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About the structure of the Spanish family, conception and work

I have been in Spain for seven weeks and six days, and I have already learned a lot in class and in the world outside the foundation. I have learned many things, but something that stands out is the prevalence of history and the importance of women in this country. Last week was International Women's Day and it was incredible to see how celebrated and powerful women are in this country. In the United States, I don't think many women are as passionate about International Women's Day because we are so desensitized to the patriarchy and therefore associate feminism as a bad, negative word. It was heartwarming to watch the parade and see so many men among the women singing, holding signs with women's empowerment quotes, and even seeing little children with the women's symbol on their cheeks smiling from ear to ear. Since I arrived, I have wanted to learn more about the history of Spanish women and the path it took to get to where they are celebrated and championed. The beauty of this program is having the opportunity to interact with Spanish women, get the truth from them, and also experience being a woman here and having the opportunity to walk a little in their shoes.

Today in my IDIS 3970 class, we watched a video that discussed birth control, birth control vs. the Catholic church, divorce, and same-sex marriage. It was interesting to see the previous structure established by Catholicism of a large Spanish family. In one of the scenes, it was a mother and father being interviewed along with their ten children who looked under the age of six. I think the interviewer asked if the wife was taking birth control or ever planned to take it and she confidently said no. While there are many varieties of contraceptives, including condoms, the Catholic Church has preached the belief that contraceptive use is "intrinsically evil" and that only natural contraceptive methods (BBC) should be practiced. The reason for this is because the church believes that sex is between a man and his wife and should also always include the purpose of procreation. The acceptance and desire to obtain contraceptives began around the time of the industrial revolution, where women began to enter the workforce, thus leaving behind the previous role of housewife. This change is one of the factors that decrease the size of the Spanish family. Today, the average Spanish family has "two children" or is a household of five people (AFS-USA).

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Personally I fully support the change of women in Spain. I have always been a huge advocate for women who choose to be more than just a housewife or mother. While I can only imagine how great being a mother is and will be, I believe women should pursue their career and dreams first. It is not fair that it is almost a tradition or norm for girls to grow up thinking that their only purpose is to take care of the home and thus neglect their true desires. I'm not a fan of birth control that basically needs to be allowed as if women need a man's permission on how they handle their own bodies. The birth control pill was still "illegal in 1977" and a year later it was allowed and more than 18 million units were sold (WIKI). It's amazing to see that nowadays, contraception is widely available throughout Spain and is "free or costs a small fee", you can also get it without a prescription in some places (Expatica). That is a huge victory for women and I hope that the same openness and acceptance can be instilled in the southern states of the United States.

The structure of the Spanish family is one that I have found quite fascinating. It is very obvious and proven that family is important for Spaniards. Something I wasn't aware of is how common it is for young adults to leave home and live with their families until their "late 20s or 30s" (Sid Martin Bio). In the United States, it is very common for children to leave home once they are in that 18 to 21 year old range, mainly due to the desire for independence and also to have their own rules. In Spain it seems that the opposite is true, that even living at home, they can still continue as adults. The main reasons for this delayed departure are due to the lack of job opportunities and the high cost of living in Spain, as well as the close-knit dynamics of the Spanish family. I have witnessed this first-hand when I met a friend from Bulgaria who emigrated to Spain 20 years ago with his family. He has a successful career, pays his own bills, has his own car, rents his own house, but shares the house with his mother. It was a bit taboo since I no longer live with my parents and the only time I'm at their house for long periods of time is when it's summer vacation or I come home for vacation. After meeting more Spaniards, I learned how normal it is to continue living with your parents in your 20s and 30s and how healthy relationships between parents and children can be. I couldn't imagine living with my parents for that long, just because they are so invasive and tend to treat me like I'm still in my teens even though I'm in my last year of college.

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Another key fascination I have with the Spanish family structure is that the Spanish birth rate is "one of the lowest in Europe" (Love to Know). Similar to why many young adults still live at home, the family structure of having large families has diminished due to the economy and "tight job market" (Love to Know). The birth rate in the United States is not one of the highest, but many people start families early and continue to have more children. I have more than twenty friends and old housemates who are already at number two or three after the quarantine. Many Spaniards explain waiting to have children once there is financial stability and a secure career, but that is not the common practice in the United States.

Work in Spain is a bit fluid and unstructured. It's interesting to see a country so lax in life and also at work, but I feel like this definitely helps prevent burnout, especially in young adults. In the states we are in college for so many years just to get a degree with no guarantee of getting a job, we also need to have prior work experience for most jobs and have some type of internship or apprenticeship in addition to our education. Workplace burnout or exhaustion "is the feeling of extreme physical and emotional exhaustion that often affects doctors, business executives, and first responders" (Healthline). Burnout not only affects these professions, but also students, workers of all professions, etc. It is about the individual and their relationship with their work. Many people experience burnout and lose passion and eventually decide to drop out of school altogether or find an alternative way to make a living. I attest to burnout in Americans due to long work hours, with short breaks and a mundane routine.

Spaniards still face the same fate as us Americans who struggle to find work, especially after graduation. Young Spaniards who are able to find work face grueling work hours and "ferociously low salaries" (El País). Many companies keep these young workers in the internship to save costs on salaries, thus prolonging the minimum wage that does not align with the high cost of living. On a positive side, the Spanish are lucky to have a slightly slower work schedule and itinerary. The culture encourages longer naps, lunches and coffee breaks, smoke breaks, but also working past 9 pm often. As Americans face burnout, we also face the privilege of being able to move states to pursue better job opportunities with better pay grades. In Spain, it is not so simple for Spaniards to simply pick up and move to other European countries to look for better job opportunities. It is necessary to have connections, know people and incredible

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"grades" (El País). Many young Spaniards feel trapped here and long for greater opportunities to earn a living and feel truly successful.

In conclusion, Spain has made many changes for the good of its inhabitants, but there is still a lot of work to do. It is encouraging to see many things related to feminism and women's rights celebrated, but more works are needed. It is incredible for me to be able to talk to Spanish women of all generations to understand what change looks like from their perspective and how it has helped them. It would be amazing to see salaries in Spain improve soon or perhaps the cost of living better match salary grades. This could improve morale, excitement in the workplace, and the desire to achieve more in one's career. The beautiful thing about all of this is the strength of the family dynamic and I pray that it continues for generations to come.

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