

# Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology

## **You Go Before Me, Please: Behavioral Politeness and Interdependent Self as Markers of Simpatía in Latinas**

Gloriana Rodríguez-Arauz, Nairán Ramírez-Esparza, Adrián García-Sierra, Elif G. Ikizer, and María José Fernández-Gómez

Online First Publication, October 29, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000232>

### CITATION

Rodríguez-Arauz, G., Ramírez-Esparza, N., García-Sierra, A., Ikizer, E. G., & Fernández-Gómez, M. J. (2018, October 29). You Go Before Me, Please: Behavioral Politeness and Interdependent Self as Markers of Simpatía in Latinas. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000232>

## BRIEF REPORT

# You Go Before Me, Please: Behavioral Politeness and Interdependent Self as Markers of *Simpatía* in Latinas

Gloriana Rodríguez-Arauz, Nairán Ramírez-Esparza,  
and Adrián García-Sierra  
University of Connecticut

Elif G. Ikizer  
Yale University

María José Fernández-Gómez  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

**Objectives:** Previous research has documented that Latinos/as value the cultural script *Simpatía*, a tendency to be kind, polite, and focus on others. No previous study has been able to capture the behavioral markers of *Simpatía* in a naturalistic environment. **Method:** Behavioral cross-sectional audio data were collected on the daily interactions between Latina and White European mothers with their partners and other adults using a digital audio recorder across 4 days. A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the data. **Results:** Latinas exhibited increased behavioral *Simpatía* when talking to other adults compared to White European counterparts. Additionally, Latina mothers chose as a main character of their conversations other people rather than themselves. Conversely, White European mothers chose themselves as a main character of their conversations instead of other people. **Conclusions:** These results show that core features of *Simpatía* (kindness and focus on others) can be found at the behavioral level in the environment that Latina mothers face on a daily basis. Implications for the cultural self and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** *Simpatía*, Latinas, politeness, social behaviors, interdependent self

Consider the following two statements given by Latino/a shoppers when asked about their interactions with salespeople in the United States (Fowler, Wesley, & Vazquez, 2007):

Retail associates are kind and nice to us, they ask us how we are and help when we ask. They speak to us when we enter and exit the store.

They say goodbye when we are leaving: since the moment I step into a store they provide good service, they say hello, come in. They even ask me how I am doing and when I leave they say goodbye and everything else. I love that.

These two statements exemplify a core value for Latinos/as when they interact with other people. They want to be treated with politeness, respect, to be asked about how they are and establish warm interactions. They, in turn, behave in this way toward others (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009). This way of treating others has been defined as the cultural value of *Simpatía*, a pattern of culture-specific behaviors that characterize people of Latin American descent. According to Triandis, Marín, Lisansky, and Betancourt (1984), *Simpatía* is a pattern of social interaction that facilitates positive social relationships. *Simpatía* includes behaviors such as being polite, kind, and respectful to others; there is emphasis in showing friendliness and avoiding conflict by accentuating the positive behaviors and deescalating the negative behaviors that might lead to it. In addition, the *Simpatía* cultural value emphasizes placing the well-being of others before the well-being of oneself; the *Simpático* individual tends to show conformity and ability to share in others' feelings in a significant way. *Simpatía* as a cultural value has been highly endorsed by different subgroups within the Latino/a population. For example, it has been documented that members of Latino/a groups from countries such as Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and regions like Central America, the Caribbean, and South America score highly on measures of *Simpatía*, compared to White European counterparts (Kim, Soliz, Orellana, & Alamilla, 2009). *Simpatía*, along with other core Latino/a cultural values, has been more strongly endorsed by

---

Gloriana Rodríguez-Arauz and Nairán Ramírez-Esparza, Department of Psychological Sciences, University of Connecticut; Adrián García-Sierra, Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences, University of Connecticut; Elif G. Ikizer, Department of Psychology, Yale University; María José Fernández-Gómez, Psychology Department, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

This research was supported by the University of Connecticut Research Foundation Faculty Grant and by the National Science Foundation of Learning Program grant to the LIFE Center (SBE-0354453).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gloriana Rodríguez-Arauz, who is now at School of Psychology, University of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Facio Campus, San Pedro, San José, Costa Rica. E-mail: [gloriana.rodriguez@uconn.edu](mailto:gloriana.rodriguez@uconn.edu)

first-generation Latino/as compared to others that have been more assimilated into the U.S. culture (Kim & Abreu, 2001).

The *Simpatía* cultural value fosters a sociocultural mode of interaction that has been linked to positive physical and behavioral outcomes in Latinos/as. For example, a study done with 5,313 Latinos/as found that higher levels of self-reported *Simpatía* predicted lower odds of hypertension in Latino men (Merz et al., 2016). Another study conducted with 226 Latino/a adolescents found that increased endorsement of *Simpatía* was associated with sexual abstinence and being older at sexual debut for females; a similar study found that increased levels of *Simpatía* were related to abstinence from alcohol in Latino/a adolescents (Ma et al., 2014, 2017).

Previous evidence has linked *Simpatía* to positive outcomes in Latinos/as, utilizing specific *Simpatía* scales. However, could it be that indicators of *Simpatía* are more prevalent when Latinos/as are compared to White European Americans? Previous research has approached this question using a broader personality framework. For example, Ramírez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martínez, Potter, and Pennebaker (2006) tested differences in Agreeableness using the Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998; John & Srivastava, 1999) between large samples of White European Americans and Mexican participants. The authors hypothesized that Mexicans would score higher in Agreeableness, since this trait taps into core features of *Simpatía* such as being warm, helpful, considerate, and kind. Interestingly, Ramírez-Esparza and colleagues (2006) found that Mexicans scored lower on these traits than White Europeans.

