

The Rules: A Study of Mexico City's Youth Culture

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Introduction

When playing any game, the participants must recognize and understand the rules. When playing basketball at a playground in any neighborhood, the participants must understand the rules of that context. The rules for the game change based on where you are playing. For example, if a person comes to a playground to play basketball who has never been there, they must ask where the boundaries are, what are the teams, and other things that are necessary to their success on that specific court. These rules must be established before the game begins to avoid trouble during the game. Missionaries are no different. Culture can be defined as the rules by which the game of life is played, and a successful missionary will attempt to understand the rules of the culture to which they are heading and will learn to play by those rules.

The objective of this paper is to begin to inform the reader about the youth culture in Mexico City and develop a preliminary strategy to implement through Youth Ministry International in Mexico. It has been limited to little personal interaction with the culture and considerable library research. Because it is the author's first attempt to understand the youth culture of Mexico, it is sure to be "limited to general overview research of his targeted group" (Lewis 1991:29). The models for youth ministry that work in the United States according to the rules of that specific culture may not work for the rules of the culture in Mexico. The purpose for this research is to examine the rules in Mexico and develop a strategy for youth ministry that will succeed.

Tools to Know the Rules

It is necessary to understand some concepts briefly before examining the rules of life in Mexico City. The first concept is the identification of two social factors: grid and

group. “Grid and group identify two distinctive dimensions of social life found in every social game” (Lingenfelter 1998:25). The understanding of grid and group social structure will help evaluate cultural preferences of the target group as well as those who attempt to minister with them. It is a tool to help understand the rules of life of the young people of Mexico City.

Grid can be described as the way people define the role and place of individuals within their society. The more roles or levels of distinction there are, the higher the grid of the social group. Societies that are high grid are classified as hierarchal or authoritarian. Each person has a specific and distinct role in society, and people are categorized and constrained by these

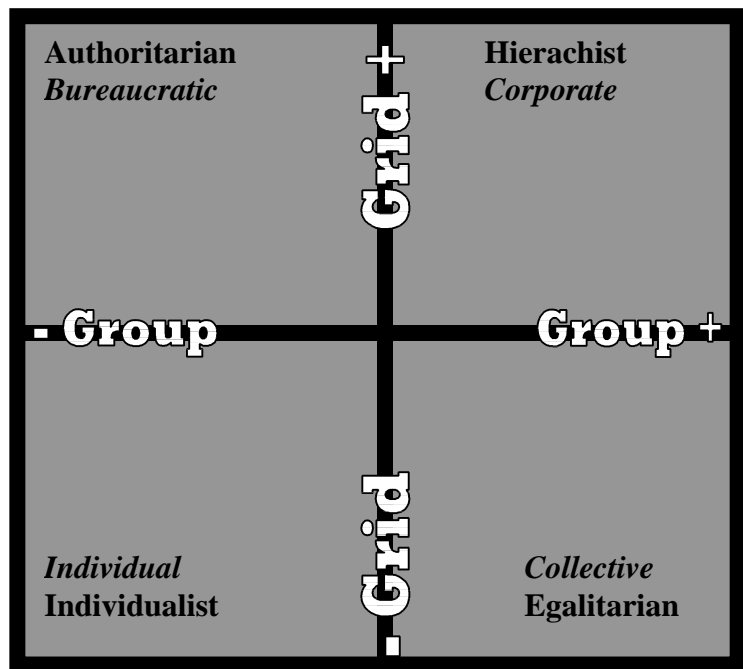


Figure 1 - Grid and Group

roles. In a high grid society, there are more sharply defined social rules. Low grid situations are where people have few social distinctions. They place more importance on individuals and are characterized by a competitive environment. Low grid social groups are classified as individualist and egalitarian.

