

**THE EVOLUTION OF LA DONNA: MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD,  
AND THE MODERN ITALIAN WOMAN**

by

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## ABSTRACT:

The ubiquitous role of the Italian woman in society is ever-changing and expanding beyond its origin in the domestic sphere. The identity of the Italian woman was once engrained in matrimony and motherhood, not necessarily by women's own choice, but because it was considered the natural and expected path of life for any woman. An Italian woman was identified by her faith in the Catholic Church, her marriage to an Italian, working man, and the culmination of her life purpose was seen in giving birth to the sons of Italy. Working all day in the house and raising the children were the joys of life for Italian women, who were expected to be content and grateful as housewives. However, once women realized that higher education and a career were not solely the benefits of being a man, they began to realize that marriage was not for all women and that motherhood was not a necessary rite of passage to establish their entrance into adulthood. Through my public observations, review of scholarly articles, attendance of a film panel, and informal discussions with a variety of women in NGOs and other relevant settings over the course of a four month study abroad program in Italy, I have attempted to understand the differences between gender roles and expectations in Italian culture versus American culture. Personal experience has allowed me to contrast my life as an American woman of Italian heritage, with my adaptations as a foreign woman in Italy. Although Italian women have realized the advantages of independence, they must make sacrifices to stabilize and discover themselves in a media-driven society that is still ruled by male hegemony.

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## PREFACE

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## **INTRODUCTION: DEPICTIONS AND SELF-DEPICTIONS**

Upon arriving in Italy in the Spring of 2010, I was bombarded with images of the quintessential Italian woman. On billboards, she is forever young and smiling radiantly, always beautiful in her form-fitting clothes and high heels. On television, she is the center of attention on ludicrous game shows, which serve more as a vehicle for her humiliation than as a source of entertainment. On the streets of Italy, she is the conservative yet confident woman who struts her way through her daily activities, ignoring the stares of the older men around her, a skill that is instinctively learned and constantly utilized. In the office, she works twice as hard as her male-coworkers to get the respect she deserves. She may be a mother who abandoned her dreams of a career, to fill her home and a country with the children they so desperately need. Perhaps she gave up motherhood, to pursue her own life goals, unable or unwilling to sacrifice her happiness for a child desperately needed to fill the void in an aging population. In many but not all cases, she is a woman in a country that has an extensively chaotic history of trying to collectively control the lives, the minds, and the bodies of headstrong women who want nothing to do with the government's agenda.

In a country where women have worked endlessly to rally the support of the politicians, the church, and the self-established outreach organizations, the hegemonic male atmosphere is still a prevailing force. In my first chapter on the influences of fascism and fertility, I will attempt to analyze the ongoing problems of the fertility crisis and the bidirectional effect it has had on the female population. Women are constantly compromising themselves and their rights in what has been a tedious struggle for gender equality. Establishing equal rights in a society whose traditions are saturated with sexist

undertones creates a stalemate in the minds of conventional Italians, whose commitment to their traditional upbringing contradicts their adaptations to the unrelenting advancement of modern practices. In my analyses, I hope to understand how the society pits women against the rest of the country, as new trends of marriage, reproduction, education, and employment threaten to dismantle the traditions that once defined the Italians. With the emergence of modern Italy, we must welcome modern Italian women.

In my second chapter, I will discuss the controversy that arises concerning women who refuse to marry or procreate in favor of higher education and an occupation. These women are said by many to create disorder by refusing to conform to roles that are not only highly encouraged, but have been expected of them in the past. These modern women are pushing the boundaries and are often said to be upsetting the very foundations of a country, which identifies family as the defining pillar of their civilization. These independent women aspire to have careers of their own, beyond the housewives of the past and want financial security without having to depend on a man (Miller 201).

A job in the workforce is the antithesis of motherhood, in that it creates a lifestyle that does not lend itself to a rate of high fertility in a family environment (Costa & Noon-Luminari 1977: 44). In my third chapter, I will detail the role of motherhood in the lives of Italian women in relation to the new reproductive trend of planned, as well as unplanned, conceptions. Affordability and availability of popular contraceptive methods has allowed women control of their bodies. For some of the modern women of today, they have realized that they can be happy without becoming mothers, after years of accepting motherhood as the naturally subsequent phase following marriage (Ketler 1997: 129). However, the decision to become a mother can still be considered an internal



decision and sometimes a struggle for women. Over time and research, it has been shown that these women who choose not to become mothers are no longer the exception to the rule, but the personification of a new societal norm, and as a result raising the fertility rate is problematic. Although some may consider families a patriarchal idealization in Italian culture, which forced women in the traditional past to make sacrifices, the modern Italian women of today who have children make this decision consciously and on their own terms. (Miller 2004: 203). These changes originally brought about during the feminist movements of the 1960s still echo in modern society, although the once overpowering presence of feminism seems to have faded. However, there is lately an exception to this trend with the March 15<sup>th</sup> “*se non ora, quando?*” protest on International Women’s Day.

Along with the decrease in total fertility rate over the past decades, the rate of divorce has increased exponentially (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 2006: 1). Women no longer feel the pressure to endure an unhappy marriage, especially if they have not conceived children with their current partner. In addition, if and when these women are remarried they are less likely to have children or have multiple children due to their now older age (Castiglioni and Dalla Zuanna 2004: 19). The education level of parents is often correlated to the disappearance of the large Italian families of the past and with the adoption of new reproductive practices, planning the number and timing of each birth is quite common (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 393). Not only can families not afford multiple children, but also they prefer to uphold a “respectful” reputation by avoiding comparison to the “sexual ignorance” of peasants (Krause 2005: 604). Having more children than one can afford becomes expensive and is considered highly taboo, as it

displays a couple's lack of sexual control, a skill in which modern Italian families take great pride.

Although women have gained control of their bodies in the familial sphere, their objectification in the media is an unrelenting source of anger and frustration. In my fourth chapter on the documentary "Il Corpo delle Donne," I will analyze how the government's control over television programming has resulted in an unacceptable display of demoralizing behavior. Women who are chosen to participate on television programs are put on display for the viewer's pleasure, scantily clad and heavily groomed. These women are often portrayed as unintelligent and helpless, as nothing more than decorative displays to their male counterparts. However, many of these women fit seamlessly and willingly into these roles, even as other women are protesting this degradation of the female body for both the seemingly "voiceless" women on television and for themselves, in an attempt to understand a deeply rooted misogynistic trend, which underlies Italian television programming. In my analysis, I demonstrate how women in entertainment have transformed their appearances to follow their aspirations to be in the media. In a country where women are perpetually fighting the media's avocation of beauty and fame before intellect and humility, these stereotypes have the potential to reverse the progress of gender equality. In a media world where women are portrayed in such a way, the overt objectification of women could be considered as upholding patriarchal society and promoting the expansion of the family. As stated by an Italian woman herself, these stereotypes constantly portray a woman only in the roles of "wife, mother, and prostitute" (3-4-2010).

In the past, women have been inhibited by their lack of opportunity (Mantini 2000: 171). However, due to the countless women's organizations of modern Italy and the world, women now have the right to demand the respect they deserve. In my fifth chapter on the activities of women's organizations, I address the difficulties they must overcome to establish lasting change. Although each organization has the primary objective of gender equality, each organization emerges from a different background, with its own language, customs, religion of reference, and agenda. These organizations often compete for the same funds, resources, and services, which impedes their mutual cooperation and efficaciousness. As a result, agreements and compromises are difficult to achieve or maintain. Organizations are so preoccupied with their own motives that they fail to recognize that what benefits one woman could potentially benefit many other women in Italy (Pojmann 2005: 84). These women in organizations all to some extent want gender equality; they want the attention and the respect of their community as equal beings, capable of overcoming the odds to achieve the change they want and deserve. These women want to be given the same opportunities as men and not be limited by their gender.

“Women have always been placed conceptually in the sphere of stability, in the sphere of that which appears as “natural” and therefore “immutable in human relations” (Mantini 2000: 177). Although the ambitions of modern women are embroiled in the tediousness drudgery of a hegemonic male society, women are expanding beyond their past traditional roles. In my conclusion, I define how women have reached beyond what is inherent and “natural” and how they are attracting more attention and more controversy in their endeavors. In closing, I state how women are now posited against their natural,

but culturally and socially constructed, roles of wife and mother created by a patriarchal society, to embody their own interpretations of roles most natural to them.

## **1.0 FASCISM AND FERTILITY: CONTRACEPTIVE USE IN A COUNTRY OF REPRODUCTIVE INADEQUACY**

The rate of fertility for a couple is strongly related to proportion of time that contraceptives are actively used, the reliability of the contraceptive method, and the fertility of the couple (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 209). In the case of the low fertility crisis, it is often women who are blamed, but as Krause and Marchesi states in their article on fertility and politics, the low birthrate is not just a women's issue (2007: 351). Women are often portrayed as selfish and nonsensical in their reproductive decisions, suggesting that there is a problem with Italian women and not with Italy's current policies (Krause 2001: 576). The Italian government desperately wants to increase the total fertility rate, but if they cannot even manage to assist the current population, it will be difficult to support the necessities of more Italians (Krause 2006: 2). If the government is unable or unwilling to financially assist couples, then there is less motivation for families to have more children, whom they feel that they cannot afford to support. However the couple's perception of the fiscal realities vary depending on the couple and their desired standard of living.

The Fascist period created a taboo atmosphere for pronatalist policies even today. It is extremely difficult to introduce new incentives for families, as women do not want any of the progress in gender equality to become undone in the process (Krause 2006: 3). Any pronatalist policy is instantly stigmatized as a result of the policies that were upheld during Mussolini's administration. Former Prime Minister Benito Mussolini began his pronatalist agenda in 1922 when he made fertility increase a primary goal of his administration. Wanting not just more children to fill an aging country, but more boys to

serve in his army, Mussolini's tax on bachelors, birth incentives, outlawing of abortion, and limits on women's employment created an atmosphere of fear and unrest for many Italians (Krause 2006: 4). Women became his prime political targets as they were often portrayed during his campaign in the role of mothers and discouraged from entering into the role of workers. Being a mother was promoted as the most important, and ideally the only role they should adopt for the well being of their country (Krause 2006: 3).

Through Mussolini's policies, the Fascist regime constructed a specific gender role for a woman, which was supposedly born out of societal necessity. However, people made their own decisions, doing what was most rational for their families, perhaps in a direct form of rebellion of Mussolini's policies. His policies were in complete opposition to practicality, as it made much more sense to avoid having babies if you cannot afford them (Krause 2006: 8). However, the same problem has arisen in today's society, as couples must again consider their finances before considering having another child. Men who took pride in their self-imposed limitations on family size were insulted, as were the women who were often treated as nothing more than stock (Krause 2006: 7). The idea that a man who is not a father is not truly a man and that a childless woman is not a real woman, were ideas that were not universally accepted by all Italians.

In Mussolini's ideal society men would go to war, women would have children, boys preferably, who would turn into men, who would go to war. This vicious cycle of politically constructed gender roles formed the cornerstone of Fascist ideology (Krause 2006: 9). Banning emigration when other countries had work to offer and forcing city workers to return to the countryside did not work in Mussolini's favor. Outlawing abortion as a crime against unborn members of the Italian race did not keep women from

having abortions. It was estimated that the abortion rates actually rose substantially although it is difficult to measure a practice that was illegal at that time. The abortions that did occur are often attributed to the economic troubles that most families faced during this time.

For women, work was considered by the regime to be an obstruction to reproduction; any period of work in a woman's life was brief and fleeting, as they were encouraged to quit and sometimes forced out of their jobs when they married or had children (Krause & Marchesi 2007: 11). Ironically Mussolini's attempts to increase the total fertility rate of his country were fruitless, as women did not let his political agenda influence their fertility decisions, even when the fertility rate continued to reach devastating lows. During the Fascist regime, Mussolini's administration represented a time where the female gender was placed under constant observation (Krause & Marchesi 2007: 18).

The idea that women are social failures if they do not procreate is an idea that cannot be upheld (Krause 2001: 599). Reproduction is not a necessary responsibility of women, but a choice. However, the ability to become a mother is a role that although highly encouraged was also a role that women willingly adopted. Women did not need to be told to become mothers, as often this was a responsibility that women expected for themselves, especially after marriage. The fertility crisis is a complex and complicated problem that involves both men and women and countless factors of influence. In a country where coitus interruptus was not only often preferred but also the only legal method of birth control, maintenance of the low fertility rate continued for decades and is still in effect. In the 60s, for couples whose use of coitus interruptus was unsuccessful,

induced abortion was the oft-chosen alternative to an unwanted birth (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 22).

The technique of coitus interruptus can be the man's standard form of birth control, because the man demonstrated his own self-restraint over his desire, while also proving that he was capable of controlling the size of his family. This method instills a tremendous amount of responsibility in the man, forcing the woman to trust the man to curb his sexual appetite and not impregnate her with an unwanted child (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 23). However, this is a technique that forces both the man and woman to sacrifice by relinquishing their satisfaction and pleasure.