What could account for this paradoxical finding, in which Mexicans, whose core trait is *Simpatía*, actually score lower than White Europeans in how aggregable they are? Ramírez-Esparza and colleagues (2006) argued that responses on self-reports might reflect changes in cultural values rather than differences in personality. This argument derives from the idea that one of the core elements associated with *Simpatía* is a modest style of self-presentation (see Díaz-Loving & Draguns, 1999; Triandis et al., 1984). Furthermore, although there is no direct evidence on the relation between *Simpatía* and modesty bias in self-reports, there is evidence that individuals from collectivist cultures demonstrate a modesty bias when responding to socially desirable traits (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Agreeableness is a socially desirable trait (Paulhus, Bruce, & Trapnell, 1995), especially for Latinos/as, who aim for conflict avoidance and value modesty and humility. Ironically, for Latinos/as to present themselves as agreeable would itself be disagreeable because it would denote arrogance. Consequently, when participants answer to socially desirable traits, the modesty value is activated, and the need to sound modest leads them to diminish their standing on Agreeableness (see Ramírez-Esparza, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2008).

The paradox resulting from using self-reports puts forward the need to capture this construct using alternative methods of data collection and analyses. Ramírez-Esparza, Chung, Sierra-Otero, and Pennebaker (2012) undertook this task by analyzing open-ended self-descriptions of personality made by Mexicans and White European Americans. Using a text analysis strategy, the authors found that Mexicans tended to use words that clearly indicated the exercise of *Simpatía* as a core dimension in self-descriptions. For example, they found a language cluster that

contained words like *honest*, *sensible*, *kind*, and *devoted*. In contrast, White Europeans did not show such a dimension on their self-descriptions (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2012). Hence, with the usage of alternative methods of data collection and analyses, *Simpatía* finds a way of expressing itself, and its occurrence can be compared with other cultural groups.

Past evidence seems to link *Simpatía* to improved physical, behavioral, and performance outcomes. *Simpatía* has been measured in these studies through self-reports, and these instruments have not captured the essence of this construct. Innovative methods of data collection such as language analysis have made *Simpatía* more visible and able to compare across cultures. No previous study has been able to capture the behavioral markers of *Simpatía* in a naturalistic environment within the Latino/a population. Moreover, no previous study has been able to capture these behavioral markers and compare them against those provided by White European participants in a similar natural context. In this study, we offer behavioral evidence for *Simpatía* being present in the context of the daily routine of Latina and White European mothers. We used an innovative technology to collect audio data on the daily interactions by these mothers with other adults.

In this single-study report, we have three overall goals. Our first goal was to replicate previous findings regarding the expression of *Simpatía* on self-reports. These studies found that Latinos/as score lower on Agreeableness than White European Americans (McCrae, Terracciano, & the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005; Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2006). We hypothesized that Latina mothers will score lower in personality reports of Agreeableness, compared to White European counterparts. The second goal was to extract a behavioral expression of *Simpatía* in everyday daily social conversations. The third goal was to observe how *Simpatía* is expressed in social interactions by analyzing who is the main character(s) in the mothers' conversations. Specifically, we argue that *Simpatía*'s core value of modesty will influence Latina mothers to choose others as main characters rather than themselves in their conversations.

### ***Simpatía*: Politeness and Deference Expressed in Social Interactions**

One way that *Simpatía* can be tackled behaviorally is by means of how polite Latinos/as can be in their daily lives. In their seminal paper, Triandis and colleagues (1984) included pleasantness, courtesy, and manners within the positive behaviors that had to be enhanced within the *Simpático* worldview, along with deescalating negative behaviors such as arguments and confrontations. The key features of politeness and a desire to evade conflict have been included as core dimensions in scales that strive to measure *Simpatía*. For example, Griffith, Joe, Chatham, and Simpson's (1998) scale includes items that measure politeness (e.g., "were you polite to others?"), as well as the aim to avoid confrontation with others (e.g., "did you try to avoid conflict with others?"). Unger and colleagues' (2006) scale assesses the need to maintain harmonious interactions by including items in their scale such as "I try not to say things that make other people feel bad."

How can politeness be detected in the natural environment? Manners and courtesy in interpersonal relations are a key feature of *Simpatía*. In addition, these expressions can be accompanied with showing deference, modesty, and usage of compliments to-

ward the other person (Triandis et al., 1984). Therefore, we hypothesize that Latina mothers will show behavioral politeness to a greater extent to other adults in their everyday interactions compared to their White European counterparts.

### ***Simpatía*: Who is the Main Character of the Conversations?**

*Simpatía* can also be approached from the point of view of who is the main character of Latina mothers' conversations when talking to others. For example, the main character in their conversations can be other people and their affairs, as opposed to themselves. This goes in line with the premise that *Simpatía* also encompasses the expression of modesty (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2008). Expressing one's needs as the primary goal in interactions would go against the preservation of harmony, and it would indicate arrogance. This core principle of *Simpatía* also goes in line with collectivistic values, where the well-being of the group is valued above that of the individual person. A collectivistic worldview, where others take a more prevalent role in the definition of individual identity, is highly prevalent in Mexicans and Latinos/as in general (Hofstede, 1991). For example, in their text analysis study with open-ended personality descriptions, Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2012) found that Mexicans tended to self-describe in terms of their relationships to close others (e.g., words like *parents*, *boyfriend*, *family*, *kids*) and the aim to be *Simpático* (e.g., words like *affectionate*, *honest*, *sensible*, *kind*). These self-definitions speak to the centrality that relationships have to one's identity, which is characteristic of collectivistic cultures.

