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Family Dynamics in Ecuador

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Quito, Ecuador

October 24, 2016

Family Dynamics in Ecuador

For this assignment I decided to interview my host mother, Martha. She is an Ecuadorian woman in her early 60's who has always been a stay-at-home mother. Even now that her children are grown and have moved out of the house, Martha still stays home to do the cooking and cleaning while my host father, Jorge, works. This is one big difference between my lifestyle back in the US and Martha's. Back home, my own mother, as well as the mothers of most of my friends, work. I do not know many stay-at-home mothers since it has become much more common for American women to join the work force. Here in Ecuador, however, the cultural idea of "machismo" is still very present. Part of "machismo" is that women are expected to stay home while the men go out and make money to support the family. Although I had heard about "machismo" before coming to Ecuador, it was still very shocking to see it in action, especially within my own host family.

Martha also has a much more conservative mindset than I do. She is not completely against, say, gay marriage, but she does not 100% condone or understand it either. I believe that this is due to religion, which is a very big part of her life. Catholicism is extremely prevalent here in Ecuador and really affects the attitudes and beliefs of the people; Martha is no exception. With that being said, there are also cultural similarities between us. Martha reminds me a lot of my own mother back in the US in many ways. Their primary concern, for instance, is their children. Martha is always looking out for me, cooking and cleaning for me, and making sure that I am safe, which my biological mother does as well. At the same

time, however, there is a slight difference in the sense that here in Ecuador, families remain very tight-knit even after the children move out; in many cases, children don't leave the home until their late 20's, and after that they still return often to visit or don't move far away at all. For example, one of Martha's daughters is in her 40's but still comes to eat dinner with us a few times each week and even lives in the same apartment complex as us with her own children. In the US, meanwhile, most children leave the house earlier at 18 and don't tend to stick so close to home.

Talking to Martha simply helped me to better understand certain aspects of Ecuadorian culture, such as the importance of family. At the beginning of the semester, I felt a bit stifled living with a family again and having to tell them where I was going constantly, since in the US I had grown used to my independence. Now, however, I have a deeper appreciation for how close families are here. I recognize the importance of familial bonds and even enjoy getting to visit with all of Martha's ten brothers and sisters, since I know how much they mean to her. Overall, speaking with Martha (not just for this interview, but all throughout the semester) has continuously helped me to keep an open mind when it comes to cultural differences between Ecuador and the US. Although Martha is different from me in many ways, she is still an absolutely wonderful woman and host mother, which has taught me that many other elements of Ecuador can be the same way—different, but in a good way!