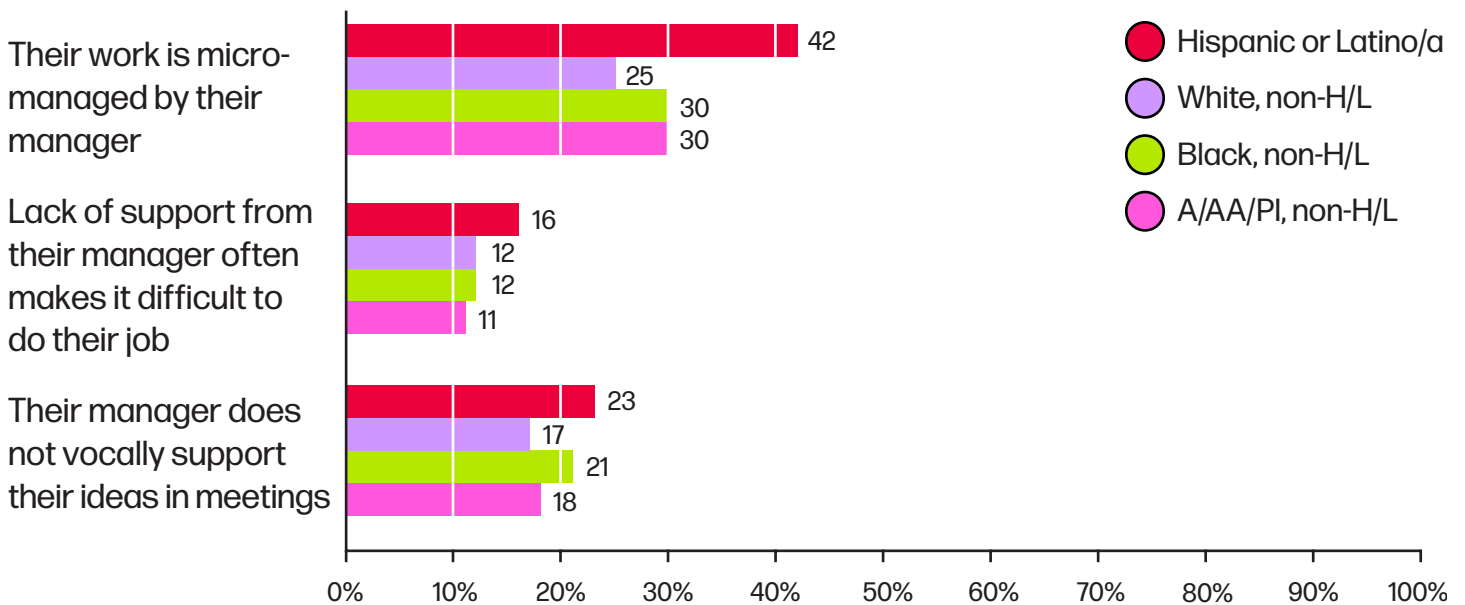
Alongside messaging to assimilate, Hispanic and Latino/a professionals also noted a lack of support from their managers. More than two in five (42%) H/L respondents feel their work is micromanaged. H/L professionals are 68% more likely to feel this way compared to White professionals. Furthermore, nearly a quarter (23%) of H/L respondents do not feel that their manager vocally supports their ideas in meetings.

H/L professionals deal with subtle and overt indications that their communication—from their accents and expressions to their tone and language they speak—is unfit or even unprofessional for the workplace. For instance, expressing enthusiasm and passion is often evaluated by peers, clients, and managers as “aggressive,” and everyday communication is read as too emotional, causing them to limit their contributions.

H/L professionals also contend with colleagues’ negative assumptions regarding their background, and professional capabilities. Nearly a quarter (23%) reported hearing stereotypes about their community on a regular basis (at least monthly), while about one in ten experienced frequent assumptions from their colleagues about being more junior (10%) or less credentialed (11%) than they actually were.

Just under one-third (30%) of H/L professionals in our sample speak Spanish as their first language. While some Spanish speakers said they are discouraged from communicating in Spanish at work, many are tapped for their language skills when it is convenient to their employer. Professionals told us they take on requests to translate internal and client-facing deliverables—sometimes requested late at night, last-minute, and outside of the scope of their job.

Professionals who say:



“You have to dance with your words. I have to use very specific language, especially as a Latina, because if you say one wrong thing, you’re labeled as aggressive.”

- **First-generation Peruvian woman**

“I was wearing khaki pants and a blue shirt. Someone approached me and asked, ‘Excuse me, are you with the cleaning crew?’ No, I’m not. I happen to be a director.”