In contrast, an individualistic worldview is defined as one where the individual's needs are valued more than the needs of the group (Hofstede, 1991). This worldview is more prevalent in individuals of White European descent; the primary source of identity for an individual is the self and its experiences, desires, and efforts (Markus, 1977). Ramírez-Esparza et al. (2012) found that White Europeans, contrary to Mexican participants, tended to use more words related to their experiences as individual people. For example, they used words related to their college experience, their daily routines, and their social lives (e.g., words like *class*, *college*, *sports*, *group*, *social*). These ways of defining oneself are in line with an identity centered on the individual, which is characteristic of individualistic cultures.

Our third goal aims to use the content of the conversations to detect behavioral emphasis on others or in oneself. We expect to detect this emphasis on others or in oneself in the natural conversations that mothers have with people in their lives by analyzing the preponderant character present in these conversations. For example, is the mother talking about herself and issues related to her or is she talking about other people and issues related to them? We expected that Latina mothers will have their speech focused outside of themselves, in accordance with collectivistic and *Simpatía* values. Conversely, White European mothers will talk more about themselves in accordance with individualistic values.

In summary, previous studies have studied *Simpatía* only by means of self-reports or by using text analysis. No studies have studied *Simpatía* behaviorally. Besides the anecdotal evidence mentioned in 1984 by Triandis and colleagues (that in professional conferences in Latin America, attendants hug and kiss more and are late for sessions, due to finding friends on their way to them),

no other study has documented behavioral markers of this script (e.g., politeness and emphasis on others) and has compared those markers to those provided by mainstream White European subjects. In this preliminary single-study report, we aim to address these gaps in the literature.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

We utilized data that were collected for a large-scale study at a research institute in the Seattle area. Latino and White European parents of approximately 1-year-old infants were recruited. Both infants and their mothers (as well as a few fathers) were asked to wear a digital recorder to capture their natural social behaviors and conversations. The data captured by the infants' recorder have been transcribed, coded, and published elsewhere (García-Sierra, Ramírez-Esparza, & Kuhl, 2016; Ramírez-Esparza, García-Sierra, & Kuhl, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). Here we focus on the data captured by the recorders worn by the mothers.

**Latina mothers.** Mothers from families who identify themselves as Latinas were considered part of this study. The final sample was 26 mothers. Only 25 mothers provided their age ( $M = 32.14$ ,  $SD = 4.94$ ). Twenty-four families' provided information about their income (average annual income = \$50,000–\$75,000; minimum, \$20,000–\$25,000; maximum, \$100,000–\$200,000). All families had an infant of about 1 year of age. Twenty-four families reported that the infant lived at home with the mother and father, and two reported that the infant lived only with the mother. Furthermore, six families had one other older child living at home, and six families had two other older children living at home. Two families reported having grandparents living at home, and one family reported having an uncle living at home.

Twenty-three of the 26 mothers responded to a language background questionnaire. One mother was born in Peru, one in Puerto Rico, one in El Salvador, two in Venezuela, three in Colombia, seven in Mexico, and eight in the United States. Mothers had been living in the United States for an average of 16.20 years ( $SD = 9.68$ ). Thirty-nine percent of the mothers preferred to use Spanish in daily life, 15% preferred English, and 35% preferred both languages.

**White European mothers.** Mothers from families who identify themselves as White and who spoke only English at home were considered part of this study. One mother who identified herself as African American was not included in the analyses. The final sample was 24 mothers. Mothers' average age was 35.31 years ( $SD = 6.04$ ). Twenty-one families provided information about their income (average annual income = \$50,000–\$75,000; minimum, \$25,000–\$50,000; maximum, \$200,000 and above). All the families had an infant of about 1 year of age. Twenty-four families reported that the infant lived at home with the mother and father. Furthermore, four families had one other older child living at home, and one family had two other children living at home. One family reported having the grandparents living at home.

### **Self-Reported *Simpatía***

*Simpatía* was measured using the nine items of the Agreeableness subscale of the English version of the Big Five Inventory



(BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999). This subscale was chosen because its items capture the core features of the construct of interest. For example, the idea that a *Simpático* person is polite, kind, and considerate with others (Triandis et al., 1984) is assessed by the items “is considerate and kind to almost everyone” and “is helpful and unselfish with others.” In addition, the idea that *Simpatía* is related to promoting harmony in relationships by avoiding conflict and emphasizing positive behaviors (Díaz-Loving & Draguns, 1999; Triandis et al., 1984) is captured by the item “likes to cooperate with others” and by the reverse code of items “starts quarrels with others” and “tends to find fault with others.” All participants responded to the questionnaire in English to avoid results being confounded by cultural biases (i.e., modesty can be activated by using questionnaires in Spanish; Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2008). Reliabilities for this subscale are .80 for White American mothers and .70 for Latina mothers.

### Behavioral *Simpatía*

**Data collection.** Families received two digital language processors (DLPs) and an armband to hold the DLP. They were instructed to record 8 continuous hours each day for 4 days (including 2 weekdays and 2 weekend days), yielding approximately 32 hr of recorded audio data from each family. Parents were also asked to complete a daily activity diary, noting the most relevant activities for each day. Of the 24 White European families, 3 fathers wore the recorder, and of the 26 Latino families, 1 father wore the recorder.

**Data preparation.** LENA software was used to analyze language input and to efficiently locate intervals with the language activity of interest (i.e., adult speech) in each participant’s large data set of recorded audio for further analysis of social interactions. The audio data were transferred from the DLP to a computer and analyzed by LENA software employing advanced speech-identification algorithms that automatically analyze audio files and produce reports of language activity. The LENA algorithms produced a total adult word count across all 4 days for each participant in the study. The accuracy of these values has been established in previous studies (see Oller et al., 2010; Xu, Yapanel, & Gray, 2009, for the English language and Weisleder & Fernald, 2013, for the Spanish language).

