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La Siesta

As a current study abroad student, I have been able to attain, enjoy, and learn a lot about the rich culture here in Spain. Before I came here to Spain, being raised in Texas, I thought that the culture might be somewhat similar due to the fact that Mexico and Spain both speak the same language. However, I was proven wrong when I realized that none of the food here is spicy! Well, that isn't the only difference I have come across since being here, but that was just the beginning. Being here has been extremely humbling due to the many assumptions that me and my fellow American peers make about other cultures, but in this case, the Spanish culture. With this amazing opportunity, comes lots of room to improve my global competency, to better understand Spanish culture. With all of that being said, in this essay I will be talking about a Spanish metaphor that I'm sure many others are familiar with – siesta. I will be using Hofstede's research to back up my experiences here and to explain what siesta means to me and the Spanish culture.

What exactly is a siesta? To begin, the direct translation of siesta in Spanish is “nap” in English. Siesta is a block of time during the day where Spaniards close up shop, from around 2-5 p.m., to go home, eat with their families, have a beer, and/or take a nap. Now that we have the basics down for what a siesta is, I think that it would be important to go over the common misconceptions regarding siesta time. To make a generalization about Americans, lots of us can hear the word siesta, know it means nap, and think that Spaniards are lazy. Or that their economy must be worse due to their lack of self drive. Or, that they need to take a nap because they partied hard the night before. The list could go on and on forever, but all of these things are not true or don't correlate with siesta. For decades, Spaniards have taken siestas for many reasons, which we will get into later. Americans, amongst other people, make extreme generalizations about other cultures based on what they see in movies, what they hear on the news and what they choose to take in from social media. However, culture is not black or white. It never has been and it never will be. In the reading by the Taylor and Francis group, they talk about two different ways to approach studying culture, called etic and emic. Etic perspective “can easily lead to the stereotyping of national cultures along a broad two-dimensional horizon, with each culture perceived as lying at one of the extremes” (Gannon & Nielsen, 5). Whereas emic perspective provides more of an in depth focus on cultural ideologies, emphasizing the fact that cultures are not black and white, but gray. Connecting this back to the generalizations that others can make about what a siesta is, they are using the etic perspective. This is an issue that leads to the misconceptions of other cultures. Speaking of misconceptions, after reading and studying Hofstede's cultural dynamics, there are many that I agree with. However, it would be stupid of me not to be critical. Most of his works are from one to a handful of different companies from each country studied. Because of this small pool of people, it is easy for his data to conclude generalized ideas about certain countries. Meaning that they are using the etic perspective. Not that it was Hofstede's intention, but it's hard to get to know a culture to its full extent without

speaking to every one of its members. For example, Hofstede analyzes individualism vs. collectivism, where the States is individualistic and Spain is collectivistic. Making this generalization, can most of the time be applicable and correct. However, I'd have to argue that many folks from the South have a more collectivist approach to life and the way they interact with their family. Enough about misconceptions and explanations, let's get into siestas and how they represent the many different aspects of Spanish culture.

My cultural metaphor I will be referring to today will be about the well known "siesta". As we now know, siesta takes place from two to five pm every day, and what Spaniards do with this time differs from person to person. Actually, most Spaniards don't even take a nap! If you work in an office building, clothing store or some other retail establishment, your shop will close down, and this is when you will go eat your lunch with your family. La siesta is the perfect metaphor to use when talking about Spain's collectivist nature within their society. Parents take care of children who take care of grandparents who take care of children. For example, in one of my classes here, we talked about the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. My professor gave us some everyday examples. One of which was when she and her friends would go out to eat, and one of her friends was struggling financially, they would pay for that friend in a sly way, without making them feel bad. They would say things like "I got you this time, you pay for me next time!" And then the time would come, and someone else in the group would say it. This correlates directly to the idea of a siesta, to spend time with, take care of, and enjoy your family.

Another part of the Spanish culture that not many other cultures participate in or understand is the early afternoon drinking that occurs. This actually correlates with the time of the siesta. When I get out of my 11:15 class, I see couples and friends sitting at tables outside restaurants having a beer or a glass of wine, just socializing and taking in the sun. When I first got here, I was kind of alarmed at the amount of people that were "getting drunk" at that time of the day. However, after speaking with locals, it is just another way for them to socialize, spend time with family, and relax after the first part of their workday. After they eat their lunch and have a beverage, they go home and hang out with their family. Part of the siesta phenomenon that I have realized is that Spaniards really value their quality of life. This ties in to Hofstede's cultural dimension about indulgence. Indulgence in regards to Hofstede is "gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun" (HQ). Like I have mentioned before, quality of life remains extremely valuable to many Spaniards, as you can see from their lifestyle choices.

In conclusion, the Spanish phenomenon "la siesta" is something that is an all encompassing task that is completed every day. It not only provides physical benefits to those who partake in it, but it also promotes togetherness, family time and quality of life. Spaniards are not lazy, or alcoholics or don't care about making money. But they value their quality of life. One thing that I hope you can take away from this is that just because two cultures are different, doesn't mean that one or the other is better or worse. It just means that they are different, which is why Hofstede conducted these experiments in the first place.

Citations

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