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Person to Person in Spain

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Jessica Nolan
March 27, 2014
Sevilla, Spain

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in Spain

For this assignment I interviewed my intercambio (speaking partner). In comparison to Javier's lifestyle and mine, it's very different. In the United States we put a lot of pressure to find a job right after college and to get working, no matter the job really. Javier is 30 and still living with his parents, trying to find work. His family supports him living with them, this is actually fairly normal for Spain at the moment. Because of the economy, and the unemployment rate, especially for young adults, finding jobs and keeping jobs that pay enough for food and rent each month are few and far between. Javier hasn't been able to find work, so he still lives with his parents and are dependent on them. This isn't looked down upon in society at all; rather everyone is really supportive of everyone else about the age of independence for young adults. This is almost polar opposite of the US where it's normal to move out of your parents' house at 21 after college. This acceptance and norm of Spain was shocking to me, as that's not at all the mentality in the US.

Some cultural similarities between Javier and I are that we enjoy the street and night life of Spain, and also culturally we agree that dressing nice and not in sweatpants is better for the street and better to run around in. Some differences between Javier and I are that our views on the government and how it should function for a country's people are different, as well as some other political ideas. A general difference between the American outlook and the Spanish outlook on life is that Americans, US citizens specifically, work for a living; a job is our life and we let it consume our lives. It is all about getting up in the work ranks and making money and working. While in Spain, the general outlook is that work is a part of life, but they work to be able to enjoy life and to live. The importance of jobs and financial success isn't as important, obviously money is necessary to live, but it is not the only thing to live for. This has been an idea that is visible to me every day in Spain, people are enjoying their lives and the US just has this crazed idea of life and jobs and jobs being your life that is so exhausting and boring.

My perceptions of the US have changed radically while spending time away from it. I've become much more critical of the US and I'm having a hard time thinking why anyone would want to live such an exhausting life of work and everything. Speaking with Spaniards about work and life and independence is a very interesting experience, you become so much more aware of how tiring living in the US is, and how much more relaxed and fulfilling of a life one can have when they stop putting the importance of random things like money and jobs aside. Spain and the Spanish lifestyle is about relaxing, spending time with loved ones, and enjoying what life has to offer. My appreciation for Spain and their outlook on life has grown immensely as my time passes here in Spain.

Interview: Javier Calleja, speaking partner