

Race/Ethnic Categories and Latino Health Research

Race/Ethnic categories have been part of the US records system since 1789. Their original use was to identify the non-white populations who were assumed to be of inferior races and, hence, were to be excluded from full citizenship. They have also been used in medical research to track differential health outcomes, often with overtones of biological determinism. This presentation points out the non-scientific nature of these categories, resulting in subsequent arbitrary, non-standardized operationalizations. The Latino Epidemiological Paradox illustrates that these R/E categories are not proxy measures for income, education or access to care. A brief history of Latino confusion about identifying with these R/E categories opens up the opportunity to consider the development of alternative epistemologies to describe human samenesses and differences that are not based on the notion of biological determinism.

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