We coded social interaction based on 30-s intervals, a technique that has been reliably used for over a decade (e.g., Mehl, Pennebaker, Crow, Dabbs, & Price, 2001; Mehl, Vazire, Ramírez-Esparza, Slatcher, & Pennebaker, 2007; Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2014) and was employed in our previous study with infants and children (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2017a, 2017b). In order to efficiently identify short 30-s intervals with language activity (i.e., adult speech), the audio files were then further processed using the LENA Advanced Data Extractor Tool (ADEX). This tool provides outputs for individual speech segments as short as a fraction of a second and automatically calculates adult word count. The outputs are then aggregated in 30-s intervals. For example, an 8-hr recording yields approximately 600–960 intervals with adult word counts after the data are segmented into 30-s intervals. Intervals with zero adult words are removed and 50 intervals are selected from the remaining intervals across the entire day, chosen from those with the highest adult word counts. Using this approach, we avoid selecting intervals for coding when there is no social activ-

ity, only silence or noise (e.g., the adult is alone at home, the adult was not wearing the recorder). Ideally, the final data set would include a total of 200 intervals for each participant; however, sometimes fewer intervals were selected if data were not available for participants (e.g., participant did not wear the recorder for the 8 hr). On average, 184 ( $SD = 33.05$ ) were transcribed for the White European families and 190.42 ( $SD = 17.28$ ) for the Latino families. Across all 24 White European families, a total of 4,422 intervals were coded, and across all 26 Latino families, a total of 4,951 intervals were coded.

### Coding of Social Interaction Variables

The Social Environment Coding of Sound Inventory (SECSI) was designed to assess moment-to-moment naturalistic social behaviors, environments, and interactions in different contexts (Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003; Mehl et al., 2007; Ramírez-Esparza, Mehl, Álvarez-Bermúdez, & Pennebaker, 2009). The SECSI was adapted for the goals of this investigation, and the following categories were used: (1) mother–father (the mother is talking to the father), (2) mother–other(s) (mother is talking to other adult(s)), (3) *Simpatía* (showing manners, deference, and respect), (4) the mother is talking about herself, and (5) the mother is talking about other people during the interval. See the “Further Data Transformation” section for a better definition of the behavioral categories to assess *Simpatía*.

Identified intervals were coded for each participant by seven trained coders (three Latino Spanish-English bilingual coders and four White European monolingual coders). Coders were provided with basic information about each interval (date, day of the week, time of day, and the time stamp of the audio recording) and the participants’ end-of-day diaries to supplement audio recordings. Transcribing software played the specific 30-s interval for coding based on the time stamp entered. The coders listened to each 30-s interval and coded each SECSI category associated with the interval. In a given 30-s interval, the coders entered “YES” if the behavior of interest occurred. The resulting matrix of YES and NO responses indicated that a specific SECSI category occurred or did not occur in that interval. SECSI categories are nonexhaustive; that is, several SECSI categories could be coded within a single interval (e.g., mother is talking to father or other adults, there is politeness, and she is talking about herself vs. others).

The coded data matrices containing YES and NO responses for each participant were aggregated to provide relative time use data by calculating the percentage of intervals coded for each category. For example, a relative time use estimate of 35% for the SECSI category “mother speaks to father” indicated that for a participant with 200 intervals, this category was coded YES in 70 of the 200 coded intervals for that participant.

All coders were tested independently with a training file from a White European participant, which was used to evaluate intercoder reliability. The five categories used in the analysis produced an average intraclass correlation of .80—indicating effective training and reliable coding—based on a two-way random effects model (ICC [2, k]; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). See Table 1 for intercoder reliability for each of the five SECSI categories.

Table 1  
Social Interaction Variable Reliabilities

Category	Intercoder reliability
1. Mother–father	.92
2. Mother–adults	.93
3. Behavioral <i>Simpatía</i>	.60
4. Talking about herself	.70
5. Talking about others	.81

Note. Intercoder reliabilities were computed as intraclass correlations, ICC (2, k), from a training set of 100 intervals that were independently coded by seven coders.

### Further Data Transformation

Since in this investigation we focused on social interactions that resulted from having bidirectional conversations with adults, we transformed the data to consider only conversations that occurred with the father and/or other adults and ignored conversations that were directed to the infant or other children. Interactions with the infant are not necessarily bidirectional, since the infants' level of language development is at the stage of using simple or complex babbling (see Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2014, 2017a).

The behavioral *Simpatía* category was considered for analyses if the mother spoke to any adult(s) showing behaviors such as manners, modesty, and respect, with an emphasis on showing friendliness and avoiding conflict. These resulted in the following subcategory: (6) *Simpatía—adults*.

The *talking about herself* category was included for analyses if the mother spoke to any adult(s) and the topic of conversation was centered on feelings, emotions, and events that happened to her. These resulted in the following subcategory: (7) *talking about herself—adults*.

Finally, the category *talking about others* was included for analyses if the mother spoke to any adult(s) and talked about their partners, family members, or other people. These resulted in the following subcategory: (8) *talking about others—adults*.

The data were then converted into relative time use estimates by calculating the percentage of valid intervals included in a specific subcategory across all coded intervals (e.g., percentage of intervals politeness—adults).

### Results

We first performed correlational analyses to observe the relation between the *Simpatía* transformed categories and self-reported

*Simpatía*, independently for Latina and White European mothers. Table 2 shows that all correlations between self-reported *Simpatía* and the transformed *Simpatía* behavioral categories turned out to be nonsignificant for both groups. The correlation between the talking about herself with other adults category correlated significantly with the talking about others with other adults category only for Latina mothers,  $r = .54, p < .01$ ; the talking about others with other adults category correlated positively with the talking about herself with other adults category only in the case of White European mothers,  $r = .46, p < .05$ .

