

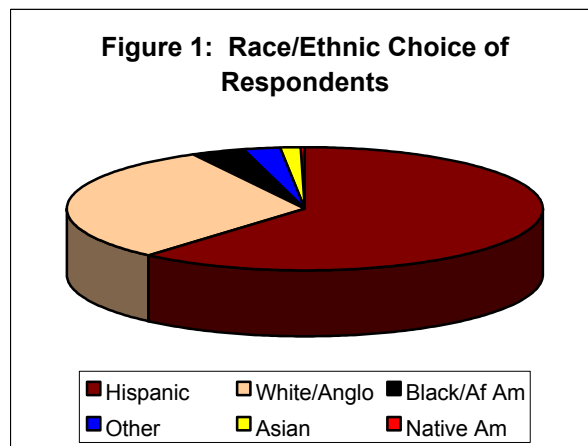
Ethnic Identification Among Hispanic Women in San Antonio

Juanita M. Firestone, Ph.D.

Richard J. Harris, Ph.D.

ISSUE: the 2000 census increased public awareness and interest in the issue of racial and ethnic identification by individuals. As part of the ethnic identification of individuals the term Hispanic has been used to include individuals from a variety of origins with common cultural characteristics associated with the Spanish language. Countries of origin often include some or all of the following: the U.S., Mexico, Central and South America, Cuba, Philippines, and Spain. The use of the term Hispanic has been criticized (especially in the u.s.) by some as a term artificially created by those outside the ethnic group; as too generic (lumping together people of very different backgrounds); and as a term with which very few individuals identify. San Antonio is an interesting location for assessing this criticism because of the majority Hispanic population, most of whom are Mexican American.

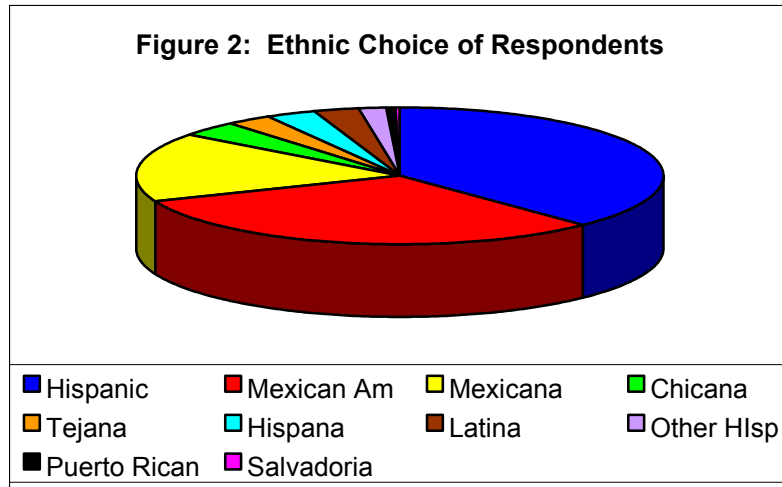
DATA AND METHODS: This brief analyzes results from a survey of women in San Antonio conducted by UTSA's Survey Research Lab in conjunction with the Hispanic Research Center. Over eight hundred telephone surveys were completed (836) and supplemented with 40 personal interviews from women living in the subsidized housing of Victoria Courts. The surveys were conducted in November and December 1994. Results are accurate within plus or minus 4%. The study population provide an interesting picture of the ethnic identification of an economically and politically marginal group, which has been under-researched.



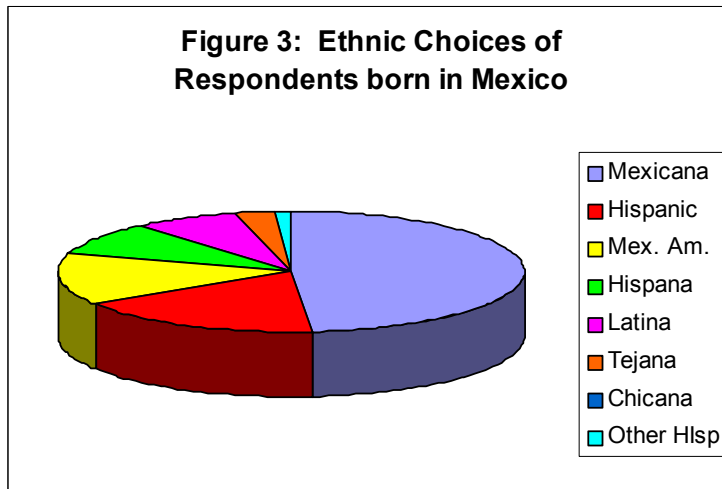
DISCUSSION: Respondents were asked the following question, "How would you identify your race or ethnicity?" The question had the following response categories: Black/African American, Hispanic/Mexican American, white/Anglo, Native American, Asian or Other. As shown in Figure1, the majority (61%) of respondents chose Hispanic/Mexican American from among the race ethnic choices offered. The next highest percentage chose White Anglo (30.8%). Very few respondents selected African American (3.8%), Asian (1/3%), Native American (0.3%) or Other (2.5%) categories.

