

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

LEVEL TWO - INTERMEDIATE

1 Pre-reading discussion

Which of these professions are more likely to involve women and which are more typical of men?
Enter M or W.

soldier	_____	nurse	_____	_____	_____
cook	_____	farmer	_____	_____	_____
secretary	_____	airline pilot	_____	_____	_____
taxi-driver	_____	dentist	_____	_____	_____

Add some other professions to the list and discuss whether they are more typical of men or women or whether they apply equally to both sexes.

2 Pre-reading questions

The text that follows is about typical male attitudes in Southern Spain to household tasks such as cooking and ironing. Decide whether you think the following statements are true or false.

	TRUE	FALSE
a. Many Spanish men think that domestic tasks are women's work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Spanish men are very proud of their cooking skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Working women don't have to do housework when they finish work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Spanish men usually do the shopping in the market.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Unisex fashion is very popular in Spain.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. On "The Day of the Book", it is the custom to give women a rose.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now read the text to check your answers.

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Recently a series of advertisements has appeared in Spain in which men are being asked to help more in the home and to share the responsibility for household tasks such as ironing and washing-up with their wives. This is part of a campaign organised by the town council in Granada in Southern Spain.

As in other Western countries, the struggle for gender equality continues. Equality 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 think that domestic tasks are women's work: "Leave that to your sister," Yolanda's father commanded as his son began to help with the washing up, "It's not your job."

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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 very proud of their cooking skills. Life for the housewife is an endless 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 again. While the rest of the family relaxes, she does the household work. She prepares a meal and then does the ironing. Most of it belongs to her five adult children, who still live at home with their parents.

"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 – going out with friends, making phone calls. Or they say how much better their shirts look when I iron them."

On the other hand, it is not true to say that all Spanish men are lazy at home. They too have their duties. My landlord, Pablo, is retired and does a lot of work at home. However, his wife would never dream of asking him to shop for food in the market.

The tasks are clearly divided between Pablo and his wife. For example, it is Pablo who carries the washing up to the terrace, but Emilia who hangs it out. Pablo takes care of any outside jobs, such as watering the garden, but indoors belongs to his wife.

There are some signs of change amongst younger couples, but progress is very slow. I asked the men in my class of adult students to give me a simple recipe but they couldn't. "But I've never cooked anything," protested 27-year old Javier. "My mother always cooks." Part of the council's programme aimed at making the lives of wives and mothers easier involves teaching boys to cook. Clearly this will be a difficult job.

Perhaps the difficulty in changing attitudes to domestic responsibility in a Mediterranean culture is part of the question of the differentiation between the sexes. Here men are men and women are women. Unisex fashion is unknown. Chicos and chicas do not wear the same clothes. They dress differently, carry themselves differently, and display their masculinity or femininity with pride.

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 seriously, "To women you give a rose."

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

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3 Vocabulary Work 1

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

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------|
| a. task | very tired |
| b. struggle | talk informally |
| c. exhausted | job, duty |
| d. recipe | gather together |
| e. display | funeral |
| f. chat | battle, fight |
| g. congregate | show |
| h. burial | a set of instructions for preparing a meal |

4 Vocabulary Work 2

Complete these sentences without looking back at the text:

- There is a campaign in Spain to persuade men to help with household _____.
- Many men still think that _____ tasks are women's work.
- Spanish women are very _____ of their cooking skills.
- Tasks are often clearly _____ between men and women.
- It is difficult to change _____ to domestic responsibility.
- On summer evenings men and women gather to _____ to their friends.
- The day of the book is _____ every year.
- It is the _____ to give friends a book as a present.

Now check your answers in the text.

5 Discussion Points

Is it the same in your country? _____

Are there some household jobs which are only done by women? _____

Is the situation changing? _____

Should women be paid for doing housework? _____