### Self-Reported *Simpatía*

To test for differences in self-reported *Simpatía*, we looked at ratings on the BFI provided by the mothers who participated in the study. The data from four questionnaires were excluded from analyses, because fathers responded to these questionnaires instead of the mothers who wore the recorders. The final sample for this analysis comprised 26 Latina mothers and 20 White European mothers. An independent samples *t* test between the scores of the Agreeableness subscale of the BFI indicated a nonsignificant difference in *Simpatía* between Latina mothers ( $M = 4.00, SD = 0.52$ ) and White European mothers ( $M = 4.03, SD = 0.55$ ),  $t(40) = -.41, p = .68$  (see Figure 1).

### Behavioral *Simpatía*

*Simpatía* was initially operationalized as behavioral politeness, using Triandis et al.'s (1984) definition (e.g., someone who is polite, kind, and courteous with others). An independent samples *t* test indicated a significant difference in levels of behavioral *Simpatía* between Latina mothers ( $M = 30, SD = 15$ ) and White European mothers ( $M = 13, SD = 14$ ) when they talked to adult conversation partners,  $t(48) = -4.39, p = .00, d = 1.17$ . Latina mothers showed significantly more behavioral *Simpatía* with other adults than White European mothers.

*Simpatía* was also assessed by analyzing the main character of the conversations that these mothers had with other adults. This taps into a core feature outlined by Triandis et al. (1984); *Simpático* people shift the attentional focus from themselves to others, so they might talk less about themselves and more about others. The opposite should happen for White Europeans: The character of their conversations will be themselves more frequently, as opposed to others. An independent samples *t* test indicated a significant difference between Latina mothers ( $M = 16, SD = 8$ ) and White European mothers ( $M = 23, SD = 13$ )

Table 2  
Correlations Between Social Interaction Categories and Self-Reported *Simpatía*

White European mothers	Latino mothers			
	Self-reported <i>Simpatía</i>	Behavioral <i>Simpatía</i>	Talking about herself	Talking about others
1. Self-reported <i>Simpatía</i>	1	.35	-.12	-.19
2. Behavioral <i>Simpatía</i>	.02	1	.36	-.04
3. Talking about herself	.31	-.16	1	.54**
4. Talking about others	-.12	.24	.46*	1

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

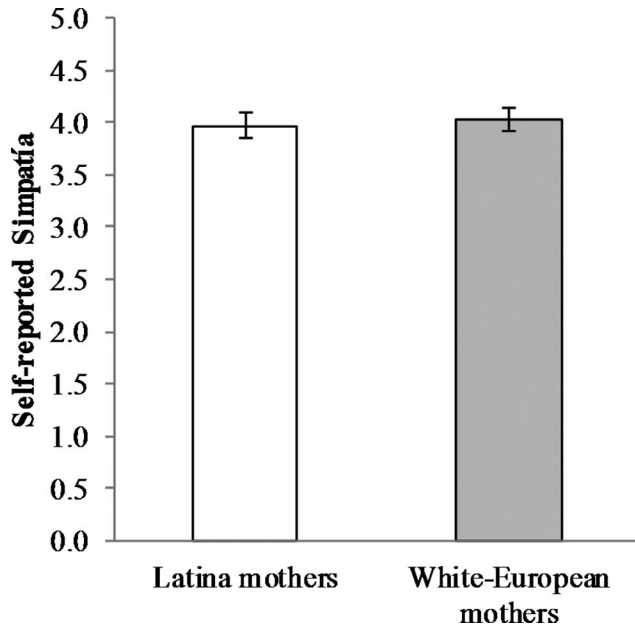


Figure 1. Means by cultural group (i.e., Latina mothers vs. White European mothers) on self-reported *Simpatía*.

when talking about themselves with other adult conversation partners,  $t(48) = 2.47, p = .02, d = .65$ . Latina mothers talked significantly less about themselves with other adults than White European mothers (see Figure 2). An independent samples  $t$  test also indicated a significant difference between Latina mothers ( $M = 23, SD = 10$ ) and White European mothers ( $M = 16, SD = 11$ ) when talking about others with other adult conversation partners,  $t(48) = -2.12, p = .04, d = .67$ . Latina mothers talked significantly more about others with other adults than White European mothers (see Figure 2).

## Discussion

*Simpatía* is a cultural script that has been used to describe a pattern of social interaction that characterizes individuals of Latino descent (Triandis et al., 1984). *Simpatía* includes sociocultural

behaviors such as warmth and being polite, kind, and respectful (Triandis et al., 1984). After analyzing audio segments on the everyday routines of Latina mothers and contrasting them against similar data collected with White European mothers, we were able to offer evidence of behavioral markers of the cultural script of *Simpatía*.

Our first goal was to replicate previous findings on cultural differences in self-reported *Simpatía*. We hypothesized that Latinas would score lower in this trait compared to White European mothers. Our hypothesis was not supported; nonsignificant differences were found for this trait between the two cultural groups. One possible explanation for this finding has to do with how cultural background might impact personality self-report responses. It is possible that the Latina respondents, since they are in the United States and are constantly cued to display more individualistic values, are less motivated to display modesty when answering a personality measure. Context might have played a role, since it could act as a culturally relevant cue that motivated a shift toward values, beliefs, and attitudes more in line with a mainstream American culture (i.e., emphasis on the independent self, high self-reliance, high sociability, etc.). This shift might have hindered the activation of modesty, which is characteristic of *Simpatía*. It is also possible that the small sample size prevented the expression of differences in Agreeableness. It is worth noting, however, that the correlation between self-reported *Simpatía* and behavioral *Simpatía*, although not significant, was positive and moderate in strength for Latina mothers. This finding hints to the fact that both measurements go in the same direction, and it is possible that with a larger sample, the correlation would have reached significance. This idea deserves deeper exploration in further studies.