In a 1980s survey in the region of Emilia-Romagna, women identified sexual intercourse as an unavoidable dimension of a relationship with a partner; the pleasure of the woman herself was only a secondary consideration (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 33). In order to further reiterate this point, "only 25 percent of women stated that physical pleasure was one of the most important aims of sexual intercourse; 78 percent answered 'to enhance communication within the couple', 61 percent 'to enhance love and affection', 15 percent 'to have children', 9 percent 'to follow a natural instinct': respondents could give up to two answers" (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 34). Although women in the U.S. could and would arguably respond the same way to such a questionnaire, it is unavoidable that different women will respond to the same question with varying motivations for such a basic and instinctual aspect of life. For Italian women, at least in Emilia-Romagna, sex seems to be regarded more as a component of a relationship, and not an act primarily of personal satisfaction. Some women will always identify sex as a means of self-gratifying indulgence, while others view sex as a way of



expanding their family or establishing closeness with a partner. Although Italian women may have similar diverse views about the purpose of sex, there is a general theme involving the expression of internal feelings to the other partner.

Unfortunately in the execution of coitus interruptus, if the man is unsuccessful in his timing, or unwilling to exercise control, it is the woman who is now in a dilemma and must make a life-changing decision, sometimes on her own. Coitus interruptus seems more favorable for women who are in secure and trusting relationships with their partners. Unfortunately, many women who are not in stable relationships resort to having an abortion. Although in the 1980s, women who were involved in long-term relationships were also shown to seek out abortions when facing an unexpected pregnancy. When abortion was first legalized in Italy in 1978, its rate was higher than other countries in Western Europe. The percentage of abortions per one thousand actually rose from 13.7 the year after its legalization to 16.9 in the years of 1982 and 1983. However, by the late 80s and into the early 90s, the rate stabilized and then dropped to 9.8 in 1993 (Bettarini & D'Andrea 1996: 267).

It is often quite common after legalization in countries for there to be a sudden increase in the abortion rate, followed by a subsequent stabilization and decrease in later years. The rate of abortion has a tendency to vary based on the region in the country just as fertility rates vary, with rates for abortion being the highest in the Northwest and lowest in the Southern regions and rates for fertility lowest in Sardegna (Bernardo & Oppo 2007: 3). The high rates of abortion in the North are partially attributed to the abundance of family planning services. Women in the age ranges of 15-19 and 25-29 consistently have the highest abortion rates of all the cohorts and women in the 45-49

year-old bracket had the lowest rates (Bettarini & D'Andrea 1996: 268). The abortions that do take place with older women are often cases in which the use of the traditional method of coitus interruptus failed. Overall, there has been a decline in the number of abortions as new and more reliable modern contraceptive methods have been assimilated into the culture (Bettarini & D'Andrea 1996: 269).

Although condoms, birth control pills, and IUDs became more readily available during the 60s, they took some time to gain popularity in Italy. Although these methods were more reliable they weren't always more affordable, especially when compared to coitus interruptus which is seen as ideal because this is a method with no cost, unless performed inaccurately. It is argued in Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, and Racioppi's article on fertility in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that the only reason that fertility rates did not depreciate sooner, was because of the Italians chose coitus interruptus over the pill and condoms (2005: 24). In comparison to France, the use of a condom was preferred more often than the pill, 0.07 vs. 0.25 respectively (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 24). It became clear that contraception is a constant compromise between the couple and there is no definitive option for men or women. However, it is possible that women simply feel threatened by the idea of having to ingest a pill that would change their internal processes, and would rather not take on any unnecessary risk or avoid the risk on all levels. By choosing a more traditional method of contraception over a more modern and medical substance as an answer to contraception, the Italians are in one way, refusing the onset of modernity.

Although modern preventative pregnancy procedures may be safer, the environment of Italy's medical world often dissuades the use of birth control methods. In

the 70s, a research study on women requesting birth control found that just over half of women who requested the pill actually obtained a prescription that allowed them to have access to the pill (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 39). It has been suggested that gynecologists may exaggerate the more unflattering symptoms of the pill to their patients. However, the pill was not an instant success, as it also was met with resistance at first in the U.S. medical setting. Recommending a new method of birth control without existing evidence of its long-term effects on users was considered risky. In addition, many of the doctors were questioned in the early 90s about their opinions concerning abortion and over two-thirds were openly opposed to abortion. It is only in the past decade that doctors have encouraged the use of birth control pills and have acknowledged them as safe for their patients (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 40). In a recent study from 2004, ninety percent of women who were married, and were interviewed at a particular gynecological center admitted to preventing an unwanted pregnancy. Condoms were identified as the most popular method, followed by the pill, coitus interruptus, planned parenting objectives, and IUDs (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 40).

The fact that coitus interruptus was still identified as a popular contraceptive method, even in the 1990s was something that was completely unforeseen to me. I would have thought this traditional technique to be a procedure that women could not depend on to prevent unwanted pregnancies, and yet the total fertility rate of the country would suggest that this technique is indeed reliable when performed accurately (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 28). However, if a society has willingly adopted a technique, such as coitus interruptus that has worked for them time and time again what is to discourage them from deviating from this tradition?

Italian women, and possibly women of other cultures, continue to contemplate sex as an expected part of an enduring relationship. If coitus interruptus is practiced more in stable relationships, women do not have to worry about being abandoned with a child. During the 1980s and 1990s, the rate of coitus interruptus did decrease, due to improvements in methods of contraception, although its popularity was still well known (Dalla Zuanna, Gavini, Spinelli 1998: 80). Its decrease in popularity also correlates with the decrease in Italy's total fertility rate, a statistic that is difficult to ignore as the younger demographic is consistently shrinking (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 29).

However, not all methods of contraception involve physical contact such as the use of condoms, birth control pills, abortion, and the very common coitus interruptus. The modern objective of planned births involves couples planning out the timing and births of their children, in addition to adopting one of the aforementioned methods of contraception. Planned births cannot be successful without the adoption of another method of birth control to facilitate the planning, unless they are completely abstaining from intercourse. (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 210). However, if the couple is unable to afford or unwilling to proceed with an abortion, it is difficult to know which children born are actually "planned" children and which children were unplanned. Perhaps the child's birth was "mistimed," but never would the birth be considered anything less than a blessing (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 211).

Whether they were truly planned or not, it is difficult for governmental institutions such as ISTAT to completely understand the reproductive tendencies involved with planned births. Since the government wants the fertility rate to increase, it

is difficult to promote pregnancies without understanding current trends. With this in mind, it is important to realize that the fertility rate is a drop in both wanted and unwanted pregnancies. It is very possible that a couple may want another child, but feel that they must terminate the pregnancy due to their financial situation or due to unforeseen circumstances (Dalla Zuanna, Gavini, Spinelli 1998: 83). This problem is especially intriguing because coitus interruptus and planned births are often not even considered methods of birth control. Coitus interruptus is such an inherent technique for the Italians, it seems only natural to avoid pregnancy and therefore it is not compared to the more modern contraceptive methods of today. As a result of these methods not being considered a modern practice of birth control, the number of couples using contraception with the aid of these natural techniques is once again highly underestimated (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 227).

When considering the practices of coitus interruptus and planned births, it is interesting to note that these two techniques are often paired together as couples try to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Couples work together to exercise this method of contraception and to control the size of their family and maintain respect in the community (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 885). In the past, the most elite families were also often the largest; in today's world this is no longer a societal norm. In southern cultural beliefs, poverty in families with more children than they can afford is often stereotypically linked to an uncontrolled sexual appetite (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 885). The use of coitus interruptus was often thought as parsimonious, a way for couples to maintain a certain standard of living that focused on materialism, while indulging themselves sexually (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 887). While members of the Church

may think of coitus interruptus as a sin, others believe that the practice is so inherent in Italian culture that it is regarded as only “natural.”

Another term that is used to describe coitus interruptus in Italian culture is “*marcia in dietro*-reverse gear” (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 889). Women prefer to think of coitus interruptus as “*fare sacrifici*” or making sacrifices (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 889). Coitus interruptus allows men more responsibility in the contraceptive process, and some women will admit that they openly respect these men for having “*tanta volontà*” or so much will power that they can have control over themselves and take on this “burden” (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 894).

Men and women must each to some extent sacrifice their sexual satisfaction, to avoid the common problem of “*più famiglia, più fame*” or more family, more hunger (Schneider & Schneider 1991: 889). Although a larger family can be considered a burden, it can also be considered a blessing, because although there are more mouths to feed, there are more people to work and earn money for the family, as money is often given directly to the mother. Planned parenting is often a goal for couples, but just as couples will refuse to admit that their child’s life was unplanned, they will explain that it is not always necessary to have a fertility plan, but to have more children as circumstances allow more children to become a reality.

It is interesting to note that a 2001 article by Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, and Loghi found that Italy uses half the amount of contraceptive methods, such as the pill and IUDs that France uses. Since Italy has such a low birthrate using even less methods than France, it becomes clear that the prevalence of coitus interruptus is significant. The high frequency of coitus interruptus in Italy must be taken into account, even though Italy had

a lower rate of unplanned births (0.28 vs. 0.35 respectively) than France during the same time period (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 212). These numbers also do not consider the rate of undocumented abortions that take place in each country. In relation to the concept of planned births, it has been found that it is more common for the second subsequent birth to have been planned as opposed to the first birth, 0.77 vs. 0.61 respectively (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 212).

After the first unplanned pregnancy, women have a tendency to switch to a more reliable method of contraception, especially birth control pills. Still there are women who swear by their techniques of choice and refuse to alter their approach to contraception. Women who fail to change their behaviors often face a second and possibly even a third unplanned birth (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 228). Although unplanned birth is common in Italy, the rate has declined significantly over the past decades, and many of the women who do conceive unwillingly are identified as “housewives and the less educated” (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 230). The correlation between level of education of the mother and her total fertility rate is significantly high, with the more educated women generally opting for fewer children. This relationship will be further explained in Chapter 4 on motherhood. However it is not surprising that the number of unplanned births is much lower than the number of births, both planned and unplanned in the earlier decades of a woman’s life (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 215).

The number of planned children that are born into a family is often not an accurate reflection of the ideal number of children wanted by a family (Castiglioni, Dalla Zuanna, Loghi 2001: 219). It is very possible and often probable, that families want more children but simply cannot afford the extra expenses. As a result, families often feel

pressured to have smaller families (Krause 2001: 594). The government must also take into consideration that there may be families who are unable to conceive at all, and therefore do not willingly give up the opportunity to have children, but must abandon their attempts because they are unable to afford fertility assistance.

As opposed to the contraceptive methods of Italy, Catholicism has been identified as a factor of reproductive fertility (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 34). The extremely religious influence and presence of the Vatican has been suggested as a governing authority, which exercises control over the conception and contraceptive methods of practicing Catholics. In 1996, it was shown that women in the 40-49 year old demographic who attended mass regularly were fifty percent less likely to use birth control pills (Dalla Zuanna, De Rose, Racioppi 2005: 37). Although the Catholic Church is given partial credit for delaying the increase in use of certain methods of contraception, much credit is still attributed to the prevalence of coitus interruptus.

Perhaps the greatest form of contraception in society is the tenacious progression of modern cultural and societal pressures. Arguably, almost all of the popular contraceptive methods are modern in practice; therefore modernity is indirectly uprooting the past traditions of large families and unplanned but oft-welcomed births. In efforts to keep pace with the United States and westernization, Italy is changing, and along with it changes its defining and once ubiquitous anchor: the family. As identified by Krause and Marchesi in their article on fertility and politics, there is a perception that traditional Italian family is creating a “barrier to modernity” (2007: 352). However in this same article, the authors identify that portraying women and family in this fashion is misleading. Modern trends of marriage, maternity, and the workforce make it difficult for



families to maintain the traditional, large Italian family of the past. However “modernity” has also become an obstruction in the maintenance of the traditional Italian family. The pressure to be modern technologically, industrially, and economically is a frustrating challenge that demands compromises between traditional and modern Italy. The priority that was once dedicated to the preservation of the nuclear family is left behind, as Italy struggles to compete with other countries economically and socially.

The considerable time, effort, and devotion that is needed to raise a family is often not compatible with the trends of modernity, as Krause and Marchesi recognize that there is now a very “serious attitude toward parenting” (2007: 354). Becoming parents is no longer a constant assumption of women and couples, but a planned choice that must be thoroughly evaluated. The services that are available to families, are only given to large families, which does not help to solve Italy’s fertility crisis problem. Those who feel threatened by the high rate of immigrants in Italy feel that this situation is a crisis, which may result in the loss of the true Italian identity in the not so distant future. The government, media, and demographic statistics have raised this fear, as immigrants have become more numerous (Krause & Marchesi 2007: 355). Because the Italian government’s priority is an increase in population, fertility clinics are very common, as many women Italian and foreign come to Italy to receive help with becoming pregnant. However, single women and same-sex couples are denied treatment at fertility clinics. Moreover, as shown through the baby bonus benefit is denied to non-European citizens, indicating that the government is not always so welcoming to the idea of foreigners populating their country (Krause & Marchesi 2007: 356-358).