Respondents who answered Hispanic/Mexican American were then asked: "Many times, people placed in the same race or ethnic category identify themselves differently from one another. By what term do you normally refer to yourself?" Respondents were not read response categories

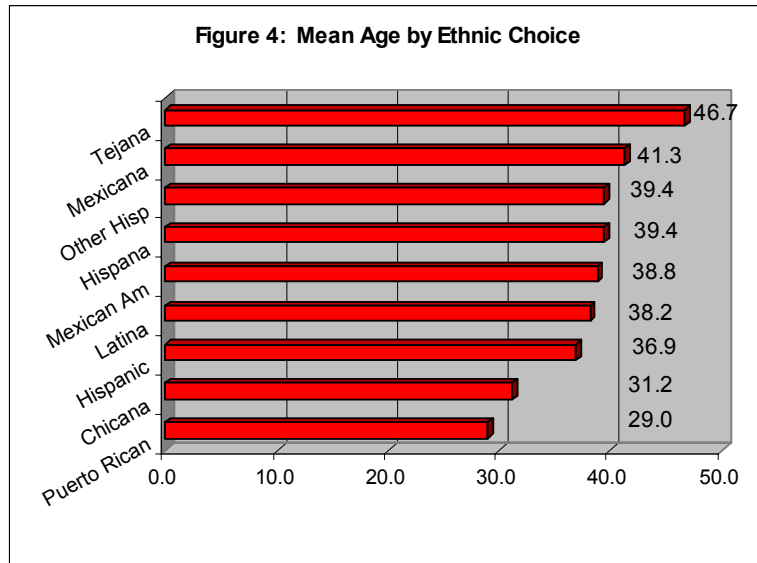
immediately, but the categories were provided for those who required a probe. The largest percentage of respondents answered Hispanic (38%), which was closely followed by Mexican American (31%). Chicana (4%), Tejana (3%), Hispana (3%) and Latina (3%) were seldom chosen, as were Other Hispanic (2%) and Puerto Rican (1%). A similar pattern held for individuals born in Texas, elsewhere in the U.S. and countries other than Mexico.



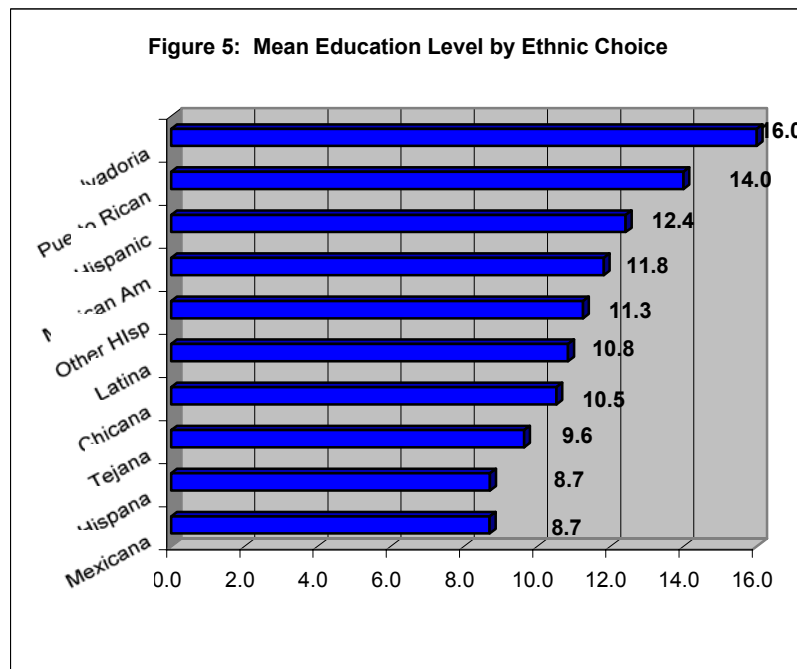
As shown in Figure 3, among those born in Mexico the largest percent (49%) selected Mexicana, and the choice with the next highest percent of responses was Hispanic (17%) followed closely by Mexican American (14%).



Figures 4 and 5 provide the average age and average education level for the ethnic choices of respondents. Looking at those categories most frequently selected, on average, women choosing Hispanic had higher levels of



education and were younger than those choosing Mexican American. On average, women choosing Hispanic also had higher levels of education than those selecting Chicana, although those selecting Chicana were younger than both other groups. The latter finding probably reflects the relatively recent time frame associated with the Chicano/a Movement in the United States.



Average education levels also reflect census-based demographic information with respondents identifying as Puerto Rican and Salvadorian having higher levels of education than Mexican Americans. The women who were born in Mexico were most likely to refer to themselves as Mexicanas, and this group had the lowest average education levels of all respondents. It is interesting that Mexicanas had the oldest average age suggesting that recent immigration may not fully explain the lower average education levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The women in this survey do not appear to perceive a negative connotation with respect to the term Hispanic. In addition, our proximity and strong cultural linkages to Mexico are seen in the high proportion of women selecting Mexican American as their ethnic identification. Forcing ethnic descriptors on individuals for ideological reasons could have a negative backlash by creating a multitude of ethnic divisions where none existed. Those wishing to create a unified political voice of ethnic minorities and to understand and provide services to those in need should pay attention to the identification of actual group members.