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Jordan Worthington
Linfield University

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Jordan Worthington

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Chillan, Chile

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Appreciation from Afar: How Chileans Perceive Independence as Distance from Family

Chile has undergone many cultural shifts within the last few years, heightening with the recent election of their new President, Gabriel Boric, who is the youngest, and perhaps, most liberal president that Chile has ever had in power. The country used to be ruled by an authoritarian military dictatorship for 17 years, between 1973-1990 under President Augusto Pinochet. Due to this, there still seems to be a looming sense of machismo regarding the rights of women. What most surprised me about what my host father, Mauricio, mentioned in the interview, was that generally, it's more common in Chile for just the male of the household to work while the female, usually a mother, stays at home. Mauricio told me that that was the case when he was a kid. While that's not the case in my home, it's still very interesting to me that this is common in Chilean society and displays a stark difference from the U.S.

Another aspect of the interview that surprised me was Mauricio's response to my question of how he thought that the lifestyle of a U.S. citizen and how they are raised affects their future as an adult. His immediate response was that children and teens in the U.S., (since in general American culture is much more independent than that of Chilean culture), are more likely to be exposed to drugs than Chilean kids and teens. He allowed that while there are also drugs present in Chile, parents are much more attentive to their children since the culture is very focused on family. He said that for this reason, Chilean parents are more easily able to realize when their kids are under the influence and are able to be more attentive when their child is struggling. Mauricio also brought up the recent shooting in Texas and mentioned that the background checks that are in place in order to buy a

gun along with Chileans' connection to family are what prevent mass shootings from happening in the country.

This idea of family being more conscientious to what their kids are doing is definitely something I've noticed first-hand. For example, we have a family group chat on WhatsApp and my family is constantly updating each other on where they are or what they are doing; much more frequent and detailed than a typical American family group chat. Given this awareness and close-knit tie to family that Chileans have, Mauricio is pointing out that it seems less likely for Chileans to turn to drugs and alcohol, or even violence as a coping mechanism because Chilean families are a more secure support system.

Next, I asked Mauricio to touch on some of the ways he felt like the U.S. and Chile are similar. His response was both interesting and surprising. He felt that the way politics are being dealt with right now and who is in office in both countries is very similar. It seemed strange that after Chile's unfortunate history under a dictatorship that people feel like our politics are similar but thinking about it more, I see what he means. Many people I've met in Chile, I've noticed, seem to have liked Donald Trump as President of the United States. What's interesting is that before Chile elected the very left-wing Gabriel Boric, Sebastián Piñera was president and he was a conservative, billionaire businessman and politician. What Mauricio was probably referring to is the similarity between Trump and Piñera, who were both succeeded by very liberal leaders. Regarding politics, Chileans don't seem to like to talk about the subject much in detail, but if you listen to what they say or how they talk about certain things, you can tell which political party they might affiliate with. Americans, on the other hand, are much more apt to share their opinion on political issues. Many people from the older generation that I've met seem to share more conservative views, which is similar to the U.S., while younger people tend to be more liberal and passionate about protesting injustices. Since Mauricio, although he never says it directly, seems to hold more conservative views and liked Donald Trump in office, we personally share that difference. The more conservative people that I've met in Chile seem to have appreciated the presence that Donald Trump had as a public speaker, but they also don't have the perspective that I do and other

Americans have when it comes to how Trump followers would act towards people of color and minority groups.

The interview itself seemed to affirm things that I already knew were going to be brought up in the interview, such as the effects of an individualistic versus a collectivist society and the political differences and similarities. I don't know that my perceptions of the host country changed much, but I did gain new insight on how the U.S. is perceived by many Chileans. Being as independent as the U.S. is, American families are seen as a bit disconnected in comparison to Chilean families. Chileans also believe that our politics are actually very similar to theirs and they appreciate the strength that American government has and how advanced we are as a country. However, they also seem to criticize the apparent ease it is for people to get a hold of or buy firearms and also the percentage of American kids and teens that turn to drugs, alcohol and violence due to the culture of independence.