The government needs to be more supportive financially and help all women, regardless of sexual preference, race, and family size. The fear of “racial heterogeneity” is a form of reviving fascist ideals of pronatalism (Krause & Marchesi 2007: 358). In addition to concerns of “racial heterogeneity”, there is also an “internal racism,” a “regional chauvinism” that seems to exist between Northern and Southern Italians (Krause 2001: 594). Italians tend more often to identify themselves by the regions they are from than as Italians. There is such importance surrounding the idea of maintaining a homogeneous population that any who are foreign or new to a country or even a region are often looked down upon. Inhabitants of regions fear that their identities as Italians are at risk along with their history and traditions. The idea that Northerners are the “real” Italians and that Southerners are “polluting” the country through their very existence is an idea that has been fueled over time by the constant comparisons between the North and the South (Krause 2006: 11). Italy has become a heterogeneous country in terms of the population throughout the decades. A desire for a homogenous and “pure” population of Italians is unlikely in Italy, just as it is in the U.S., where a plethora of different cultures are recognized each day in the general population.

While in Italy, I was exposed to many differences between the North and South of Italy. Although I lived in Rome, I traveled as much as my academic schedule allowed and observed differences between the cities and regions. Although citizens of the northern regions of Toscana and Veneto welcomed tourists, I found myself feeling most comfortable during my travels in the South, where I felt very welcome. A confusing bus ride to a hostel with a group of friends in Sicily turned out to be a refreshing experience, when three different strangers helped us with directions and made sure the bus driver

stopped for us. Their cordiality continued as each of the places we stayed at was filled with some of the most amiable people I have ever met and of course, they all knew each other.

Despite my appreciation for the humble kindness of these Southerners, I knew I was treated respectfully both in the South and in the North for two very clear reasons. As a female American and a tourist, I was a consumer in their economy, ready and willing to spend my money on their resources. In addition, I was not just an American studying abroad in Italy, but in Rome, which often extracted an excited and joyous response from Italians. Had I told the Sicilians that I was from Milan, a city that is very antagonistic to the South, perhaps I would have been treated differently, as a member of an opposing group. With each of my traveling excursions, I began to realize the preferences of different regional populations.

The Southern regions of Italy are to the Northern regions, as the Southern region of the U.S. is to the Northern region. The North embodies images of modern Italy, whereas, the South clearly is described by northerners as the traditional Italy of the Northern past. Perhaps this is why the North and South often feel like two seemingly separate countries, because as shown through internal regionalism, Italy hardly feels like a united country. However, regionalism does still exist in the U.S. as well. Everything is very bustling and sometimes rushed in northern Italy, whereas in southern Italy the atmosphere is more relaxed. Although I think these qualities can be attributed not only to Southern regions, but to some of the more rural Northern regions as well, these trends are highly supported in the South, showing that both regions have different levels of modernity within society.

Since WWII, the South was often associated with poverty and overpopulated families, which causes the North to view Southerners as crass and inferior, treating them as foreigners in their own country (Krause 2006: 13). The South represents tradition and therefore high procreation, but is also linked to Sardegna, where there is the lowest fertility rate in Italy (Bernardi, & Oppo 2007: 3). In contrast, the North is identified as modern, civilized, and sexually knowledgeable and is associated with being populated with small families (Miller 2004: 201, 208, Krause 2005: 604). The North strives to compete with other countries and maintain societal stability, while the South fights against their past image, as a land of peasants and poverty (Krause 2005: 609). These trends may hold some truthfulness, but they are also upheld in common stereotypes. As an outsider visiting each region, the differences between the North and South are clear, and yet they do not present themselves on opposite ends of the societal spectrum of modernity. Although, each region reflects their own trends of reproduction and contraception, each region has adapted to reflect a different interpretation of the modern Italian family. Italy is still a united country, whether Italian citizens approve of this association to their regional neighbors or not.

Regardless of this North-South stereotyping, the sense of family in Italy is still a strong sentiment, which Italians of both the North and South try to preserve, regardless of the size of their families. Although Italians may never agree on what makes a family or a woman's role in family, by compromising and infusing the past traditions of women and family with the modern cultural interpretations of today, it becomes clear that tradition can still exist within modernity (Miller 2004: 211-212).

## **2.0 HOUSEWIFE OR HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE: EVERY ITALIAN WOMAN'S LIFE CHOICE**

When I first arrived in Italy, I did not have many expectations for the success rate of marriage and I was naïve about the fertility situation, as well. Being from a country where marriage is still a celebrated institution but where many do not last, I expected the situation to be similar in Italy. I had also assumed to see more professional women in a variety of career settings. In some ways, I thought that I would be greeted with more couples, more families, and more children. However, I later learned that I would be greeted with a more elderly population than a population filled with children. But just as I did not see the large Italian families that I had imagined, and there was also not an overwhelming presence of couples, except when I went out to restaurants. However, this is not surprising, since in our country many couples split up for the bulk of their day to go to work. Nevertheless, the absence of couples was a repeated observation of mine that was not explained in later discussions with Italian women; perhaps the separation between genders was not an issue that was thought necessary for discussion. However, as a tourist I was unfamiliar with where the typical Italian couples would spend their nights. As a tourist, I often found myself in areas that were popular for tourists, which may not appeal to the locals.

During my time in Italy, one woman with whom I became close was my Developmental Psychology professor and the counselor at my school, Elaine Luti. Elaine is an American woman from Boston, who settled down in Italy during her graduate schooling when she met and married her Italian husband. Elaine became a friend and advocate, as she helped me to come to terms with my expectations and subsequent

perceptions of Italian culture. I felt a kinship with her, and soon asked her to lunch, so I could interview her and discuss her interpretations of Italian women. Although I felt myself quickly assimilating into the Italian lifestyle by adopting the language more proficiently, I was curious to learn how she first reacted to Italian society and if this was an immediate or constant process.

When discussing the presence of women in the workforce, Elaine stated her opinion that women were not taken seriously. As an example, she cited her experience when visiting a hospital where the male doctors were always referred to as *dottore* or doctor, but the female doctors were always called *signora* or miss, indicating women were not taken as seriously in the professional work environment (Luti 3-2-2010). In order for women to get ahead, Elaine felt that they needed to be both direct and confident. Women need to adopt masculine qualities, while having a “bitchy edge” (Luti 3-2-2010). They need to be commanding, and to be both “professional and be sexy at the same time” (Luti 3-2-2010). In Italy, as well as in the U.S., we agreed that beauty operates as a double-edged sword; good looks are important, but “if you are good-looking you sometimes are not taken seriously” (Luti 3-2-2010). Although Elaine’s observations echoed many of my sentiments, it would have been interesting to contrast her insight with that of a native Italian woman.

Elaine’s observations about women exuding self-determination and allure made me wonder how these two factors affected the marital choices of Italian women. Elaine suggested that European men are the long-term bachelors who then marry younger women, while the older women are left alone and single. It was intriguing to me to

understand how this double-edged sword affected women's decisions to marry, whether the men be older or not, as well as their decisions to enter the workforce.

Women have developed a more independent perspective, as there are more opportunities for education and occupations now than there were in the past. Whereas marriage and motherhood were formerly expected of almost all women, the women of today seem to view these life processes as optional. The financial benefits of marriage seem less enticing to women, who now have more opportunities to support themselves. Perhaps it is this increase in opportunities that has made cohabitation a more common occurrence in not just Italian society, but in developed societies in general. In Italy, the three steps of independence for adults are often considered to be leaving home, marrying, and having children (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 152). Cohabitation is a compromise, somewhere between leaving home and marrying. In Italy, it is often more common and more appropriate for children to leave the home to marry than to cohabit. Parents typically support this view along with the church, who believe cohabitation should begin with marriage. However, cohabitation allows couples to explore a different option. Instead of committing yourself to another through matrimony, couples are able to "test the waters" first, to see if their significant other meets their expectations, and also to observe the pros and cons of living with a partner (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 151). With more freedom and acceptance for cohabitation today, couples do not feel forced into marrying and subsequently reproducing; it has become optional. However, the presence of cohabitation before marriage may delay the age of marriage, as well as the onset of conceptions in couples that wish to conceive, usually resulting in a lower overall birthrate.

In contrast to cohabitation, the increase of delay of leaving the home of the parents is a trend that seems to reinforce the notion of family in Italian society. The tendency of delayed marriages for the younger demographics is attributed to these new trends of cohabitation, housing shortages, and the tendency for adults to leave their parents' homes at a later age (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 150). Although as previously mentioned families have been shrinking in size, Italians still love and value their families the same whether there be ten children or a single child. Parents help their children in their finances constantly, before, during, and after marriage. Although parents in both Italy and the U.S. are protective of their children, the Italian parents seem to hold more influence over their children. In Italy, children more often than not live in extremely close proximity to their parents, who like to oversee their children's decisions (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 154). Although the decision to live closer may be a result of parents funding the purchase of the house, it may also be a conscious decision of Italian children who believe they are being morally sound by living close to their parents. In the U.S., it is expected for children to go to school, move out, attend college, and then continue life in a more independent state, which may involve living alone, with friends, or a partner, while pursuing a career. Because of high unemployment rates and housing shortages, this is not always the case in Italy; in fact young adults leave their parents' home "at the highest age of Europe" (Santarelli & Cottone 2009: 2).

It has been suggested that the relationship between parents and children encourages the child's delayed departure from home. In addition to the parents' financial support, the parents and children are each very emotionally supportive. Children are able



to fully focus on their education because their parents are financially providing for them. Once they finish school, they may focus on their employment and marriage. Since it is more common for children to live with their parents during higher education, and for the children enter the workforce at a later age and as a result marry and have children at a later age. The later the marriage, the more common it is for couples to have fewer children (Santarelli & Cottone 2009: 3).

Families are such a resilient structure in society that children fear that their parents will feel a deep emotional loss when they leave home and parents may overextend themselves in their parental duties, even risking the “maturity, autonomy, and responsibility” of their children in the process (Santarelli & Cottone 2009: 5). The North and South once again differ in the time that children leave the parents’ home and the motivation for their departure. Whereas the children leave home in the South earlier than in the North, these young adults usually leave to marry and start their own family, often in close proximity to the parents (Santarelli & Cottone 2009: 7). In contrast, it is more common and traditional in the North for parents, often of the husband, to live with the married couple (Santarelli & Cottone 2009: 7).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, there has been a correlation between the level of education of parents and their total fertility. In addition, there has been a link between the level of education and the presence or absence of cohabitation and marriage (Rosina & Fraboni 2004:155). It has been shown that a high level of education, especially for the father, has been linked to more unconventional life choices. Cohabitation is also much more likely for women with a college degree (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 158). For the year 2008 in Italy, the number of women entering a university degree program were as follows

by region: in the Northeast 30,000 entrants, and in the Northwest 38,000 entrants, summing to a total of approximately 68,000 entrants for Northern women, as opposed to the South, where there are just over 43,000 University entrants (Istat.it 2008). In other words, of the approximately 13,000,000 female residents in the North, only half a percent were university entrants in 2008. For the South, of the approximately 7,000,000 female residents, about 0.6 of a percent were university entrants. In this respect, the North and South report very similar education rates for women (Istat.it 2008). With more knowledge and access to “cultural and material resources” these couples feel less pressured to conform to societal norms (Rosina & Fraboni 2004:155). It is also possible that cohabitation is more common for the highly educated because the college age is often considered a time for experimentation, since it is the younger demographics that have the highest rates of cohabitation (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 160).

Nevertheless, cohabitation is not promoted; marriage remains preferable and is financially supported by parents (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 136). However, results in a 1990s survey show that some parents will go to some lengths to keep their children, with 57% of the young adults answering the survey admitting that they have a room in their parents’ house where they are free to have sexual relations (Dalla Zuanna 2001:146). If parents are less strict with their children and do not place limits on their freedom, children may feel less inclined to leave the parental home.

Until the 1990s, cohabitation was considered an unorthodox behavior for couples, but just as the rate of cohabitation increases, so does its’ rate of acceptance in the community. However, cohabitation is still considered anomalous and many members of younger demographics will marry without cohabitating first, though some women will

avoid marrying young to allow time for higher education (Miller 2004: 217).

Cohabitation can be considered as a precursor to marriage for couples, but for some couples cohabitation is enough. There are couples who are unmarried and have no children and who have no intention of changing these aspects of their relationship. (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 111). Unsurprisingly, the rate of cohabitation in the South was and still is lower than rates in the North (Rosina & Fraboni 2004: 158).

Just as cohabitation is considered unconventional in Italy, it has been my experience that cohabitation is perceived similarly to perceptions in our country. As someone who has lived with my boyfriend for over a year, I know that it was not a decision that especially pleased my mother. However, it was a situation that arose not necessarily because I wanted to see if my boyfriend was right for marriage, but because it was simply convenient and financially beneficial; it was an obvious advantage that could be instrumental in many couples' decisions to cohabit. However, the importance of convenience is not discussed in research on cohabitation in Italy; it is very possible that many of the couples that do cohabit do so for the same uncomplicated reasons as I do.

In my conversations with women in Italy, who were both Italian and English, and conducted in the English language, marriage was not a topic that was discussed. While I did not explicitly ask about the success rates of marriage, in retrospect I find this omission curious, since it was such a prevalent topic in my readings. However, when I began a literature review on this topic and read Carole Counihan's *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family, and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence*, there were several interesting passages on this subject. The traditional role of marriage in Italy, as in the U.S., is that marriage is an accustomed and expected event in life. As expressed by

Counihan's interview with former baker Elena, marriage meant everything to a woman when she was growing up.

