Celeste Campos-Castillo

Latinx youth guard privacy on social media

By Silvia Acevedo | FEBRUARY 23, 2020

Latinx youth are much more guarded about their private life on social media than youth of other demographics, according to research by Celeste Campos-Castillo, an associate professor of sociology in the College of Letters & Science. They post less about family life and also show discretion about finances and immigration status.

"You're just not supposed to post about your family," says Campos-Castillo, and the mandate encompasses many different reasons.

Often, it's just a matter of believing that family matters are nobody else's business, but there are also concerns about how sharing specific information would affect their friends' perceptions. One youth told Campos-Castillo that she didn't want to post about her parents' workplace because people would be able to infer her social class.

Campos-Castillo interviewed 43 Latinx high schoolers, nearly evenly split by gender, involved with a summer 2019 college-prep program at Milwaukee's United Community Center. Many of the teens lived in predominantly Latinx areas but attended predominantly white schools. This difference in home and school life, Campos-Castillo says, spawns conscious decisions on what to post.

Campos-Castillo notes that some Latinx youth were conflicted when it came to politically related social media posts. "They would talk about how they never felt comfortable expressing their true political beliefs on social media because they didn't have mainstream beliefs." Beliefs which, the teens explained, were conservatively aligned with their culture's expectations.

Latinx teens did show many similarities with other teens, however, including a keen concern for their friends and a reluctance to turn to parents for help.

Campos-Castillo plans to continue the line of research by interviewing Latinx parents or caregivers in the summer of 2020. Her research is funded by a $120,000 grant from the Technology and Adolescent Mental Wellness program at UW-Madison.