- **Latina executive**

“My boss called me into the office and said, ‘Absolutely not. No Spanish in the workplace.’”

- **Peruvian woman in pharmaceuticals**

“I can guarantee you that a professional translator, they get paid for that service. Where is that compensation for all of us that are doing all of these things above and beyond?”

- **Latina professional**

Immigration rhetoric

H/L professionals also contend with xenophobic sentiments about immigration, regardless of their US citizenship status. Just over one in five H/L professionals say colleagues make negative comments to them about immigration or immigrants on a regular basis.

21%

of H/L professionals say **colleagues regularly make negative comments to them about immigration or immigrants**

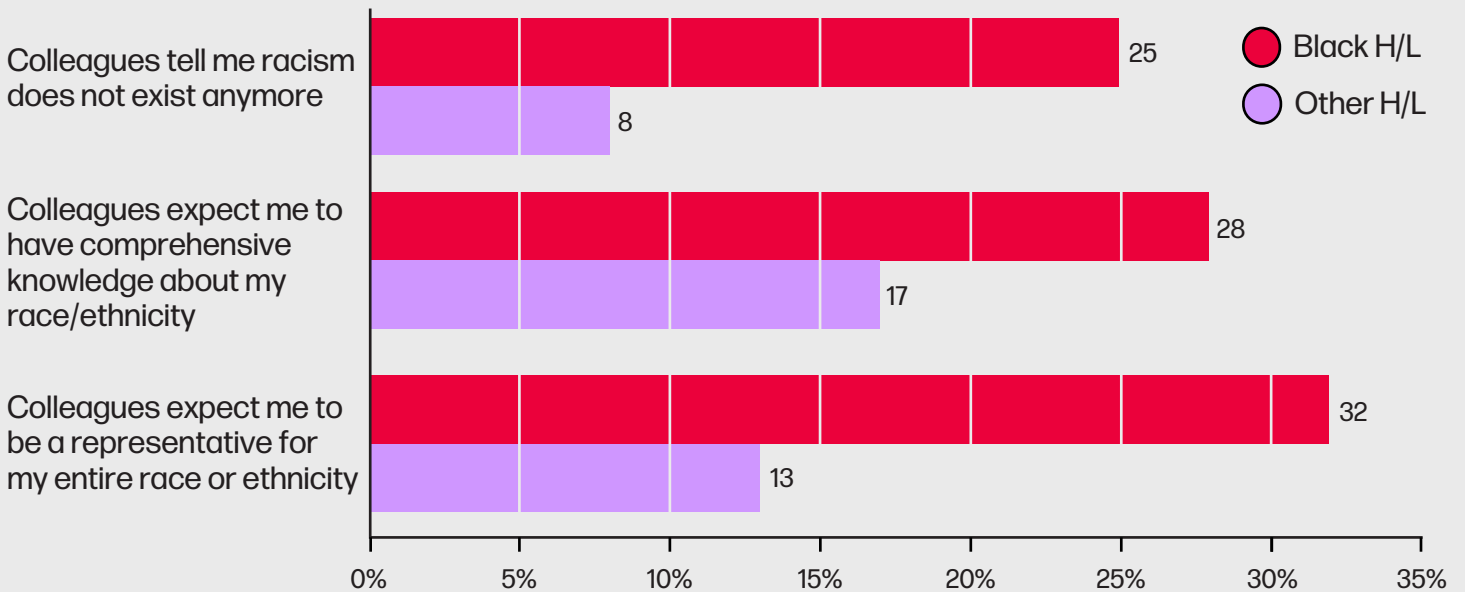
Spotlight

The double bind of race and ethnicity for Black Hispanic and Latino/a professionals

Black Hispanic and Latino/a professionals face a double bind of simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility. They are singled out for their identity: nearly 30% of Black H/L professionals regularly feel pressure to be a representative for and to have comprehensive knowledge about their race *and* ethnicity. At

the same time, a quarter of this group is frequently told by colleagues that racism is over—a not-so-subtle signal that any attempts to speak up about racialized experiences will be undermined.

Professionals who experience the following frequently:



Solutions

Whether it is recruiting diverse talent, preventing turnover, or improving career advancement for current employees, companies must be intentional about investing in Hispanic and Latino/a professionals. Below, we outline two sets of evidence-based solutions to accomplish these goals. The first set is targeted at company culture: a set of inclusive leadership practices to put in place. The second set is targeted at company policy: intentional changes to organizational policy and structures that will drive system-wide change.