*“If you weren't married you were looked at with different eyes. People thought: Look, she couldn't even find a husband; she couldn't even find some desperate guy to take her. Understand, that kind of thinking really bothered you. Hence you had to find a husband...In those days we thought, I'll get married and finally I'll do what I want” (Counihan 2004: 98).*

Her daughter Giovanna supported her statement saying,

*“I think that Italian women are looking for support in marriage... Italian women are seeking more than anything financial support. Clearly Italian women cannot maintain themselves as well as a husband can, especially one with a profession. I think Italian women are looking most of all for economic support. I don't know if violent passions, impetuous love, and all these things exist anymore—either in Italy or anywhere else. I don't know. But I think what a woman wants most of all is to get settled—“ (Counihan 2004: 98-99).*

Perhaps marriage was expected of all women, many of whom want a man to help them financially so they do not become overburdened.

Although divorce rates have increased throughout the past several decades in Italy, as they have in other countries, Italy still tends to have a higher success rate for marriage, since the divorce rate is 0.9 per 1000 inhabitants (Istat.it 2008). By the 1970 law, couples must be separated and living apart for at least two years before they meet the requirements for filing for a divorce (De Rose 1992: 72). This is a law that couples should consider before making the decision to marry, especially if they do not plan on having children. Although couples may physically separate, there are also “home separations,” in which couples will cohabitate and cooperate to help raise their children, but they will have open sexual relations with others (De Rose 1992: 72). This allows each partner more freedom, while maintaining financial stability and providing a mother and

father figure for children. However, the complications of having an open marriage may be both confusing and disconcerting for the children involved. Divorce rates began to increase in the 1960s, but it was thought that the Catholic Church had some influence over impediment of marital dissolutions. In the early 1980s, it was found that divorce rates were five times higher for couples married outside the church, as opposed to a religious marriage (De Rose 1992: 73).

In addition to the influence of the Catholic Church, the low rates of divorce in Italy are tied to the current economic factors. Separated couples are in a situation where financially, it makes much more sense to stay together, a situation that occurs both in Italy and in the U.S. Italian society does not offer much support for couples that are going through a divorce and there is a shortage of housing, especially in urban industrial areas (De Rose 1992: 73). It is true that there are some men and women who can be financially independent, and are able to divorce and support themselves if they have received higher education, but this is not always the case. The tendency for a couple to divorce also depends on the age cohort of the couple (De Rose 1992: 75). The younger the couple, the more likely they are to have a divorce. If the divorce is initiated earlier in life, each member of the couple has more time to have a successful marriage, as opposed to couples who divorce after a long marriage, and couples that have children.

Men's and especially women's attitudes on divorce have transformed throughout the decades, making divorce more acceptable and not such a deviation from cultural and societal norms. Younger women are more likely to divorce, with the younger demographics having the highest rates. Age is very important, as women who divorce young still have a chance to have a successful marriage. Marriage tends to occur more

often for younger women, aged 20 to 30, and the rate of marriage declines for couples in the older cohorts, aged 40 and onwards, and these second marriages usually do not result in offspring (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994:118). Governmental institutions would look for success in the marriages of younger women, as this would logically result in a higher fertility rate. Unfortunately if these marriages fail and are the only marriages in the lives of these women, their fertility rates will be either low or nonexistent.

Being in a marriage that involves children is one factor that may hinder women from considering divorce. Depending on the age and number of children, it may not be fiscally viable. The length of the marriage may also have an effect on the decision, as more newlywed couples, such as the cohort in the 25-29 year-old bracket, are more inclined to resort to divorce (De Rose 1992: 79). The first ten to fourteen years is when most divorces take place in marriages, with women who were born in the 1940s being identified as the first women twice as likely to divorce more than earlier generations (De Rose 1992: 81-82). Divorce has been shown to be much more common in women with higher levels of education (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 129). In fact, women with a higher education degree were observed as 83% more likely to divorce than women within the minimum education level. These highly educated women are also more likely to cohabit, which is also linked to higher divorce rates, as women who first cohabit with their partners upon marriage are more likely to have a successful marriage (De Rose 1992: 83).

Women who are more financially independent with an occupation outside of the house are at greater likelihood for divorce, because just by working, they are fulfilling a role that goes against the past traditions of Italy, which glorified woman as the keystone

of the Italian family. (De Rose 1992: 77). They are more open to unconventional choices and have a lifestyle that affords them more opportunities and are identified as twice as likely to divorce (De Rose 1992: 84). Women who have a career have more confidence; they have more determination and feel more in control of their life (De Rose 1992: 77). Their occupations serve as a buffer against finances as they are able to cope with stress brought on by expenses. Regionally, it is more common for Northerners to divorce than Southerners. Southerners, especially those living in sparsely populated towns, are less likely to divorce (De Rose 1992: 83). Since the North is consistently identified as a region defined by modern trends, it is unsurprising for divorce rates to differ geographically. In 2008, it was determined that approximately 242 per 100,000 married people were granted in the Northwest and 216 per 100,00 for the Northeast. In contrast, only 102 divorces per 100,000 married people were granted in the South in the same year (Istat.it 2008).

Another factor that can contribute to the decision to divorce is the burden of housework and outside work for women. Married working women must work long hours at their jobs, followed by long hours of housework when they return home. It has been found that Italian women in particular, spend much more time completing the housework than their husbands, even when they hold a full-time job with the same amount of hours as their husband (Miller 2004: 204). However, this double burden for women is not a modern concept, but an adaptation that women in many countries have had to make for years. After the total number of hours paid and unpaid are added up for husbands and wives, wives are estimated to work 8-14 hours more per week, depending on their

geographical location, with the more rural women having the most time dedicated to housework (Miller 2004: 216).

The amount and type of work, whether in the household or in the workforce, highly correlates with the level of education of the woman, with the most pronounced contrasts between highly educated women and women with low socioeconomic statuses (Miller 2004: 216). As women work more hours, there is a decrease in the amount of time each woman spends on housework but no increase in the assistance of men with the housework (Miller 2004: 205). As a result of this expected and accepted workload increase, it is unsurprising that women consider this inequity when deciding to get married and when thinking about have more children. However, in Italy as in America, there are variations in the doling out of housework based on the demographics, with younger Italian women having the most enduring opposition to the gender-based division of labor (Miller 2004: 214).

In Counihan's interviews with women about the benefits and costs of being a housewife as opposed to working, one woman stated, "What you lose by going to work, you find by staying at home but what you lose by staying at home, you find at work" (Counihan 1999: 89). The decision between homemaking and the workforce is complicated, especially for women who compromise by taking on both roles, as arguably all women do. Counihan's subject continued on this issue saying, "a housewife never gets the recognition that a working woman gets...her work is taken for granted because it is perceived as an obligation and not as a sacrifice. She has to do it; it is her work; she has to do it" (Counihan 1999: 89).



Women admit that they feel overburdened by their dual roles, but they accept the role, even admitting that housework is just not a job for a man (Counihan 2004: 89). Hence, the saying “if you want something done right, do it yourself,” is an idea that seems to explain what women are not willing to admit. Perhaps if men were volunteering for more housework, women would share the burden, but it seems that women are aware of their choice and believe it is a choice they must make as women. Regardless of being a housewife or a working professional, women all fit into the same category,

*“We women are all sacrifice—we’re all sacrificed, we’re all overburdened. The housewife is sacrificed because she is a housewife and doesn’t want to be. The woman who works is sacrificed because she goes to work and then has to do all the housework, so she longs for more time at home. Understand? It’s never just one thing; you never find the woman who is content. There is always so much work” (Counihan 1999: 89).*

In Counihan’s work, women who embody this role of the *sacrificate* are fulfilling a role that for them seems predetermined; it is just what is expected of them and as a result, it is the life that they chose for themselves. For women, the dual roles of housework and outside work are the responsibilities that are asked of them by society, and men have their own roles, which they carry out,

*“Oh a man has to work, without a doubt. Here in Italy, a man’s upbringing and education would never allow him to stay home and do the housework and send his wife out to work. He would never allow him to stay home and do the housework and send his wife out to work. He would feel like a total failure if he switched roles with a woman” (Counihan 1999: 94).*

The subjects of Counihan’s interviews in the late 90s and early 2000s seem to feel that it would be a failure for a man to do a woman’s work, because it debases the very work that women must complete each day. However, men’s lack of help with housework could be attributed to the tendency of men to not leave the parental home until they intend to

marry (Dalla Zuanna 2001: 148). In this situation, men have little to no acquaintance with housework because they have never shared these responsibilities with friends or had to complete them on their own. Although women are identified in every society as the caregivers and men as the providers, it is my opinion that these roles should not define them as individuals. However the decision of women to attend higher schooling, cohabitate, marry, and work are multifaceted compromises of necessity and aspirations that are complicated by the abundance of factors that influence these life choices. It is not merely a decision of financial consideration, but a decision formed by the social pressures that transform a woman each day.

### **3.0 MOTHERHOOD: IS IT A CHOICE? THE ROLE OF PLANNED BIRTHS**

Motherhood is a role that is highly esteemed in the familistic or family focused, Italian culture because nothing is more important than family. In the past, motherhood was expected as a rite of passage through which females transformed from girls into women. Women who do not immediately become pregnant after their marriage were more of the exception to the rule (Ketler 1997: 129). As explained in Elizabeth Krause's *A Crisis of Births: Population Politics and Family-Making in Italy* when Krause spoke to seamstress and housewife Nicoletta, motherhood was considered a natural life process for all women when she was growing up,

*“...when you reached a certain age, you married, started having sex, and then the children came along. Then you sacrificed for your children. You did all you could for them in terms of making their lives as good as possible. You never doubted that they would do the same thing; that they would marry and have kids. When you grew old, your children would take care of you, and their children would take care of them” (Krause 2004:18).*

Motherhood was not planned but assumed of all women; it was predictable and it was welcome.

In more recent times, motherhood has become more of a choice and responsibility that women consciously decide to implement. Elaine seemed to think that children are still “an expected part of life in some way,” but the actuality of having children is circumstantial based on the couple (Luti 3-2-2010). Younger women now have more autonomy and view becoming pregnant as a personal decision and not something that should be automatically expected of all women. However, as mentioned in Sue Ketler's dissertation on maternity, motherhood, and postpartum depression, the choice to become a mother has now become the choice to become parents, as couples now plan pregnancy

together (1997: 147). This new trend is a change from the pre-modern women of the past, who believed that the decision to keep a baby was their own personal choice and not a joint decision (Ketler 1997: 132).

The low birthrate of modern Italy is a reflection of the changing reproductive choices of couples and the social factors that impact their decision-making process. For mothers there are few part-time jobs and not much childcare opportunities within the work environment (Mencarini, Salvini, Secondi, & Vignoli 2010: 2). In order to gain a broader perspective on women in the workforce, I asked an Italian woman who was the recruiter of an antiviolence women's shelter about her opinions. When I discussed this topic with her, her opinion was as follows,

*“...the government is penalizing women as the former governments have usually done when facing financial crisis, since it is still considered a top priority for women to be mothers and wives full-time, therefore it cannot be considered a shame to fire and send them back home. For example the recent reform on the primary school in Italy, through imposing the one teacher's role, and given that 95 percent of the primary school teachers are women, caused the dismissal of thousands of them. In Italy, the percentage of graduated women is equivalent to (that of) men, however the percentage of employed is still at the lowest levels in Europe (6-28-2010).*

There are tax and governmental incentives for families, but only those who have one full-time working parent (Mencarini, Salvini, Secondi, & Vignoli 2010: 3; Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 2006: 22). For women who want to have a professional career, it is difficult to balance work and being a mother. However, there has been research that suggests that women are more likely to have a second child if the father is more helpful with housework and childcare duties, even when the woman works the same amount of hours (Mencarini, Salvini, Secondi, & Vignoli 2010: 3; Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 2006: 22). This ideal and cooperative situation tends to be most common in couples in which each

has a higher level of education. Couples that are financially successful are also more willing to have children (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 2006: 19). However, this does not mean that the Italians of lower socioeconomic status are not also willing to have children, although they have increased difficulties managing the expenses. The number of children of a couple is not always the number of children desired by a couple; there is a constant “gap between intentions and behavior,” that suggests that both members of a couple must constantly sacrifice in order to realistically plan their futures (Mencarini, Salvini, Secondi, & Vignoli 2006: 2-6).

The decision to have children has become a unified decision for both the husband and wife, but it is not always guaranteed that a couple who marries is a couple that will also have children (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 111). Childless marriages were relatively rare until the 1970s, when marriage ceased to function as the gateway between fertile and non-fertile life (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 113). It soon became normal for the first years of marriage to be non-fertile. From the 1950s onward, there began to be longer intervals between marriage and the birth of the first child, and between the births of the first and second child (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 116).

