

Where men are men and women don't know the recipe for equality

Compared with the seductive advertisements for cigarettes, underwear and alcohol, the recent billboard posters appear stark: "Dare to ... if you're a man," they proclaim. But far from being challenged to some daredevil macho stunt, the males of Granada are merely being exhorted to tackle the washing-up. The adverts, which depict a huge stack of dirty dishes, form part of the town council's campaign for the greater sharing of responsibilities and domestic tasks between men and women.

As in other Western countries, the struggle for gender equality continues. Parity in terms of pay and opportunities has improved enormously in recent years. It is in the home that traditional ideas are more difficult to change. Although most women now have jobs outside the home, many Spanish men still consider domestic tasks to be women's work: "Leave that to your sister," Yolanda's father commanded with a frown on seeing his son pick up a tea towel, "It's not your job."

Often, though, it is the women themselves, especially those of the older generation, who insist on serving the rest of the family. They see it as their duty, and are fiercely proud of their culinary and housekeeping skills. Life for the housewife is an endless *faena*, a round of tasks to ensure the comfort of every (other) member of the family.

Maria is in her late 50s and works full-time, cleaning the large building where I work, and running the cafeteria. Her husband works there too, although his job is less physically demanding. When Maria arrives home, exhausted after a long and tiring day, her work begins anew. While the rest of the family relaxes, she sets about the household chores, prepares a meal and stares aghast at the vast pile of ironing that awaits her. Most of it belongs to her five adult children, who see no reason to leave home in the foreseeable future.

"It's not fair," Maria agrees, "but what can I do? When I ask them to help, they always have something more important to do – an outing with friends, a series of phone calls. Or they point out how much

better their shirts look when I iron them." She shrugs: "Young people " Neither can Manolo, her husband, be expected to change his ways: "It's not what he's used to".

On the other hand, it is not true to say that all Spanish men are parasites in the home. They too have their duties. My landlord, Pablo, is retired and, it seems, entirely at the disposal of his wife. It is clear from the string of orders, issued in peremptory tones each day, who is boss. However, she would never dream of asking him to shop for food in the market.

Clear demarcation lines exist in the division of tasks. For example, it is Pablo who carries the washing up to the terrace, but Emilia who must hang it out. Pablo takes care of any outside jobs, such as hosing the terrace and watering the garden, but indoors is the undisputed domain of his wife.

There are some signs of change amongst younger couples, but the pace of progress is painfully slow. The men in my mixed class of adult students were completely stumped when asked to relate a simple recipe. "But I've never cooked anything," protested 27-year old Javier. "My mother always cooks." Part of the council's programme aimed at relieving the burden on women and mothers involves teaching boys to cook. Clearly its work is cut out. Perhaps the difficulty in changing attitudes to domestic responsibility in a Mediterranean culture merely reflects the wider picture of differentiation between the sexes. Here there is no room for equivocation: men are men and women are women. Unisex fashion is an unknown concept.

Chicos and chicas do not wear the same clothes, or shuffle along in the same uniform manner. They dress differently, carry themselves differently, displaying with pride their masculinity or femininity.

In the squares of the town, the parents and grandparents of these young people gather on warm summer evenings to chat and pass the time of day with their neighbours. Men congregate on one side, women on the other. It has always been that way it seems.

And it has always been that way on "The day of the book", which is celebrated every year on April 23, the day of Cervantes's burial, when it is the custom to give friends a book as a

present. "Yes, but not to women," Javier explained earnestly, "To women you give a rose."

Letter from Spain from Barbara Lamplugh
The Guardian Weekly Dec 6 2001

1. True or False?

- a. Many Spanish men still consider domestic tasks to be women's work.
- b. Spanish men are fiercely proud of their cooking skills.
- c. Working women don't have to do housework when they finish work.
- d. Spanish men usually do the shopping in the market.
- e. Unisex fashion is in vogue at the moment.
- f. On "The Day of the Book", it is the custom to give women a rose.

2. Vocabulary Work

Match the words in the left/hand column with the meanings in the right/hand column

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| a. stack | relating to cooking |
| b. exhorted | unable to answer |
| c. culinary | boring, everyday tasks |
| d. anew | horrified, disbelieving |
| e. chores | doubt |
| f. aghast | urged, encouraged |
| g. stumped | again |
| h. equivocation | pile |

Find the words in the text that mean:

- a. attractive, enticing _____
- b. portray, show _____
- c. equality _____
- d. enormous _____
- e. lazy people _____
- f. bossy _____
- g. without argument _____
- h. gather in a group _____

3 Discussion

Compare the situation described in the article with the situation in your country. Are both sexes treated equally or are there some jobs and tasks that are left exclusively to women. Do women receive equal pay for the same work?