

Running in Tarahumara culture

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Image showing Rarámuri runners. Credit: Lieberman, Daniel E.

"Running in Tarahumara (Rarámuri) Culture," just published in *Current Anthropology* (v61, no. 3 (June 2020): 356-379) studies the Tarahumara Native Americans of northern Mexico.

For over a century, the Tarahumara have been famous for their long distance running traditions and abilities, with many accounts claiming they have superhuman athletic abilities that partly result from being uncontaminated by westernization.

Now an international team of researchers (including a champion Tarahumara [runner](#)) combine their own observations with detailed

interviews of elderly Tarahumara runners to dispel these stereotypical myths, which they term the "fallacy of the athletic savage."

Lieberman and colleagues use accounts by Tarahumara runners to detail the various ways Tarahumara used to run for hours to hunt animals, and they describe how the Tarahumara still run traditional long distance races that, for men, involve chasing a small wooden ball and, for women, a hoop. While these many different kinds of running have important social dimensions, running is also a spiritually vital form of prayer for the Tarahumara.

Further, contrary to the fallacy of the athletic savage, Tarahumara runners —both men and women— struggle just as much as runners from other cultures to run long distances, and instead of being the natural "superathletes" that some journalists have claimed, they develop their endurance from regular hard work and other endurance [physical activities](#) such as lots of walking and dancing.

More information: Daniel E. Lieberman et al, Running in Tarahumara (Rarámuri) Culture, *Current Anthropology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1086/708810](https://doi.org/10.1086/708810)

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