For women born in the 1960s and onwards, it was shown that the later the woman was born, the later they married, and within each subsequent age cohort, the number of children declined (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 114). From the 1970s onward, fertility rates declined overall in couples with higher levels of education (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 128). There is now a gap between the new reproductive behavior of childlessness and the contrasting old reproductive behavior of three or more children (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 390). These declining rates of

fertility suggest that family has begun to weaken as an Italian institution and the role of motherhood is losing its' significance. (Castiglioni & Dalla Zuanna 1994: 137).

The rise in career opportunities for women and the fall of the birthrate seem to imply that roles of mother and worker are not compatible (Vignoli & Salvini 2005: 1). But this does not mean that women cannot be both mothers and workers, if they have the support of their families and significant others. If the mother is already employed in a stable job when she conceives, it is possible for a woman to take on both roles, but she must be ambitious and hardworking as well as family-oriented (Vignoli & Salvini 2005: 2).

The fact that not all women may want children has been a hard reality for Italian society to digest. As mentioned earlier, a high level of education may motivate women to have more career goals, but at the likely cost of lower fertility (Mencarrini & Tanturri 2006: 392). If this career results in a job that is not reliable or permanent and has inflexible work hours, it will have even a greater negative effect on the total fertility rate of a couple. Men who contribute little to housework duties have been shown to be present in both extremes of fertility, both in families with one or no children and in families with three or more children (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 399).

It has been suggested that the religiosity of a couple both individually and cooperatively will influence their reproductive tendencies. Secular families are more likely to have fewer or no children, while more religious families, especially with religious women, tend to have more children (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 392). The cost of raising children is also an influential factor, as well as the success of the economy, as it has been shown that there is a higher fertility rate for couples that are married during an

economic upsurge (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 393). A survey conducted in 2006 on the determinants of reproductive behavior found that women who were childless were often only children, not practicing a religion, with a higher level of education, and a fixed work schedule (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 397). Mothers with three or more children worked outside the home much less and had more traditional and religious values (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 397). Women who have never gone to church are three times as likely to be childless as women who regularly practice a religion. In addition, it has been shown that women with partners who also practice a religion are two times as likely to have three or more children than women with partners who do not practice religion (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006:398). The type of family that an individual is born into is another contributing factor in the size determinants of their family. Women who were members of a larger and perhaps more religious family tend also to have large families, just as women who are members of smaller and more secular families tend to have small families (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 398).

With more children in a family there are more sacrifices, but there are also more blessings. Couples want to have their individual freedoms, careers, and to maintain a standard of living, but there must be a compromise between these desires and the desire to have children. If the couple cannot compromise on fertility, there are a number of possible outcomes. A third of women surveyed in a 2004 questionnaire on reproductive choices cited that they did not have children because their marriage was not stable enough to warrant having children with their partners (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 403). Just over ten percent of women said that they separated before they could even think about having children. Eighteen percent of the participants said that both members of the

couple could not agree on how many children to have, with one partner wanting more children than the other (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 403). Some women said that having another child was threatening to one of their current children, while others said that one of their current children was so difficult that it made the idea of having more children less appealing (Mencarini & Tanturri 2006: 404).

The foundation of Italian family is a stronghold in society; family is one of the several institutions in life that Italians struggle to have control over, with the government's influence being problematic. Perhaps this is why motherhood was never a topic that was raised by the women in my discussions. However because motherhood was not a topic about which questions were explicitly asked, it is difficult to come to a clear conclusion from the women I interviewed. Motherhood is a decision in which women have authority, but it is still a decision that conflicts many women. It is true that women may desire more assistance with childcare but the choice of becoming a mother is just that: a choice, and no longer a role of necessary fulfillment or biological near-inevitability, as it was when birth control was rarely practiced. Although the sizes of families from the traditional past differ from those of the modern present time, family is still the most meaningful aspect of life. The family may differ according to region or social class, but the family has always been a mainstay of security and protection against the church, the government, and the outside community (Dalla Zuanna 2001: 140). This familistic approach to life is representative of the "traditional" Italian life, but it is also against the individualistic trends of modernity, which arise from the absence of families with children (Dalla Zuanna 2001: 154).



#### **4.0 IL CORPO DELLE DONNE: THE OBJECTIFICATION AND DISAPPEARANCE OF THE REAL ITALIAN WOMAN**

When I first came to Italy, I became very aware of the way women were portrayed by the media. Women were young, beautiful, light-skinned, sometimes nude, and always laughing or grinning from the attention they drew. These advertisements were not unlike many in the U.S., although the media in the U.S. has gradually diversified, to appeal to a more diverse audience. A 1989 study on the portrayal of genders in television advertisements found several commonplace misrepresentations after taping hours of commercials on the top five channels in Italy (Furnham & Voli 1989:177).

Men were shown twice as often as the main figures and had voiceovers much more often than women, as women were more often shown visually than males (Furnham & Voli 1989:180). This practice of portraying men as the “brains,” and women as the “beauty,” is a constant in television, and as suggested by some of my interviewees, in traditional relationships as well (6-28-2010). Men were more likely portrayed in business or professional roles, while women were shown as “dependent users” (Furnham & Voli 1989: 180). Females were shown much of the time at home, using house and grooming products, while men were often highlighted in commercials focusing on food products (Furnham & Voli 1989: 180). When portrayed in groups, men were more often seen with a group of women, while women were shown with both genders (Furnham & Voli 1989: 180).

Because of my attendance of a film panel on the gross objectification of women in the media, I had expected the majority of main figures on Italian television to be females, but women were only shown as central characters in advertising 35.7% of the time, while

in America they were shown 43% of the time (Furnham & Voli 1989: 181). This statistics although from a different time, were still upheld in my observations when watching Italian television. Men were more likely shown as the main figures because they were portrayed as authorities. Men advocated more costly products, while women marketed those that were more inexpensive (Furnham & Voli 1989: 182). Since men were portrayed in these authoritative roles, it gives the impression that a man's approval is best when considering the expensive consumer goods.

Allowing women to promote only cheap and disposable commodities suggests they are only capable of advising on and purchasing cheap goods. In addition to being trustworthy advisors, men were often the more comedic figures while women were speechless. Since men were shown as more credible, commercials would also often conclude with their opinion in support of the product (Furnham & Voli 1989:182). The absence of a woman's voice and her ideas, suggests that a woman's voice and her ideas are not worth hearing. However, the voice of women was not always unheard, as women were shown more often endorsing products, which indicated that consumers would have "social approval awards" (Furnham & Voli 1989:183). The time during which these more traditional and stereotypical representations were shown most was during the evening, not surprising since this is often a time where the whole family is home and relaxing after a long day (Furnham & Voli 1989: 183).

Although I had watched several Italian films before visiting Italy, it was a film that I saw shortly after my arrival in Italy that I found most disrespectful. One night after a cooking class, I went to see a film with my friend Jason, which was called "Scusa ma ti Voglio Sposare," directed by Federico Moccia, which translates to "excuse me but I want to marry you." I thought it would be an interesting insight into their culture to see a modern

Italian film. It was a simple romantic comedy and the entire thing was in Italian, which allowed me to practice my translation skills with Jason, who spoke no Italian. It was an enjoyable film but it was somewhat different than the romantic comedies of the U.S.

In this film, women seemed to be much more objectified than they are in U.S. films. Each woman in the Italian film wore extremely revealing clothing and had oftentimes very melodramatic behavior than seemed unrealistic. Also in Italian films, I had begun to notice a common theme of spouses cheating on each other. Not that it is uncharacteristic in an U.S. film, but every character in this film cheated on their significant others, some more than once. And of course, at the end of the movie, each couple realizes they love each other, overcomes unrealistic odds and then are reunited in some ridiculous fashion. I was also a bit perturbed with the way in which women were portrayed. Even in my short time in Italy, I knew that the real Italian women that you saw each day in society were not like these women on the screen. Each of the women in the movie was overreacting in most situations. They were either hysterically emotional or overly objectified, acting dimwitted and confused. Some of the women's chief purposes of the movie were to act as a mistress, which wore little or no clothing and were never even given names or dialogue.

However sexist this trend may seem, it is easy to see where filmmakers could create these scenarios using real life inspirations, given a Prime Minister who is being accused of an illegal affair with an underage prostitute, which is not his first scandalous appearance in the media, but only his most recent tryst. Although these stigmas are overly utilized in the U.S. and Italian films alike, I felt like it was more explicit in this film in particular. I have seen other Italian films that have portrayed women in a more flattering way, but since this movie was a new release, I found its themes very frustrating because women of many countries are constantly trying to fight these very stereotypes.

It was not until Elaine told me of a discussion panel that was being held at our university that I became aware of the tactics that women were utilizing to protest the

objectification of women in the media. After weeks of observing Italian women, I was happy to attend a film and discussion panel, hoping to understand more about Italian women. The panel, which was held in English at my school, John Cabot University, was on the Italian documentary “Il Corpo Delle Donne,” which literally means “women’s bodies.” The film was written, narrated, directed, and produced by Lorella Zanardo along with her two friends, Cesare and Marco. They wanted to make a movie about the portrayal of Italian women in the media, in order to raise awareness of young people. Since its release on the Internet, over a million viewers have seen the video. I found it encouraging to see that it was not just Lorella, a woman, who was passionate about the ideas that inspired the film, but also that both of her assistants, who were men, who were also disgusted by the current state of Italian media. The video was both disconcerting and informative, as Lorella and her friends had videotaped over 400 hours of Italian entertainment programs and cut it down to this twenty-five minute documentary. Each woman in the documentary was heavily groomed and made up, with evidence of multiple rounds of plastic surgery. Italian television seemed much more provocative than American television, because there was absolutely no censorship. Images of women scantily clad and overly preened filled the documentary, which analyzed the corruption of the Italian media.

After the viewing, the panel began to discuss the movie. When talking about the women of the Italian media, Lorella used an interesting word to describe them, *orrechine*, which in Italian translates to earrings, but was a symbolic word to portray women as ornaments of decoration. The women are young and beautiful but they lose their voice when they are on TV because they are portrayed in a humiliating fashion, doing things without people even caring what they have to say. Lorella’s documentary is about the struggle of women to get back their voices. She explicitly stated that she was not against these women on TV or even plastic surgery, but against monopolization of the media by the government and the subsequent and relentless degradation of women. The video also focuses on the disappearance of the human face. Every face on TV is the face of someone young, because

the older generation has distorted their faces with dozens of plastic surgery procedures to appeal to men (Zanardo 2-10-2010). Lorella's statements fit with the statements one of Counihan's subjects, Sergia who said,

*“They (women) can't live without men courting them and making them feel like women. They need this because they are unsatisfied in life. To feel like women, they need to feel loved, pleasing, still attractive. They need to feel that even at forty years old they can still make a conquest of some young man. Perhaps the women who are most unsatisfied and thus most restless always want to realize themselves through their body. They have no other way to fulfill themselves. The life of a housewife is oppressive, so they go out with a beautiful body and they feel compensated” (Counihan 2004: 113).*

Just as Sergia explains that there are no “natural” or “real” bodies, Lorella admits that there are no real faces anymore. No one looks natural. The face is something that changes with time and experience, to the point where an individual's face reflects not only time and age but also the experiences of their life (Zanardo 2-10-2010). When these faces are unnaturally altered, Lorella argued, you cannot detect what that person has been through; you are left with a mystery.

Another member of the panel, a female Italian author, explained that women who are changing their faces and bodies are neglecting their responsibility to themselves to be happy. It's not just a problem with Italian women, but the entire country. However, I would say it is a problem with many women in the world, who change themselves out of insecurity. Along with Lorella, the other women of the panel explained that there has always been a constant link between women, spectacle, and politics and because of the frequency of such programming in the media, it is difficult to differentiate what is real and what is falsified (Zanardo 2-10-2010).

Another author on the panel recognized the loss of the Italian women's voice, saying most of these women lose their identity between the ages of 12 and 15. As a result these girls become detached and estranged from themselves and their feelings. These girls watch TV and are taught to believe that they must act in a provocative manner and constantly appeal to men when they appear in the public. She emphasized that this has become a

cultural trap that has been ignored by society. The author and Lorella agreed that, at this point, some people's initial reactions are just to turn off the TV because you are so disgusted. Lorella said we must ignore our feelings and we must watch TV. We must watch with our sons and daughters and talk about it and be open and non-judgmental to make them understand (Zanardo 2-10-2010).

The next speaker was an Italian teacher at my school, with a bit of a contrasting view. Although the media displayed inappropriate shows and images, she believed that the people of Italy do not necessarily accept the media. Italian TV allows for little competition, since the main television channels are owned by Berlusconi, and the government regulates television itself. Whether the Italian people approve of television or not, television is watched by the Italians. The advertisements are outdated and the shows are over the top. She added that it probably doesn't help that only 30% of the high ranking jobs in the country are held by women and only 20% of the Italian government members are female (2-10-2010).

One U.S. teacher asserted her opinion, saying media is not as shameful in the U.S., and that Italian women, like women in the U.S. have rights, but women of the U.S. are more independent, more progressive, more outspoken, and not as naïve. I would argue that although some media may be less shameful in the U.S., there are still outrageous reality and talk shows that portray women in situations eerily similar to those in Italian television. This American teacher, like I, could not help but compare American and Italian media, but being born and raised in an American environment makes it difficult to make objective comparisons. It is necessary to consider both the opinions of Italian and American women when comparing the role of women in each society, because each woman will have different ideas about their own country. The woman continued to say that before Italians can have their country change, they must change their habits of consumption and stop paying to support ideas that they don't believe in (2-10-2010).