As a second goal, we expected to find differences in the levels of behavioral *Simpatía* by Latina and White European mothers. Specifically, we expected that Latina mothers would show more behavioral *Simpatía* compared to White European counterparts. Our results support this hypothesis; Latina mothers were in fact more polite, agreeable, and kind when talking to their partners and other adults than White European mothers. It is important to note that by using an innovative approach, we were able to provide evidence for the fact that Latinas express *Simpatía* through their natural everyday interactions. This result goes in line with previous

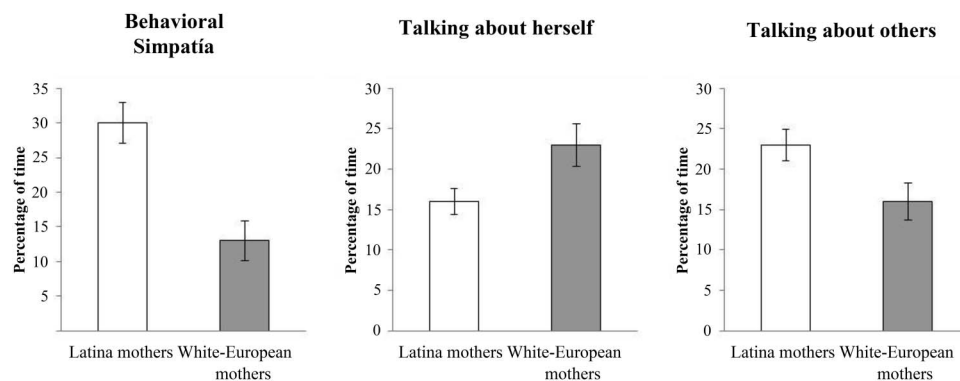


Figure 2. Means on behavioral markers of *Simpatía* by cultural group (i.e., Latina mothers vs. White European mothers).

studies, where self-reports are not usually sufficient to provide evidence for *Simpatía*. For example, Ramírez-Esparza and colleagues (2006) showed that English-Spanish bilinguals showed increased Agreeableness when they answered a self-report in English than in Spanish; however, they showed more *Simpatía*-related behaviors in an experimental social interaction task in Spanish.

These results add behavioral evidence to the claim that *Simpatía* is detectable in social interactions captured within the daily routine of Latinos/as. By using politeness more frequently, Latinos/as exercise one of the core features of this cultural script, which is to appear modest, likable, and considerate to others. As stated earlier, being polite is considered one of the key features of *Simpatía*, and *Simpatía*, in turn, has been defined as a key feature of how Latinos/as interact (Domínguez-Espinosa & Velasco-Matus, 2017). This behavioral evidence provides support for detecting this cultural script and traces its occurrence within other culturally relevant interactions, such as those within the health, parenting, and academic contexts (García, Zuñiga, & Lagon, 2017; Mogro-Wilson, Rojas, & Haynes, 2016).

Our third and final goal had to do with testing our hypothesis regarding the main character of the conversations these mothers had with adults. Specifically, we expected that for Latina mothers, the main character appearing in their conversations would be others and their affairs, as opposed to themselves. White European mothers would display an opposite pattern: The main character within their conversations with other adults would be themselves, as opposed to others. Our results provide support for this hypothesis as well. The main character of Latina mothers' conversations were other people rather than themselves. Focusing on others serves the purpose of organizing social interactions in a way that is highly consistent with a collectivistic worldview. Within collectivism, it is highly valued to put others' views and needs ahead of our own, so interactions are smooth, considerate, and satisfactory for both parties (Hofstede, 1991). Within this worldview, the self is construed around the basic connectedness of human beings to each other (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Since *Simpatía* enables the facilitation of social relationships and avoidance of conflict, it honors the primacy of relationships for one's identity and reinforces a more collectivistic life outlook. In contrast, White European mothers do in fact talk more about themselves. This is also consistent with a more individualistic cultural view, where the person as an individual is the focus of identity. Hence, it makes sense that the conversations in natural interactions gravitate toward the activities, desires, and worries of oneself.

### Future Directions, Strengths, Implications, and Limitations

The results outlined in this report lend themselves to pose interesting research questions for the future. For example, since *Simpatía* can be traced behaviorally in politeness and the character of conversations, can these indicators be further linked to relationship well-being? Can these indicators also be related to individual well-being? Previous evidence has shown that *Simpatía* as measured through self-reports is linked to health-protective factors (Ma et al., 2014, 2017) and increased intent of helping others (Levine, Norenzayan, & Philbrick, 2001). Would the same linkages exist if behavioral indicators were used?

We consider that the main strength of this article is that it transitions the abstract discussion on the occurrence of *Simpatía* toward a more concrete ground. Since the construct of *Simpatía* was first introduced by Triandis et al. (1984), no further research has been able to provide behavioral evidence for it. We offer behavioral, naturally occurring support for the notion that *Simpatía* does take place across social interactions in Latinos/as, and this allows us to move away from anecdotal and self-reported evidence.

A related strength of this article is that the evidence provided here was collected using a naturalistic approach, which adds tremendously to the ecological validity of *Simpatía*. Our data were derived from naturally occurring interactions that enrich other methods of data collection such as self-reports.

The findings outlined in this article, although preliminary, have interesting implications for psychological practice. For instance, understanding that people of Latino/a descent exercise *Simpatía* at a behavioral level would inform educational professionals on how to address conflict situations involving them in educational settings. In the clinical setting, therapists who understand behavioral expressions of *Simpatía* can feel more empathy toward the cognitive and behavioral complexities that make up clients with Latino/a descent and would provide them with tools to promote their well-being in a culturally sensitive way.