Group can be described as “a team or collective to which individuals belong” (Lingenfelter 1998:28). High group societies are tightly held together with higher

demands on members of the group along with privileges that are not available to those outside the group. High group societies, as seen in the figure, are known as hierarchal and egalitarian. The group is more concerned with the life of the group than the individual members. Low group societies are those in which there is little holding a group together. They have few mutual interests and do not participate much in activities together. The short-term activities of the group are the goal, and there is little interaction among group members apart from the common, short-lived objective.

Basic Values Continuum

Another tool used in analyzing culture is known as the “basic values” continuum developed by Dr. Marvin Mayers in 1974. This tool is used to observe and classify the tendencies of people from various cultures. Using these twelve key elements will provide us with an understanding of the basic values of the culture in

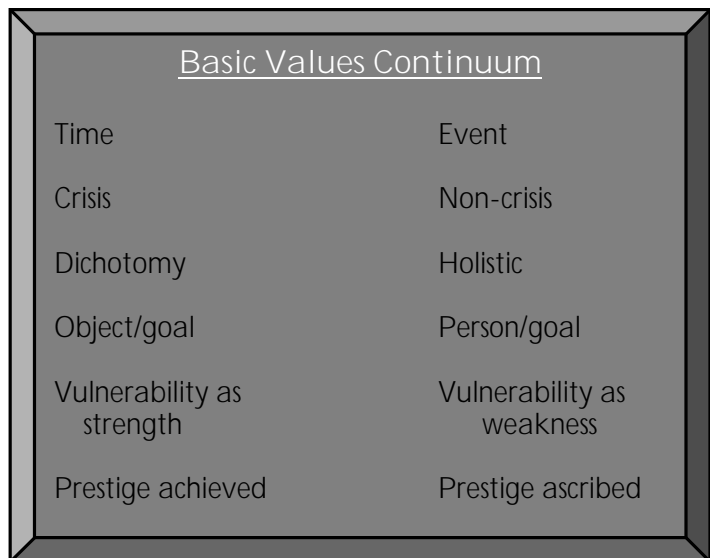


Figure 2- Basic Values Continuum

Mexico. It is important to remember that this model will produce “an oversimplification of the reality of our experience. But at the same time it should help us understand something about that reality” (Lingenfelter and Mayers 1986:28). This tool will be important to reduce frustration about the way people value the elements on the continuum.

History of Mexico

There is little known about the early history of Mexico, but we do know that there were sophisticated peoples who lived there in highly developed civilizations. In central Mexico, there have been more than 10,000 pre-Columbian cities identified. Many of these civilizations have been identified and studied, such as the *Olmecs*, *Mayas*, *Toltecs*, *Mixtecs*, and, most notably, the *Aztecs*. By the time of the European arrival in the early 1500s, the *Aztecs* were the leading civilization in Mexico. They called themselves *Mexica*, and according to their records, their empire consisted of approximately 17 million people. The other 148 distinct tribal nations, each with its own language and customs, attributed for approximately another 8 million people living in this part of the world (De Mente 1998: XIV-XV).

All of this changed when Hernán Cortés and his band of 700 Spaniards arrived in 1519. The *Aztecs* were expecting a white skinned god to arrive in that year and were in awe of Cortés and the horses and guns that he brought with him. Moctezuma, the *Aztec* emperor at the time, welcomed Cortés, but Moctezuma was soon arrested and the Spanish began their control of the capital city. The *Aztecs* would not go down without a fight, however, and forced the Spanish to retreat. A smallpox epidemic greatly decreased the number of *Aztecs*, and by the summer of 1521, the Spanish assaulted the capital city and overthrew the reigning emperor Cuauhtémoc.

The Spanish rule of Mexico, or New Spain, as they called it, was wrought with destruction. They wanted to not only conquer the indigenous people, but also to destroy anything that was associated with them. They began to destroy everything connected with their religious life, including their books, libraries, temples, and monuments. The

Spaniards became the landowners, using the indigenous people as slaves and intermarrying with them, creating another race of people called *mestizos*, which came to outnumber the Spaniards by the early 1800s. In 1810, led by a village priest named Miguel Hidalgo, the *Mestizos* and indigenous people began a revolution, and Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821.