A male professor from the university attributed the problems of the media to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who started his career in television. I was unsurprised at

his statements, as television and media have always had a way of breeding politicians. The professor went on to say the downfall of television began because Berlusconi found Italian television boring and wanted to add Westernized forms of entertainment. In this respect, Berlusconi's presence and influence in the media are in direct opposition to tradition, as he has sought to modernize television. Television is a "pillar of Italian society," he said and it would take much time and effort on the part of the people to fix all the problems of the media (2-10-2010).

Countering the professor's assertions, an audience member stated that the real problem with Italians is that they no longer know what they actually consider acceptable and not acceptable; it's more of a problem with the structure of the Italian television industry. Lorella added an interesting side note at this point, by talking about the *velline* (Zanardo 2-10-2010). The *velline* are the women that are picked for these demeaning roles on shows and they are all, surprisingly, picked single-handedly by a woman, although the *velline* are picked by a man. Some women, Lorella continued, behave worse than the men who watch this vulgar TV. The woman who casts the *velline* is harsh and judgmental towards the younger women, picking out their flaws, causing them later in life to get the same alterations that she has herself. She sees women more beautiful than her, and feels empowered by picking them apart. Women are to blame as much as men for creating this vicious cycle of criticism, Lorella suggests (Zanardo 2-10-2010). Women have been forced to realize that they themselves have allowed this humiliation to continue, Counihan's friend Sergia said,

*"There's no way out. But it is women themselves that go along with this. We women turn ourselves into objects. It comes from advertising and these models who are paid millions to objectify themselves. It is men who put it all into action, no? In these newspapers, it is the men who initiate it all—the photographer and the writer who use the women. The women go along with it to get paid or show themselves off, or who knows why? It begins with men, but the women go along with it" (Counihan 1999: 114).*

Unfortunately, Lorella said that unlike in the U.S., women in Italy are not encouraged to attend cultural events and educate themselves as much as they should. Women, however, do watch television. Although I realize that women watch television, I think it is important to

recognize that many women also become the women they are from the influences of their mothers, sisters, and other female relatives and friends who are continuously present in their lives.

As Counihan's friend mentioned, women are not always the victims in the Italian media. There are women who are manipulated by the creators and owners of the television channels and shows, but there are also women who do "go along with it." Some of these women know what they are getting themselves into, but go along with it because they desire their fifteen minutes of fame, not unlike U.S. women on "reality TV" shows. However, in the U.S. it is "reality" TV that is known for its ridiculous charades and unstable characters, whereas in Italian television, this portrayal of women is everywhere. There are women like Lorella who are trying to fight for the rights of the naïve or fame-obsessed women on television, but they must realize they are fighting a battle that some women in television may argue is not worth fighting.

The problem seems to be that more women need to be present in the public sphere to make change happen. As Lorella put it, women need to be assured that they too, can have value and power. The Italian women aren't silent as a whole, but they are being silenced. For this reason, Lorella and her partners have been all over Italy conducting discussions and having screenings of their movie to reach out to the younger generation. However, as one professor pointed out that night, mass culture is not a phenomenon that the Italian people think of as worthy of being studied. It is only the grassroots efforts that really have been effective. Men and women each need to change themselves to make the change they want possible. Women give in and sacrifice their individuality for fame and beauty to fit this unrealistic mold of the perfect woman. Men are infantilized, by being treated like boys who have sex drives but no brains. In this way, the media is promoting a Fascist ideal, which is validating "men's right(s) to define and judge female beauty" and highlighting the "underscored women's duty to please men" (Counihan 2004: 49). The entire media industry, government, and the people themselves need to change together, if they want the



change to be permanent.

During my time in Italy, I was fortunate enough to speak with representatives from Differenza Donna, an anti-violence shelter in Rome. We had an informal discussion together in person in English and the rest of our correspondence was conducted through emails. I found that the women at the organization echoed Lorella's sentiments about the exhibition of women in the media. A recruiter for the shelter translated for her coworker, while also adding her own opinions citing that, "women are seen and recognized only as bodies" (3-4-2010). Women are chosen for elite roles in government but "only if they have a beautiful face and body" (3-4-2010). The two women explained to me "a woman is seen as an object within this society because they are expecting a certain image, because it is a culture based on images" (3-2-2010).

Women are portrayed and perceived in a way that compliments Italian culture. They are exhibited like an object to be shown, "not a subject but an object," which can be shown only to satisfy the male pleasure (3-2-2010). When I asked the women at Differenza Donna how they perceived the influence of television the recruiter stated,

*"Television provides information and education as well, it does not only reflect the prevailing culture, yet it imposes behavioural models and most all needs to sell! TV and media contribute in a significant way to women's mistreatment. In our society, from a symbolic and even political perspective, the woman is depicted as a body, the women's subjectivity is being cancelled. Predominantly media presents women in the traditional roles of wife, mother, and prostitute, behavioural models, which offer the fundamental basis to the patriarchal culture. In such a social, political, and cultural context where the 'market ideology' rules, the woman's body is regarded as the market privileged good, the most used one for trade" (6-28-2010).*

In addition to television, the recruiter cited a "training course reserved to young models" as another tactic the government was utilizing to institutionalize the preferred image of a female working professional (6-28-2010).

The two women, like Lorella, believed that television is a commanding influence in the treatment of women. Through the gross objectification of women, the media is instituting "behavioral models," where the woman is nothing more than a body. In this

context the “women’s subjectivity” is completely eliminated. When women are presented in such stereotypical roles, patriarchal views are glorified and the woman’s body becomes an item on the market, an item that must sell because it is a “privileged good” and the good that is “the most used one for trade” (6-28-2010).

In Italian society and in other cultures, women have been consistently identified as “bodies” and men as “minds,” and it is the mind that is held superior to the body (6-28-2010). The women in the media are in a culture that promotes objectification, which became more acceptable in the modern Italy of today as opposed to the traditional Italy of the past. There is a split between the modern women who are on television, these women who are conforming to a role that they chose for themselves, and the others such as Lorella feel a need to overcome objectification in the media for women, whether they have chosen the life of an *orecchine* or not. For the other modern women, who are fighting back against the media and the portrayal of the modern women of television, their objectives are clear, that it is not until women are treated as equals and respected politically, professionally, and individually that these women will be satisfied.

## **5.0 ITALIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS: CONFLICTS AND COMMUNICATION LOST IN TRANSLATION**

In order to learn more about Italian women from Italian women themselves, I decided to visit different women's organizations when I arrived in Italy. I was not particular about which associations I would visit, because I had not yet decided which aspects of a woman's life I wanted to focus upon. I made myself open to those with different political, religious, or cultural affiliations and hoped that by seeing a diverse range of organizations that I would have a more multifaceted view of the life and choices of an Italian woman. After searching for women's groups in Italy, I narrowed my search down to those organizations located in Rome. My list was somewhere between ten and fifteen different groups and I felt confident that I could establish a relationship with at least half of the groups. At this point in time, I was still unfamiliar with the geography of Rome and so I decided to try contacting organizations through phone calls and emails. If a phone number or email was listed for the organization, I contacted them, but without success. I could not understand why none of the organizations would return my calls or emails. I left messages in both English and Italian, hoping that the representatives of these groups would be more helpful if I spoke their language. I had expected that the organizations would take this into account and would look more favorably on my curiosity.

After a week or so of being ignored, I made the decision to visit the headquarters of each of the groups in person. However, I first spoke with my professor, Elaine, who sympathized with my efforts to learn more about women's associations and suggested visiting a feminist organization that was located close to one of our school campuses. When I asked her where women in Italy go to seek help in the city, she admitted she was unfamiliar with the organizations, but that this organization was close and had been in business for years. I took her advice as encouragement to seek out the organization myself. That day, I found the address of the organization and walked to their headquarters

in hopes of developing a connection with these women.

The organization was not hard to find, as they were located on the same street as one of my school's campuses. When I entered, I noticed the walls were adorned with pictures of women during the feminist movement of the 1970s, where the women of Italy fought for more labor opportunities. They had many flyers for distribution, as well as a store and a library. I entered the store, where I asked the owner about the location of the main office. Although I had begun talking to her in Italian, she responded to me in English, as many Italians seem to do when they recognize an American. Perhaps they could tell from my accent that I was not a native Italian, or fluent in Italian and they wanted to respond to me in the most helpful way possible. The woman was very cordial, escorting me to the elevator and telling me to visit the secretary's office, where two secretaries called another woman, who would show me to the library. I kept getting passed off from one person to the other; no one seemed to know where I should go or whom I should talk to. Luckily, the woman who was sent for was very helpful and she walked me outside the building to another building, unmarked, which was the library.

My escort spoke to me in English, saying excitedly that many Italians like to practice their English with Americans and she apologized for her broken English, although I told her I understood her perfectly. She showed me to the building's elevator and pushed the third floor button before leaving me. When I got to the third floor, I was faced with another road block: the woman who greeted me, who spoke no English, was not the person I was supposed to talk to about my research. I spoke to her in Italian about my work and she very kindly applauded my efforts. Then, she sent me to the first floor, insisting that they would be more helpful.

I soon found that the first floor was the actual floor that housed the library. For

the fourth time that day, I explained the purpose of my visit to two women, and they told me it would be most informative if I read their website and watched their DVD, which I purchased to watch at my leisure. The women tried to be helpful and explain a bit of the history of the organization to me, but suggested I attend some of their events posted on their website.

Feeling a bit defeated, I thanked the women and left the library. I tried to maintain an optimistic attitude when I visited the next organization on my list. After a drawn out chat through the apartment building's intercom, I was let upstairs. I had to explain to the secretary who I was and why I was there and she only seemed to allow me entrance because I could not understand her accent and rapid speech. She had tried to give me an email address to try to set up an appointment, but after walking there, I told myself I was not going to leave before I at least spoke with a representative in person. I reached the second floor and was allowed into the office where I spoke with the same secretary. She gave me the exact email address, which I had already tried contacting in previous weeks. After I told her I had had no luck reaching anyone, she assured me that I should try again, but also gave me a supplemental address. She then hurriedly explained that they were all very busy and to send them an email to set up a time to meet.

Although I had only visited two organizations, I worried if each one would be so unwelcoming. Why did no one seem to take me seriously? I was unsure if it was because I was a student or because I was foreign. I would hope since I visited women's organizations that it would not be because of my gender.

Although everyone I had met with was very polite, no one seemed to want to help me with my research. That night, I looked at both of the organizations that I had

visited online. I emailed each at both addresses and looked at their events. Not only were the events exclusive only to members the feminist organization, they were rather expensive. In order to join the feminist organization, you also had to pay a large fee each month. The fees and event charges were more than I could afford, and so I decided to watch the DVD I had purchased from the feminist organization's library, which I realized did not work, because its format did not fit my computer. After my first day of visits, I felt that all my efforts to learn more were in vain.

These formalities for organization membership and attendance made membership less appealing and more discouraging to me. If membership is only available to women who have a certain level of availability of time and money, I wondered how successful the organization had been in the past at recruiting members, or if they made the effort to recruit members at all. In making membership of the organization an exclusive priority, I wondered how many other women were disenchanted and decided against becoming a member. Another setback for non-Italian women could be that this organization along with several others, only have their sites in Italian and for those who do not know Italian, it difficult and unlikely that they will become further involved in the future.

On my second day of visits, I went to the headquarters of an Italian political feminist group. I arrived on the correct street in a palazzo, but the numbers on the buildings were hard to find. I did eventually find the building, but when I went to ring the buzzer, I did not see the name or even the abbreviation for the group. I walked into the building a bit to see if there was a guard on duty that I could ask, but the security office was closed. I re-read the names for the offices inside the building and after having no luck; I asked two of the gentlemen who owned the restaurant next door about the organization.

They were absolutely clueless, but they were at least very kind and helpful. They

helped me try to contact one of the other offices in the building, after we realized there was no one physically present on the first floor to ask. When one of the offices finally answered, they told me not only was the organization no longer located in that building, but it had been gone for five years now! They also did not know if the organization was still in existence and if so where their new location would be. The address I had visited was the most updated one I could find, even on google maps. I had already tried calling and emailing the organization, but no one had answered or replied.

A few days after visiting the nonexistent organization, I decided to speak with Elaine about my research to see what she recommended. When I explained to her my most recent experiences, she just shook her head. She explained to me that when she first came to Italy, she too tried to attain information about the different services available to women. Like me, she also had trouble. She told me that for some reason, the organizations, at least in Rome, don't seem to cooperate well with Americans. She continued to tell me that people in Italy have a strong sense of nationalism; they are very proud and although their organization's purpose is to help people, they don't really know what to do about people that just show up and want to learn more about their organizations. Whether they were simply unfamiliar with American students visiting their organizations or had an aversive experience with American students in the past I did not know. I told Elaine, that they seemed to just want to know what I wanted, to see if I was trying to get something out of them. In reality, all I really wanted was to learn more about them, as a result it was frustrating when I was handed a flyer and told to read their website. In retrospect, if I had more time and experience to offer to volunteer for these organizations, I may have had more success establishing a rapport. In addition, it was obvious when I visited these organizations that they were also busy with their own projects.