Instill culturally inclusive leadership practices

- **Redefine professionalism.** It is vital that company leaders challenge workplace norms that encourage assimilation and stifle authentic expression. Equitable leaders must instill a culturally inclusive workplace culture that is welcoming to different interpretations of professionalism.
- **Validate and reward linguistic diversity.** Company leaders should ensure that all employees feel comfortable speaking different languages in social and organizational settings, and work on modeling and normalizing linguistic diversity at the top levels. Linguistic diversity should be celebrated, and language skills ought to be appropriately compensated.
- **Welcome difficult conversations about race and ethnicity.** As backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion seeks to eliminate conversations about the historical and ongoing impact of structural racism in the US, companies must be intentional about creating safe environments for difficult conversations about cultural differences.

“Going back to what was going on in the country a few years ago with the previous election, it felt like there was a new fire every single day. And it was really overwhelming [and] I needed a way to connect with others. I found that here within the Latinx community. I would love it if organizations created spaces for us to come together to just talk about what’s going on. [I think] that would be really healing.”

- First-generation Guatemalan man of Mayan descent

Strengthen organizational and structural policies

- **Improve company-wide terminology and self-ID campaigns.** There is no permanent or perfect terminology for addressing employees by their preferred cultural labels. The terms individuals use to identify themselves are deeply personal and influenced by a variety of factors. Design and implement a process to collect the most accurate demographic data of your employees to help inform decisions pertaining to company-wide terminology.
- **Focus on structural diversity.** While compositional diversity can be considered a surface-level snapshot of a company's representation data, structural diversity looks deeper into where those employees are positioned throughout the company's leadership pipeline, job functions, geographical regions, exempt and non-exempt positions, and beyond.¹³ Rather than treating diversity as a checkbox, commit to developing policies that increase structural diversity by ensuring Hispanic and Latino/a professionals have equitable access to career development opportunities that prepare them for successful transition into sustained leadership roles—not just for performative placement.
- **Provide support for work visa and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients.** As companies expand their recruitment to a global talent pool, they must ensure that H/L professionals who rely on temporary work visas and conditional DACA status are provided ongoing assistance as it pertains to applications, renewals, legal support, and even housing.
- **Strengthen sponsorship offerings.** Coqual has long argued that if sponsorship opportunities are not equitably distributed and well-managed, leadership patterns will continue to reproduce existing hierarchies and inequity. As companies develop and scale sponsorship programs, they also need to ensure that employees are well informed about advancement and professional development opportunities available to them.
- **Endorse and fund affinity groups and professional networks.** These spaces are important for providing resources, community, and opportunity. Companies should focus these groups on fostering innovation, belonging, and fueling the pipeline for future leadership, particularly across resource groups for greater impact.

Methodology

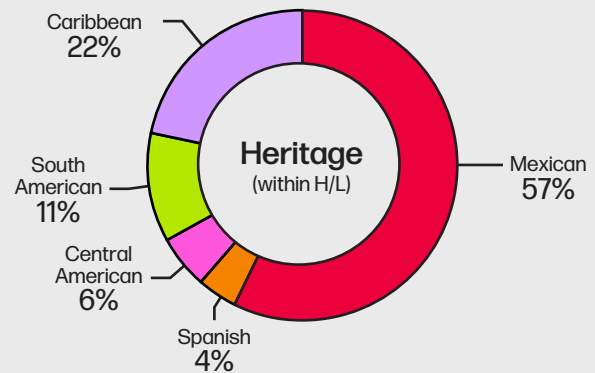
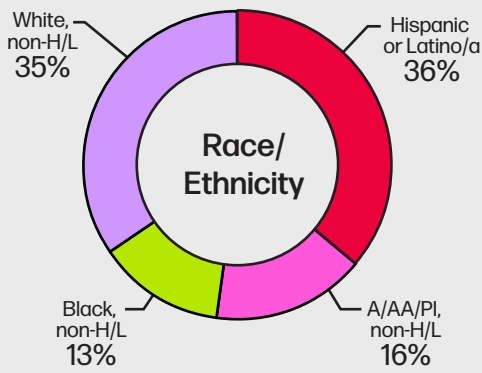
The primary sources of data for this report consisted of a survey, virtual focus groups, and one-on-one key informant interviews. Findings presented in this study combine results across each of these sources, incorporating a mixed-methods approach of quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry.

Through our qualitative research, we draw on testimonials from over 100 professionals, experts, and practitioners across the US. For our quantitative data, we partnered with NORC at the University of Chicago to deploy a web-based survey instrument to capture data from completed interviews across 2,385 respondents.

To be included in this study, respondents were at least 21 years old and currently employed full-time in professional occupations in the US with at least some postsecondary experience and/or degree.

Please refer to the full report for a more detailed explanation of our methodology and limitations.

Our sample



Endnotes

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