This independence did not lead to peace, however, as Mexico was wrought with violence for the next forty-five years. Much of this violence had to do with the church, as



Figure 3- Benito Juarez

the Catholic Church is estimated to have owned one half of the country and held mortgages on the rest of it. In the constitution of 1857, the government attempted to separate the power from the church. President Benito Juárez began making major changes, and the church persuaded France to invade. In 1862, France occupied the country. Juárez was forced to flee, but the church did not like Maximilian, the French ruler. With the help of the United States, Juárez

returned and defeated Maximilian. After Benito Juárez died, there was a dictator named Porfirio Díaz, who ruled until his overthrow in 1910, when democracy began to evolve in the country of Mexico.

History of Mexico City

A long time ago, wandering nomads often inhabited the region that is now known as Mexico City. It was not until 200 B.C. that the area became the focal point of Mexican politics. Indigenous people built the area of Teotihuacán just north of present day Mexico City, making the area a thriving civilization. During the centuries that

followed, many people migrated towards the area and settled around the great city of Teotihuacán, and the *Aztecs* founded Tenochtitlán in 1325 on an island in Lake Texcoco. This city soon became the political, social, military, religious, and commercial center of Meso-America. When the Spanish arrived, all roads led to Tenochtitlán, the home of over 60,000 people, while the Valley of Mexico was home to an estimated 1.5 million people.

With the conquest came the decimation of the population of the city, and urbanization did not come to the area again until the revolution in 1910. During the Revolution, many people began flocking to the capital to escape the violence they encountered in other parts of the country. In the twenty years following 1910, the population increased from 500,000 inhabitants to 1 million. Riding writes about the city in 1940,

“Already it exuded the bustle and excitement of a large metropolis, but traffic moved smoothly along its broad tree-lined avenues and even social problems seemed less visible than today. Many elderly *chilangos*, as the inhabitants of the capital are known, can still remember waking up daily to crisp clean air and blue skies, with the snow-capped volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, visible over the pine forests surrounding the city. Then, over the next four decades, the city was transformed.” (Riding 1984:256-257).

There was no planning for the urbanization that took place between 1940 and 1980, but the population of Mexico City exploded as more and more people from all walks of life began to migrate to the city. Bowen writes about the migration, “The [migration] process began well before the 1970s, but the crucial threshold was passed in the last twenty years, when the percentage of the population living in urban areas grew from 42 per cent in 1970 to 60 percent in 1990” (Bowen 1996:54). There is no doubt that Mexico City has become the center of the country, with more impact on the lives of

Mexicans than any other city in the country. The Mexican people view the capital as a promising place, with opportunities that are not to be found elsewhere.

Demographics

According to the 2000 census, Mexico has a population of 97.4 million people, although some believe this to be an undercount. Seventy-five percent of the population lives in urban areas, including Mexico City. There are over 22 million people living in Mexico City. It is one of the largest urban areas in the world. As figure 5 indicates, 55% of the population is under the age of 30. Mexico has 2,443 *municipios*, or counties, and the fastest growing ones in the 90's were around Mexico City and along the border with the United States. The annual growth rate for the country in the 1990's was 1.8 percent (Thompson 2001). The middle class consists of 21.5 million people earning \$10,000 to \$40,000 a year. In the United States, an annual income of \$10,000 is below the poverty line (Kephart 94:3).