Our study has limitations that have to be considered carefully. For example, our sample restricts itself to Latina and White European mothers. Future studies would benefit from including both single men and women and women in committed relationships with no children. This would extend our findings to the broader cultural groups of Latinos/as and White Europeans.

A second limitation has to do with how this study used ethnicity as a proxy to assess cultural processes. Future investigations would benefit from including additional and explicit assessments of constructs such as familism (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Marín, 1993), collectivism (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2009, 2012), and assertiveness to confirm that these values are stronger in the Latinos/as and to test if they converge with behavioral evidence of *Simpatía*. For example, work done with Mexican samples on assertiveness has revealed that Mexicans might display a nuanced version of this trait, which has been called indirect assertiveness, which means that Mexicans might try to be assertive by controlling situations through affective means and through the trust on powerful others. This dimension of the trait has not been documented in the original composition of the assertiveness construct (Castaños, Reyes Lagunes, Rivera Aragón, & Díaz Loving, 2010; Flores-Galaz, 2002). Future studies would benefit importantly from incorporating these self-reports, which would provide a more complete picture of underlying cultural processes.

A third limitation of this study is that we present the Latinas as a monolithic group, disregarding the heterogeneity of the Latino culture. Although *Simpatía* has been recognized as a cultural script that is prevalent among Latinos from different subgroups (see Kim et al., 2009), it is possible that each Latino group embraces *Simpatía* at different levels and expresses it differently. Furthermore, it is important to consider that behavioral *Simpatía* could be affected by the geographical location of the study. For example, evidence has shown that people from the West Coast score higher in Agreeableness than people from the East Coast (Rentfrow, Gosling, & Potter, 2008).



A fourth limitation has to do with using an imposed approach to assess self-reported *Simpatía*. That is, a questionnaire that was developed within the English-speaking world for English-speaking populations was imposed on the Latina mothers. It is possible that other more culturally nuanced assessments would converge more precisely with behavioral *Simpatía*.

Finally, additional limitations of the study are inherent to naturalistic studies: Sample sizes are small, and the samples are not equivalent regarding socioeconomic characteristics. Hence, our results have to be taken cautiously, and careful replications are in order.

## Conclusions

This single-study report provides preliminary behavioral evidence for *Simpatía*, a mode of interaction that has been consistently reported to occur in Latinos/as. Latina mothers behaved more *Simpático* and talked more about others than White European mothers, who talked more about themselves. It is of interest for future investigations to test if *Simpatía* can be tackled behaviorally in other ways to add to the strength of this construct.

## References

- Benet-Martínez, V., & John, O. P. (1998). Los Cinco Grandes across cultures and ethnic groups: Multitrait multimethod analyses of the Big Five in Spanish and English. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*, 729–750. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.3.729>
- Castaños, S., Reyes Lagunes, I., Rivera Aragón, S., & Díaz Loving, R. (2010). Assertivity's Measurement Standardization by Gambrell and Richey-II. *Revista Iberoamericana de Diagnóstico y Evaluación Psicológica, 1*, 27–50.
- Díaz-Loving, R., & Draguns, J. G. (1999). Culture, meaning, and personality in Mexico and in the United States. In Y.-T. Lee, C. R. McCauley, & J. G. Draguns (Eds.), *Personality and person perception across cultures* (pp. 103–126). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Domínguez-Espinosa, A., & Velasco-Matus, P. W. (2017). Sympathy, modesty, and arrogance: Part and parcel of the Mexican personality profile. *Psicología Iberoamericana, 25*, 8–20.
- Flores-Galaz, M. (2002). Asertividad: Una habilidad necesaria en el mundo de hoy [Assertivity: a necessary skill in today's world]. *Revista de la Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, 221*, 34–47.
- Fowler, D. C., Wesley, S. C., & Vazquez, M. E. (2007). Simpatico in store retailing: How immigrant Hispanic emic interpret U.S. store atmospherics and interactions with sales associates. *Journal of Business Research, 60*, 50–59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.09.002>
- García, A. A., Zuñiga, J. A., & Lagon, C. (2017). A personal touch: The most important strategy for recruiting Latino research participants. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 28*, 342–347. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1043659616644958>
- García-Sierra, A., Ramírez-Esparza, N., & Kuhl, P. K. (2016). Relationships between quantity of language input and brain responses in bilingual and monolingual infants. *International Journal of Psychophysiology, 110*, 1–17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2016.10.004>
- Griffith, J. D., Joe, G. W., Chatham, L. R., & Simpson, D. D. (1998). The development and validation of a simpatía scale for Hispanics entering drug treatment. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 20*, 468–482. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/07399863980204004>
- Heine, S. J., & Lehman, D. R. (1997). The cultural construction of self-enhancement: An examination of group-serving biases. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 1268–1283. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.6.1268>
- Heine, S. J., & Renshaw, K. (2002). Interjudge agreement, self-enhancement, and liking: Cross-cultural divergences. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 578–587. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167202288002>
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Culture and organizations: Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival*. London, England: McGraw-Hill.
- Holloway, R. A., Waldrip, A. M., & Ickes, W. (2009). Evidence that a simpático self-schema accounts for differences in the self-concepts and social behavior of Latinos versus Whites (and Blacks). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*, 1012–1028. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0013883>
- John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999). The Big Five Trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives. In L. A. Pervin, O. P. John, L. A. Pervin, & O. P. John (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 102–138). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Kim, B. K., & Abreu, J. M. (2001). Acculturation measurement: Theory, current instruments, and future directions. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, C. M. Alexander, J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 394–424). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, B. K., Soliz, A., Orellana, B., & Alamilla, S. G. (2009). Latino/a Values Scale: Development, reliability, and validity. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development, 42*, 71–91. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0748175609336861>
- Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., Matsumoto, H., & Norasakkunkit, V. (1997). Individual and collective processes in the construction of the self: Self-enhancement in the United States and self-criticism in Japan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 1245–1267. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.6.1245>
- Levine, R. V., Norenzayan, A., & Philbrick, K. (2001). Cross-cultural differences in helping strangers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32*, 543–560. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022101032005002>
- Lugo Steidel, A. G., & Contreras, J. M. (2003). A new familism scale for use with Latino populations. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 25*, 312–330.
- Ma, M., Malcolm, L. R., Díaz-Albertini, K., Klinoff, V. A., Leeder, E., Barrientos, S., & Kibler, J. L. (2014). Latino cultural values as protective factors against sexual risks among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 37*, 1215–1225. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2014.08.012>
- Ma, M., Malcolm, L. R., Díaz-Albertini, K., Sánchez, J. C., Simpson, B., Cortes, L., & Kibler, J. L. (2017). Cultural assets and substance use among Hispanic adolescents. *Health Education & Behavior, 44*, 326–331. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1090198116659440>
- Marín, G. (1993). Influence of acculturation on familism and self identification among Hispanics. In M. E. Bernal & G. P. Knight (Eds.), *Ethnic identity: Formation and transmission among Hispanics and other minorities* (pp. 181–196). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Markus, H. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35*, 63–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.35.2.63>
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*, 224–253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224>
- McCrae, R. R., Terracciano, A., & the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project. (2005). Universal features of personality traits from the observer's perspective: Data from 50 cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 547–561. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.547>
- Mehl, M. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2003). The social dynamics of a cultural upheaval: Social interactions surrounding September 11, 2001. *Psychological Science, 14*, 579–585. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.0956-7976.2003.psci.1468.x>
- Mehl, M. R., Pennebaker, J. W., Crow, D. M., Dabbs, J., & Price, J. H. (2001). The Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR): A device for

