

# 'Ni de aquí, ni de allá': Navigating two cultural identities

By **Samantha Herrera** - June 29, 2021



*Guanajuato, Mexico, founded in 1548. Mexican Americans such as Salt Lake Community College Dream Center coordinator Brenda Santoyo often return to the land of their ancestors to better understand their own cultural identities. (Erik Téllez, Unsplash)*

Cultural pride is important. But for people raised with two cultures, it can be tricky to navigate.

"Humans are creatures of habit," said Brenda Santoyo, coordinator at Salt Lake Community College's Dream Center, which works with undocumented students and mixed-status families. "We do things simply out of the tradition of doing it."

Children raised in a country different from their parents can find difficulty in balancing their identity within two cultures.

A September 2020 report by [Pew Research Center](#) showed leaning on multiple identifiers is not uncommon for Hispanic and Latino people, noting that "the use of these terms varies across immigrant generations and reflects their diverse experiences."

Generation, country of birth and use of the Spanish language all factor into which term a person identifies with.

Keiko Pozo, a speech pathology student at the University of Utah, identifies as Hispanic. She tells people she is from Peru when asked where she is from.

"That's where I was born, that's the culture I've been trying to keep," Pozo said.

Identifiers are different for everyone. Santoyo, for example, said she uses several identifiers interchangeably.

"In Mexico, I probably wouldn't say I'm Mexican American, I would just say I'm Mexican," she said, adding that her language around her identity changes depending on who she speaks with. "Over here, I would say I'm Mexican American or Chicana."

Santoyo said her use of "Chicana" depends on whether someone is familiar with the term.

### **In between diverse cultures**

Sinthia Rosado Veronica, a nursing and sociology student at SLCC, said being in-between two cultures makes life complicated. Born in Mexico but raised in the United States, Veronica's expression of culture changes depending on context.

"In my house, I go by Katy. I think of that as my name within Mexican culture," she said. "I go by Sinthia at my job and at school."

Living between two cultures also brought pressure to conform. Veronica recalled her siblings pointing out her "white people music" and being questioned on her ability to speak Spanish by other Spanish speakers.

"I used to feel in-between. 'Ni de aquí, ni de allá,'" Veronica said, using the Spanish term meaning "not from here, nor there."

Veronica said though she's been living in the United States since she was a few months old and sees it as her home, she doesn't feel American. She also struggles to identify with Mexican culture because she didn't grow up there.

It's a feeling Gisselle Ramirez, a business and communications student at Westminster College, said she recognizes as she navigates between two cultures.

"I don't feel like I fully belong in American culture," she said, explaining she has been influenced by the United States but identifies more with Mexican culture. "It's very conflicting at times."

As a child, Ramirez explained, she struggled to make sense of the differences she saw between herself and her peers, especially after moving from Texas to Utah.

"When I was younger, and I didn't understand it, I felt like, 'Why am I Mexican? Why can't I be like everyone else?'"

But as she got older and grew more comfortable, Ramirez felt more confident in her Mexican identity. Now she feels like a "weird mix" of the two cultures and that the combination feels like an additional part of her identity.

"I don't feel like I fully belong in American culture, there's things I do with the culture, but I spend so much time with my family, so I have their culture mixed in, too," Ramirez said.

## **Generational change**

The pull of two different cultures affects more than identity. It also impacts decision-making, Ramirez said.

She recalled her parents pushing against the idea of taking a gap semester during college. Her parents grew up with the mindset that being successful is based on your ability to graduate college without taking breaks in-between.

"That's been hard to navigate," Ramirez said of balancing her parents' expectations and her preferences.

Mexican parents, she said, tend to be stricter with children, especially when compared to American culture, which she sees as more lenient.

That leniency is something Ramirez said she'll borrow from American culture for her own children.

It's a notion Veronica echoed when thinking about her future. She said she won't raise her children to value machismo, the Spanish term used to describe overt and aggressive masculinity.

"If I ever have kids, don't tell them not to cry like a girl," she recalled telling her father.

Veronica notes she relates more to American views on gender roles than the views often held in Mexican culture.

American culture has influenced Pozo's decision to live separately from her family once she is married. Having lived in the U.S. since the age of seven, some American customs feel more normal than their family's customs.

"[In Peru] everyone lives in the same house. When someone gets married, they build a second floor. Eventually, everyone ends up living in one household," Pozo said. "[In America] once you're married, you move out."

## **Built connections**

Being raised in two cultures can make finding cultural pride a long process, said Santoyo, who added she has taken deliberate steps – including traveling to the city of Guanajuato – to learn more about her Mexican heritage.

"I got to see how it is on that side and compare it to what it's like over here," she said, pointing out that part of her journey has been learning about the indigenous tribe, Guamare, of which she is a descendant. "That culture shock helped me understand that there is a difference between the two and that I have a lot to learn on the Mexican side."

Still, Santoyo said, being close to Mexican culture has led her, unintentionally, to having predominantly Mexican American friends. That shared culture, she said, naturally helped

her create connections.

"I wouldn't be able to build a community without being Mexican," she noted.

Pozo embraces the connections to several cultures. She was raised with Japanese – from her mother's side – and Peruvian traditions, and began including American traditions after her family's move to the U.S.

"It's the differences that make us unique," she said.

# To Our Black Students, with Love: Letter no. 27

By **Tyler Jordan** - June 29, 2021

To Our Black Students, with Love, is a series of letters from the SLCC student body to our Black students. The Office of Diversity & Multicultural Affairs started this letter campaign to show solidarity with our students in response to the [Zoom bombing](#) that occurred during the Black History Month Poetry Slam hosted by the Black Student Union in February 2021. [Read more letters here.](#)

Black Student Union and BSU Sponsor Glory Johnson-Stanton,

I heard about the attempts of evil people to bring down your celebration. I cannot imagine how that feels, but I want you to know that there are many in our community that do support you and celebrate your efforts! Don't let these hateful people get in your way!

Tyler Jordan  
MICRON  
Process Engineering Manager

# Globe staffers talk favorite summer activities

By **Samantha Herrera** - June 29, 2021

Summer is in full swing, and The Globe staff shared their favorite activities for the season. Their favorites spanned from big activities like [water parks](#) and [concerts](#), to coffee shop visits and walks in the [park](#).

See The Globe's [Instagram](#) for inspiration on what to do this summer.

*Globe staff picks - favorite summer activities*

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*Staff photographer Sydney White t*



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