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Finding a stereotype that is true: Mexicans more sociable than Americans

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Stereotypes often paint a partial or false picture of an individual or group. But now researchers have found evidence that supports a stereotype held by many in the United States – that Mexicans are more outgoing, talkative, sociable and extroverted. The finding also contradicts the way many Mexicans view themselves as being less extroverted than Americans.

A team of social psychologists from the two countries explored this paradox by having students from Mexico and the U.S. wear small digital audio recorders the size of a cell phone for two days and then analyzing their interactions. The students also filled out questionnaires that measured their sociability. The differences the researchers found are primarily cultural.

"Mexicans and Americans differed in the way they behaved socially," said Nairan Ramirez-Esparza, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Washington's Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences.

Ramirez-Esparza is a native of Mexico and began exploring the stereotype of Mexican sociability when she moved to the United States. She could see a difference in behavior while attending college.

"In Mexico people are outside a lot more and are in groups more than Americans are. The University of Texas has a lot of very nice outdoor places where students could get together. But American students didn't do that as much," she said.

The Electronically Activated Recorder worn by 54 American students from the University of Texas and 46 Mexican students at the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon in Monterrey recorded sounds for 30 seconds every 12.5 minutes. The students couldn't tell when the device was operating. Researchers later listened to and coded the recordings to determine what was going on – such as whether a conversation was occurring indoors or outdoors, in a class or hallway, how many people were involved, or whether a person was talking on the phone, using a computer or watching television.

Ramirez-Esparza said the students from the two countries exhibited distinctly different patterns of interaction with other people. Mexicans spent more time talking in person, in groups and outdoors in public while Americans were more likely to be alone and have remote interactions with people such as talking over the phone.

"Monterrey and Austin (Texas) have relatively the same weather, so that is not a factor," she said. "The students were reflecting their cultures, and culture influences how we behave. Many behaviors that differ can be explained by the terms interdependent and independent cultural selves.

"Mexicans are interdependent, which means everything is guided by being dependent on others. They spend

more times in groups, don't like to spend time alone, are more involved with family and are more conscious of what others say about them. Americans, on the other hand, are independent and basically the opposite. They learn to be independent and learn to be individuals."

The differences found in the recorded data not only showed that Mexicans behaved more sociably in their daily lives but also that the differences were substantially greater in magnitude. However, the self-report questionnaires filled out by the students painted an entirely different picture.

"In self reports, Americans overestimated the time they talk with other people while Mexicans underestimated. Self reports don't always show us what we expect to see," Ramirez-Esparza said.

She added that behavioral sociability may be problematic for Mexican-Americans who are caught between two cultures, but preliminary data seems to indicate they tend to socialize like Americans.

Source: [University of Washington](#)

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