That same day, I went out on my third round of visits for my project. This next organization was an antiviolenace shelter, which was located near my apartment. My task of finding the correct building was a bit more difficult, as the street numbers of the buildings

skipped numbers. If this building was supposed to be a valuable resource for women in trouble, you would think that would have made their location easier to find and identify.

Eventually, I found the shelter and recited in Italian, from memory, the purpose of my visit. I explained that I was an American student studying at John Cabot in Rome who was interested in learning more about the services their shelter offered to women. After waiting a few minutes, a young Italian woman explained to me, in Italian, that an anti-violence center for women was created for women who had been sexually harassed, raped, newly divorced, or just in a tough financial situation. Among the services they have are: a hospital, help-groups, a legal action branch, places to stay overnight or for an extended period of time, protection services, immigration services, and lounges and salon areas for rest and relaxation. The organization was founded for a great cause, but the women explained to me that unless I was in a situation that necessitated the organization's help, they couldn't really help me. I asked about possibly sitting in on one of their help-group meetings and they informed me that because of issues of legality and liability, it was forbidden and rightfully so. I wanted to respect the privacy of their residents, so I thanked the women for her help and left.

I decided to visit a few more organizations, the first of which was located in an ancient piazza. A security guard informed me of the stairwell and floor on which the organization was located, Stairwell B, Floor 3. Unfortunately, locating the organization was more difficult than I realized. Nothing was labeled and each person I asked told me to go to a different floor, even though none of them knew of the organization. When I was finally on what should have been the correct floor, no one answered the doorbell, because that area of the stairwell was under construction. It is possible that the organization moved to another location for the time being, but since all of the Italian organizations I had visited did not seem too concerned with updating their phone numbers, emails, and addresses, I was not surprised. Having a friend in Italy who was personally involved with one of the organizations would have been extremely beneficial.



The next organization I visited that day was Differenza Donna or “Different Women,” which was located farther away than any other place I had visited. I arrived at the office and was introduced to a young Italian woman who served as a recruiter. The recruiter was able to talk to me in English and translate for some of the women in the organization who only spoke Italian. They seemed so open and welcoming and when I asked if I could meet with them to talk about women’s rights, they agreed to meet with me the following week! After exchanging email addresses, they told me to send them a list of topics and questions and after we could set up an appointment. I thanked them profusely for their cooperation and kindness and left feeling very relieved. Finally I had convinced someone to listen to me about my research.

A few days after my visit to Differenza Donna, I visited another organization that worked with labor unions for Italian citizens. Although it was not specifically a women’s organization, it came up many times when I was researching women’s rights, so I decided to pay them a visit. After explaining the purpose of my visit, the male secretary told me that although I was at the correct organization, the general office (at another location) would be a better place to visit for more information. Although everyone I had corresponded with was polite, they were not always necessarily helpful. All they did was send me to another person, who sent me to another person, and so on and so forth. However the time constraints of being a student studying abroad for only a brief period of time made it difficult to establish a relationship with these organizations and their members.

The next day I went to the other location of the labor union organization. For once I did not have to worry about locating the building, as it stood out with the letters of the organization in big, red capitals at the entranceway. When I went in, I talked to the men at the front desk about why I was there and I got the usual baffled looks. They looked at me and handed me a booklet about their services and then called down a woman to talk to me. Although their organization offered many services, she said, I would be better off visiting another organization, which she said dealt more with human rights and immigration

services. She kindly printed me out a paper with their services and gave me a pamphlet in English about their history.

I should have been more upset with the organizations I had been visiting for being so evasive, but I realized I had become accustomed to people being confused with my presence at their door. No one seemed to understand why a foreign student would want to know more about their foundation and its services. I was hoping that when I visited the human rights organization a few days later that they would give me more information. When I entered the building I spoke with the man at the front desk, who told me that no one was at the office today, which I found strange because it was still the middle of the work week. He then handed me the same booklet that the women from previous organization had given me and told me to call their phone number if I wanted to speak with someone. I had already called the number before visiting and no one had answered. I decided I would send them an email and plan on returning if someone answered, fully expecting no response based on my track record with all the other organizations.

My visits with the different organizations were frustrating. If the women in these groups were so determined to gain a voice again in their society, why could they not be more receptive to me when I tried to visit their organizations? I asked Elaine why it had been so difficult to get associations to openly and warmly release information to outsiders such as myself. She mentioned that she had much of the same problem when she first came to Italy and visited organizations herself, saying she was often accused of being some type of spy.

Despite the opportunities that women have, she said, there are not many individual opportunities because of the unstable Italian economy. Everyone has their position and they have a tendency to believe that people who are seeking information all have some ulterior motive. They ask you who you are and what you want, because if you are an outsider then you are basically no one to them. They are very guarded because these people have very little and are therefore protective of the little that they do have. They are suspicious of the

intentions of any outsiders and do not like to give out information (Luti 3-2-2010). Because of this, the advice we often get is not helpful or concrete.

When the day of my meeting with Differenza Donna came, the recruiter greeted me warmly along with the other woman that she would be translating for, was running late because of the rain and traffic. Unfortunately she ended up being forty minutes late and I had to leave within forty-five minutes to be on time for an exam with Elaine on my school's campus. When I sat down with the two women I did make them aware of the time constraints, which they apologized for, but I had gotten so accustomed to Italians being late for everything that it did not upset me. Although I did realize that half an hour would not be enough to discuss everything I wanted.

The recruiter translated graciously for her friend, who was in charge of training for Differenza Donna. The foundation was established in 1989 by women and for women. Only women work at the organization and their main objective, the recruiter said, was to combat and prevent gender-based violence. They focus on violence done to women by men, because that is the most common. They have carried out different awareness activities, conferences, and specific projects for the community. In 1992, the first antiviolence center was built in Rome to offer women a concrete resource for escaping violence. The organization realized more needed to be done and expanded their interests to dealing with women who are victims of sexual trafficking. Public institutions and the government fund all the centers and they each serve as a refuge (3-4-2010).

The recruiter continued to tell me that the organization shelters women, offers a psychological center, activities, legal assistance, and also support for maltreated children. However, the largest problem they deal with involves domestic violence, which is 80-90% more common than other forms of violence. About 70% of the cases are made by women's former partners, or male members of their family. These women are often in low to middle socioeconomic status but it affects many other women as well (3-4-2010).

Differenza Donna is not only a safe haven for women, it also teaches women

training classes for nine months that are both practical and rhetorical. The trainees must stay in centers for two months. The recruiter said she works with international projects and has helped to set up a shelter in Palestine. It only started out as a pilot project, but it is now an actual center, which provides for thirty women and children who stay there. The recruiter said that these women may go to sessions and go through psychological counseling and attend self-help groups. These all support the notion of removing oneself from the violent atmosphere that may be at home. There are also programs for babies and children having learning problems (3-4-2010).

The organization is also funded by the ministry of foreign affairs, as well as by the EU. They have recently opened six antiviolence centers in areas of need in Kazakhstan, as well as other countries. They support women acquiring equal rights around the world, but began in Italy. The recruiter began to tell me about how the institution of new laws in the 60s' and 70s' revolutionized Italian society. The 60s' were a time of many changes for Italy as more jobs were accessible for women. In 1971, laws prohibiting the sale of contraceptives and other methods of pregnancy prevention were abolished. In 1972, a law was created that prevented men who killed their wives from having legal control in their families. In 1975, there was a reform of family law, which promoted equality between wife and husband, and there was no longer a designated head for the family. In 1978, law in Italy allowed voluntary abortion. Finally in 1996, the government-instituted laws against rape and sexual violence, which escalated the sentence for those found guilty of instigating the rape. With this law, rape became considered a problem against public moral but also against individual women (3-4-2010).

Differenza Donna has a very strong standing against the prostitution of women, the women said. Although law closed brothels in Italy in 1958, Differenza Donna believes prostitution is still a key form of gender-based violence that needs to be eradicated completely. It is not a job or chance for women, but it is something that is "forced upon women" (3-4-2010). When I asked the recruiter if she believed violent crimes had increased in Italy, she

said it is unclear because there are just now more resources available to women, therefore there are now more reported cases. Unfortunately, she said there are still many cases that are not reported because they occur inside the family and the victims are afraid to create tension within the family (3-4-2010).

Domestic violence is also a problem to report, because then the children and entire family become directly involved and it becomes a public affair. Both women said that even though a law was instituted in 1975 about gender equality, the family sphere is still the most common place where rape and abuse is perpetrated because women are considered the property of the men. This creates problems because Italy is a country upon which the entire society focuses on the importance family. Society has its' foundation in the separation and division of roles of the sexes (3-4-2010).

When I asked the women if there were certain necessary precautions to avoid violent situations, they insisted that women are not responsible for the violence they suffer. The recruiter attributed the problem to society as a whole, because society must be held responsible for their citizens, and undertake the necessary precautions for the protection and prevention of violence to their women and children. Prevention, education, and training can lead to changes in the mentality of society and its' stereotypes. The women's movement around the world has been gaining power and publicity by stating their oppositions against violent acts, the recruiter said. However, she admitted it is also women's responsibility to stop violence and protect themselves (3-4-2010).

The recruiter then translated for her friend who said that in Italy, the main tool women adopted to protect themselves was solidarity among other women and the strength of these personal relationships among women. The recruiter said this was in order to "cut the linkage" with the male gender or abusive men, which had previously held them as inferior (6-28-2010). Women started to understand it was important to resist compliance with men's needs, desires, and demands. It was necessary for the women of today to split from the women of the past (3-4-2010). After the interview, I thanked each of the women,

who said they were each very happy to help with my project. They thanked me each for the flowers and promised to email me to set up a time to finish our interview. They each said goodbye to me as if we were old friends, with a hug and kiss on each cheek.

Due to scheduling conflicts, I was unable to meet with the women to finish our interview before I left Italy. I had emailed them almost every week since our first interview and between their busy schedule and my traveling; we decided to rely on email correspondence to finish the interview. A few weeks after my return to the United States, I received an email with answers to the rest of my questions.

When asked about how violence affects both genders, the women insisted that women are the key victims, not just in Italy, but all over the world. In Europe, violence is the number one killer of women, more than car accidents, cancer, and war. One in three women will be “battered, raped, or killed,” in her lifetime by one of her own relatives, the women cited (6-28-2010). Since the superiority of the male gender is upheld in the nuclear family, this encourages an “imbalance of power,” and the subsequent “subordination of women” (6-28-2010). When this violence occurs in the realm of the family, the sons and daughters learn from their parents’ roles, identifying men as the active force, and women as the passive receivers of violence. The women’s beliefs undoubtedly mirror the beliefs of Cornelisen who stated, “When husband and wife share their room, often their bed, with their children...it is hard to have a private fight” (Cornelisen 2004: 19).

When considering the role of women in society the Italian government is in a bit of a dilemma given their current financial situation, when considering whether to employ more women, the women explained. Women are seen as wives and mothers first and despite their occupations, their roles as wife and mother are still viewed as their full-time priorities. Since these are the women’s real occupations, the government does not consider it unjust to fire these women and send them home to tend to their duties. As shown in Counihan’s interview with housewife and former dressmaker Valeria the work never seems to end,

*“You work and you work and you can’t get anything done because you’re at home and you have all the housework to do, and if the phone rings you*

*have to get up; if the doorbell rings, you have to get up; if someone comes over, you have to give them some coffee. The end of the day comes and you've accomplished nothing. But if you go off to work, you're more at ease, you do your eight hours, and you're done, and then you go home and do the other things" (Counihan 1999: 87).*

These policies mirror the Fascist ideology of the past, which “exalted marriage and the family, and relied heavily on the unpaid labor of women to provide care for the elderly and children” (Counihan 1999: 48). Although men and women in Italy graduate at the same rate, the level of women employed in Italy is one of the lowest rates in Europe.

When asked what ongoing projects and events Differenza Donna has to raise awareness among young women in their country, the recruiter emphasized the importance of their training within the organization. Their training begins with the ultimate goal of recognizing, preventing, and eradicating all violence against women, a problem that arose from specific social and cultural issues. Differenza Donna has been enabling different programs in Italy and around the world, all aimed at combating gender-based violence. Through “conferences, meetings, workshops, and training” members of “antiviolence centers, teachers, students at high schools and University” workers have been taught to help those who have been victimized in situations of domestic violence. These courses allow women to acknowledge the fact that they have all at one time or another been victims of “violence and gender stereotypes” and therefore these women gain a more holistic perspective of their lives and relationships as women. Some women who have been treated by the services of Differenza Donna were so profoundly affected that they themselves have later become teachers and counselors.

Differenza Donna has been fighting against gender-based violence, but women are capable of helping to support their cause. Women are at their strongest when they unite with other women, the women at Differenza Donna believe. This notion of “female solidarity,” where women ally among themselves instead of engaging in competition, allows for women to be freed of patriarchal society and have mutual power and equality (3-2-2010).