- sampling naturalistic daily activities and conversations. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 33, 517–523. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3758/BF03195410>
- Mehl, M. R., Vazire, S., Ramírez-Esparza, N., Slatcher, R. B., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2007). Are women really more talkative than men? *Science*, 317, 82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1139940>
- Merz, E. L., Roesch, S. C., Malcarne, V. L., Penedo, F. J., Talavera, G. A., Castañeda, S. F., . . . Gallo, L. C. (2016). Social support, simpatía, and hypertension prevalence in Hispanics/Latinos: Findings from the HCHS/SOL Sociocultural Ancillary Study. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology*, 4, 131–141. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/lat0000047>
- Mogro-Wilson, C., Rojas, R., & Haynes, J. (2016). A cultural understanding of the parenting practices of Puerto Rican fathers. *Social Work Research*, 40, 237–248. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/swr/svw019>
- Oller, D. K., Niyogi, P., Gray, S., Richards, J. A., Gilkerson, J., Xu, D., . . . Warren, S. F. (2010). Automated vocal analysis of naturalistic recordings from children with autism, language delay, and typical development. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 107, 13354–13359. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1003882107>
- Paulhus, D. L., Bruce, M. N., & Trapnell, P. D. (1995). Effects of self-presentation strategies on personality profiles and their structure. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 100–108.
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., Chung, C. K., Sierra-Otero, G., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2012). Cross-cultural constructions of self-schemas: Americans and Mexicans. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 43, 233–250. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022110385231>
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., García-Sierra, A., & Kuhl, P. K. (2014). Look who's talking: Speech style and social context in language input to infants are linked to concurrent and future speech development. *Developmental Science*, 17, 880–891. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/desc.12172>
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., García-Sierra, A., & Kuhl, P. K. (2017a). Look who's talking NOW! Social interactions and language development across time. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01008>
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., García-Sierra, A., & Kuhl, P. K. (2017b). The impact of early social interactions on later language development in Spanish-English bilingual infants. *Child Development*, 88, 1216–1234. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12648>
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., Gosling, S. D., Benet-Martínez, V., Potter, J. P., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2006). Do bilinguals have two personalities? A special case of cultural frame switching. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 40, 99–120. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2004.09.001>
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., Gosling, S. D., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2008). Paradox lost: Unraveling the puzzle of Simpatía. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39, 703–715. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022108323786>
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., Mehl, M. R., Álvarez-Bermúdez, J., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2009). Are Mexicans more or less sociable than Americans? Insights from a naturalistic observation study. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 43, 1–7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2008.09.002>
- Rentfrow, P. J., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2008). A theory of the emergence, persistence, and expression of geographic variation in psychological characteristics. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 339–369. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00084.x>
- Shrout, P. E., & Fleiss, J. L. (1979). Intraclass correlations: Uses in assessing rater reliability. *Psychological Bulletin*, 86, 420–428. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.86.2.420>
- Triandis, H. C., Marín, G., Lisansky, J., & Betancourt, H. (1984). Simpatía as a cultural script of Hispanics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47, 1363–1375. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.47.6.1363>
- Unger, J. B., Shakib, S., Gallaher, P., Ritt-Olson, A., Mouttapa, M., Palmer, P. H., & Johnson, C. A. (2006). Cultural/interpersonal values and smoking in an ethnically diverse sample of Southern California adolescents. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 13, 55–63.
- Weisleder, A., & Fernald, A. (2013). Talking to children matters: Early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary. *Psychological Science*, 24, 2143–2152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0956797613488145>
- Xu, D., Yapanel, U., & Gray, S. (2009). *Reliability of the LENA language environment analysis system in young children's natural home environments*. Retrieved from [http://www.lenafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/LTR-05-2\\_Reliability.pdf](http://www.lenafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/LTR-05-2_Reliability.pdf)