Although the women of Differenza Donna were kind enough to meet with me and

discuss my interests, they were the only group that I contacted that agreed to meet with me. Differences in ethnicity, culture, religious practices, and language create significant barriers for these groups to overcome in order to institute change. Pojmann's book on the female immigrant population further details the struggles that these women face to gain acceptance. Many of the women who have come to Italy are from third-world countries and are discriminated against and judged by their dissimilarity to Italian women. Women come from all over including the Phillipines, South America, Morocco, China, America, Germany, and Russia. Still more migrants come in smaller groups from other countries. Forty-four percent of these women reside in northern Italy, while forty-nine percent live in central Italy; the south has the lowest number of female migrants (Pojmann 2006: 39).

These migrant women, who are involved in their own groups, are often all of the same ethnicity or background: Arab-Muslim, Eastern European, or Chinese (Pojmann 2006: 95). Each group is separate because they each have their own priorities. The Arab-Muslims wished "to overcome stereotypes and become members of the Italian community while allowing for the valorization and continued practice of their faith" (Pojmann 2006: 98). A particular Slavic group called Associazione Lipa wanted to encourage "the right to active citizenship and the respect of cultural and gender differences, allowing for a trans-cultural approach and valuing the experiences and professionalism of its women members" (Pojmann 2006: 101). As for the Chinese population, there appeared to be no particular migrant organizations and most of their adaptation in the Italian cultural was done together by both sexes. Pojmann seemed to notice more "traditional social structures based on hierarchies of sex, age, and clans" (Pojmann 2006: 102). Regardless of differences in cultures and backgrounds, each of



these groups wish to further women's rights and overcome negative portrayals and stereotypes of women.

What perhaps should be the key focus of all migrant women of Italy should be to unite to form a collective initiative in improving the rights and services available to migrant women. In order for these women to advance as foreigners they need to work with native Italian women to learn from their personal experiences. Although such associations do exist which foreign and Italian women as members, they are the minorities in the realm of women's help groups. One group, Trama di Terre, has suggested to its' members having a shared meal between members to openly discuss the day to day obstacles that they face as foreigners, in an effort to make Italian women better understand and empathize with these women (Pojmann 2006: 117). Unfortunately, many of these affluent groups have trouble getting other groups to notice their work and follow their lead.

It has been difficult for leaders of the organizations to get support and funding from both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Problems between Italian, multi-ethnic, and single ethnicity groups lie often in trust and translation. It is difficult for migrant women to trust native women, who have so much more power and for women of minorities to trust other groups whether Italian or not, who outnumber them vastly. Each group is fighting for the same resources and funding, which are available in limited amounts. It has also been a continuing problem to find members of different ethnicities that can translate for the variety of languages spoken by the members. Verbal and cultural misinterpretations become frequent problems that result in simple but common misunderstandings. Although several groups and outside researchers have looked into

fixing this problem, it will take much time, effort, and funding to ultimately solve the issues (Pojmann 2006: 125).

Women's organizations all over the world are trying to unite together conquer women's issues that affect all women. The NGO Association of Italian Women in Development (AIDOS), which has been fighting gender inequality since the 80s' is one such organization that is seeking global recognition (Pojmann 2006: 151). I must applaud their efforts, along with the efforts of other organizations, which appear to be hard at work for advancing women's rights.

The complicated nature of forming relationships with and within women's organizations is a tedious process. As shown through my efforts of contacting different groups, even those who adopt their language and seek their help personally are turned away. Organizations must be more readily available through different methods of contact. Their habit of continually referring visitors and volunteers is discouraging. The difficulties faced when attempting to find some of these organizations at times made me think that they did not want to be found.

In order for both migrant and Italian women to achieve the status they desire, they must be represented, they must be spoken for and they must be willing to accept the help of others outside of their demographic. Representation is impossible without the mutual integration of native organizations with the foreign organizations, not just in Italy but in all countries. In addition, the women must work together and learn from each other, instead of just educating outsiders about how they must adapt to their new environment. Italian women should not expect foreigners to learn their language, but also make an effort to learn the languages of these new citizens of Italy. In order for these

organizations for these organizations to be successful, they must realize that the modern women of Italy are of varying ethnicities, speak different languages, and uphold a multitude of moral and religious ideals. Women must welcome these new women of Italy into their lives and into their families as Italian women, as well. Women must all learn to understand each other, to be proud their identity, but to acknowledge the identity of others (Pojmann 2005: 166). As Pojmann cites in her article on women's organizations, the members of these groups are constantly choosing between emancipation and liberation. In emancipation, the women of these groups "are working from within existing systems and trying to change them" (Pojmann 2005: 74). In liberation, there must be a "complete overthrow of the *status quo*" (Pojmann 2005: 74). The women of these groups must decide if they are working to change the system or hoping to overthrow them completely. These groups each must maintain certain alliances to have the financial and social support of their benefactors, but they must also stay true to the women that they are fighting for (Pojmann 2005: 80-81). These organizations will continue to struggle to uphold the traditions that define Italian society, while promoting modernity through societal change; it is a struggle that must be faced to institute the change that is necessary.

## **CONCLUSION: WHAT MAKES AN ITALIAN WOMAN: THE SACRIFICATE AND THE ORECCHINE**

Through months of observations, reading, and retrospective thinking, I have realized that the women of Italy continue come to terms with themselves, compromising between notions of tradition and modernity, and embodying both components of the culture. Just as women in the U.S. fight gender stereotypes and socially constructed roles, Italian women resist the impositions of their society upon them. Whether Italian or American, these women try to fuse the idea of the traditional women of the past with their ideal modern self-depiction of the present. Each Italian woman has the opportunity for greater control over her own life and can consciously makes choices that she lives with every day, in ways that previous generations of women could not. This is a contemporary condition that women of Italy and America share.

There are the women who chose to become housewives and prioritize family over work. Fertility is now a planned and conscious choice over which Italian women have more control, like their counterparts in the U.S. There are the women who value beauty and fame above all else. Those women who self-proclaim themselves *sacrificate*, who give all for others selflessly through work, household chores, and childbearing are not necessarily the women you see when watching television or who are working outside the home. I have realized that many women, in all global cultures can be considered as *sacrificate*, as selfless and restless people who want little but the happiness of their close friends and family. In contrast, the *orecchine*, who sell their bodies on television and in the media are not necessarily women who feel fulfillment through marriage and procreation. They reach fulfillment through material and cosmetic means and publicity,

and these women are unavoidable in any culture.

The women who strive for higher education and occupations that make more demands on their lives are not necessarily the women who are tempted by fame and fortune or family life. They are growing through their occupations and achievements instead of through having their own offspring and spouses. These women, whether Italian or not, prove not only to others but also themselves, that they have no boundaries and no limits. Women must realize it is not just men but also women who impede themselves from making progress. Just as there are successful women in the media, there are efficacious women in the workforce, and women who feel great satisfaction from a life at home with family. Marriage, motherhood, and the workforce neither separately nor independently define an Italian woman, an American woman, or any woman, as a real woman, just as they do not define her own happiness. Although these roles are “natural” for some women, they are not natural for all women; they are roles that women adopt through their own choices. Although some women may look unfavorably on others who diverge from themselves in their life choices, they must accept these women as their equals, just as they wish for men to accept women as their equals.

The women who may challenge conventional roles for Italian or American women do not have to be the opposition to women who prefer traditional or modest roles, in fact they can be their allies if they collaborate on important societal issues. In addition, some men can also be considered advocates for such women. Italian women would have more opportunities and access for childcare services and support in America. In contrast, many American women seem to covet the overwhelming attention from the male population that Italian women loathe. As an American woman in Italy, I felt more

independent and more culturally aware of my surroundings than a typical U.S. girl. Having the experience of living in an unfamiliar and foreign environment forced me to overcome my naiveté. To be an American who was suddenly part of a minority was a humbling experience, which made me reevaluate my own views as American woman, who also has Italian ancestry. Assimilating into the Italian culture as an American woman was a process. It was a growing experience, which motivated me to become a more proactive and forthright person, because that was the woman I had to become. I had to become like the Italian women I observed, to understand how they dealt with the attention I was given and how to command it. Over time, I realized that Italian and the women of the U.S. are not disparate, but they are raised in distinctive environments, that send different messages to the female population and have variant expectations.

Italian women, like American women, have different attitudes and intentions as shown through their marital, reproductive, and personal choices. Their decisions are as diverse as their regions of origin but they are all women of Italy or women of the world. These women may not all be native Italian women, but they are all citizens and women of Italy. These women are all individuals who are capable and willing to make their own distinctive choices. It is clear through numerous discussions with women of Italy that the country needs to undergo a political transformation before any of these women are satisfied. For although they are all women of Italy, they each have their own expectations of their country, which for some deeply contrast their current observations of the country. There are women in Italy, like many women in America, who will work to dismantle the roles and responsibilities that are forced upon them and exercise their own freedom of choice. However just as there are these women who want change, there are women who

avoid discussions of marriage, maternity, and the workforce, because these issues, although relevant to their lives, are not areas of their lives in which they desire change. It is difficult to initiate change in a society if there is not an overwhelming demand for these changes. Although there are most certainly women whose desire for change is clear in the presence of these issues in their discussions, the absence of these topics in discussions with other women also speaks volumes. These issues, which were overwhelmingly discussed in any articles I reviewed, were often ignored in my firsthand discussions with Italian women.

There were several limitations in my research and methodology that can be attributed to time constraints. Since I was living in Rome for a brief, four-month stint, this made it difficult to expand my discussions with organizations and women outside of Rome. Had I been able to travel the country and converse with women of several geographic regions, I would have emerged with a much more multifaceted perspective on the women of Italy firsthand. My experiences with the organizations themselves may have also been more successful if I had more time to offer as a volunteer. For example, the organization *Differenza Donna* trained each of their members for a nine-month period before they were permitted to work with the women who were aided. Being able to complete this training would have allowed me to establish a more meaningful relationship with the organization and its' members and gain their valuable insight as Italian women.

In addition to time constraints, the revising of my academic research plans while in Italy complicated the depth and consistency of my visits with the organizations. Upon first arriving in Italy, I had intended to meet with women's organizations of all political,

religious, and cultural viewpoints, and conduct informal discussions. However, after deciding that there was a rich and abundant source of topics for research to acknowledge, I decided to expand my research from an independent study to a BPHIL research project. Had I been more cognizant of my research plans, I would have been more thoroughly read on the relevant issues in Italy before arriving in Italy. In addition, I would have structured my questions to ask more about marriage and motherhood to learn more about Italian women's current perspective on these topics.

Lastly, my lack of fluency in the Italian language also served as barrier to establishing rapport not just with women in organizations, but Italians in general. Although I tried my best to converse only in Italian when in Italy, my limited vocabulary created complications when trying to establish rapport. Had I been more fluent in the language, it is possible that women may have been more receptive and more willing to have open discussions. All of the interviews and discussions I had with women were in English, not by my choosing but by their own. I can only assume that these women decided they would be best understood if they spoke to me in English, however this results in some aspects of the discussion being lost in translation, because of the absence of acceptable substitutes for certain words in the other language. It is also possible that these women, like my escort at the first organization, wanted to practice their English, although I would have enjoyed practicing my Italian with them as well. However, since they were answering these questions as a favor to me, I left the language of discussion to be their choice.

Despite all my research beforehand and knowledge of the language and culture, nothing could have thoroughly prepared me for my experience abroad in Italy. Like all



researchers, I was forced to confront my preconceived notions and expectations with realistic observations. I eventually came to the realization that there is no normal or natural expectation for how Italian or American or any women should be. In retrospect, it was not until I had departed from Italy that I began to understand the disparity between my expectations and observations. The expectations and the observations depend entirely on the cultural, societal, and political context of the environment. The women of Italy have continued to challenge my initial presumptions with their complexity and their divergence between their self-depictions and depictions in modern culture.

There are many options for topics of research in future discussions, as identified by the members of my panel. The following paragraphs explain several of their fascinating suggestions for later analyses. It would be intriguing to speak more with Italian men to learn how they perceive Italian women and make generalizations. I would also like to incorporate more discourse on the church's role in the media and the bidirectional influence between the two institutions. Learning more about women's opinion of the church and their personal habits of attendance would also be insightful.

When considering the topic of fertility, it would be relevant to learn more about the adoption rates of children in Italy and from what countries these children are being adopted. For couples who are looking at other contraceptive alternatives, I would like to learn more about the rate of hysterectomies and vasectomies that are performed in Italy, to see the popularity of this option or lack thereof. The low fertility rate in Italy could also serve as interesting comparison to high fertility rates in China, as well as other highly populated nations.

As already mentioned in my section on limitations, it would helpful to have more

time to volunteer with women's shelters, during which I would like to learn more about their opinions on the foreign women and immigrant population in Italy and how to help these immigrants feel more welcome. If I would have the opportunity to spend more time with organizations in the future, I would try to find ways to use my knowledge of English as a strength to help Italians wanting to learn the language. In return, I would hope to practice my Italian speaking skills and learn more about growing up in the Italian culture. Lastly, I have realized that another trip to Italy is not necessary to continue all of my research, as I could establish a reputable basis for comparison by visiting with women's organizations in the U.S. The possibilities for future research in Italy are as diverse and intriguing as the women of Italy themselves; they are a group of women about which there is still so much to learn.

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