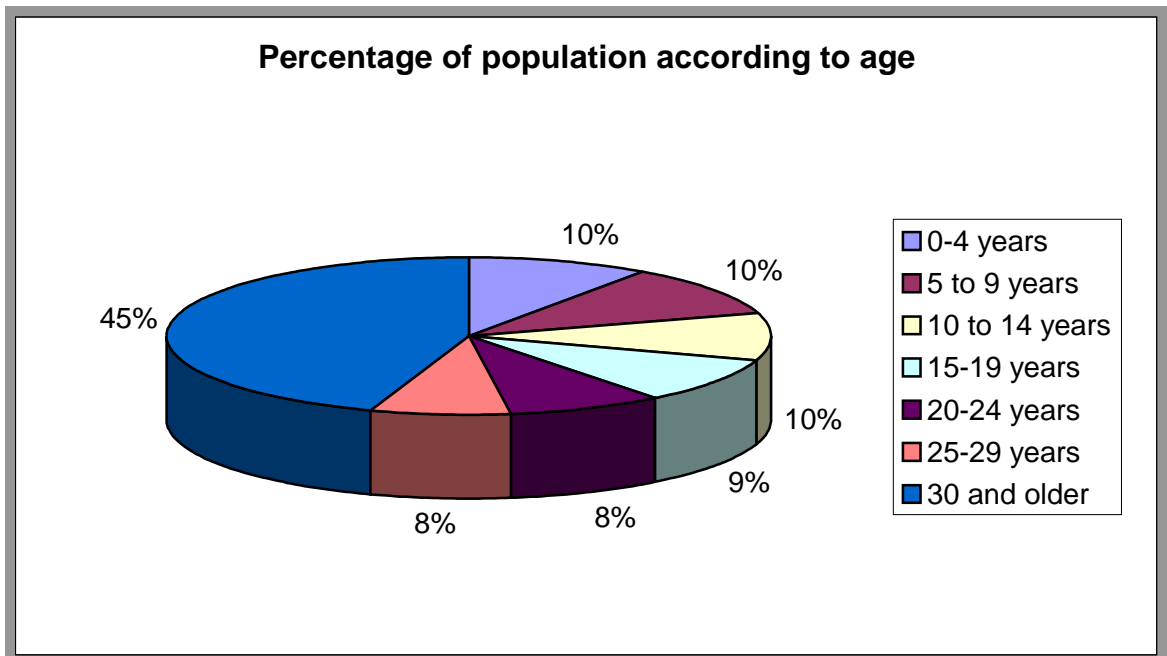


Figure 4- Population by age

Geography of Mexico

Mexico is located in Middle America, with the United States on its north and Belize and Guatemala on its south. With a total land area of 1,927,550 square kilometers, it is just less than three times the size of Texas. It has rough, mountainous terrain as well as low, coastal plains, high plateaus, and desert (2001 CIA World fact book). There is common seismic motion in the country as well.

Geography of Mexico City

The country has a mountain range running from east to west called the Volcanic Cordillera. In the middle of this mountain range lies the valley of Mexico, the largest and most important valley in the country (Coe 1994:27). The capital is walled by the mountain ranges of *Monte Alto* and *Monte Bajo* to the west, the *Sierra de las Cruces* to the southwest, and the mountains of *Ajusco* and *Chichinautzin* to the west. In the east, however, there is a plain that runs into the two volcanoes, *Ixtachihuatl* and *Popocatépetl*. Built on dried lakebeds, the city sits on soft subsoil that is very unstable, as evidenced during the earthquake in 1985. Many of the downtown landmarks are slowly sinking into the soil below. Riding explains the city this way:

“For the world's largest urban center, Mexico City is in the most impractical of settings. Situated 7,400 feet above sea level, it is ringed by mountains and volcanoes, set in an earthquake zone, gradually sinking into its soft subsoil, far from water, food and energy supplies and, literally, short of oxygen.” (Riding 1984:254)

In the center of the city lies the *Zócolo*, the main square. It is the main part of the political scene, and it has two of the most important institutions, the presidential palace and the national cathedral. The *Zócolo* has been prominent from the times of the Aztecs, and the ruins of the *Templo Mayor* are still prominent in the square. To the west is the

Paseo de la Reforma is a wide thoroughfare that runs towards the wealthy areas of the city. Running north and south is the *Avenida Insurgentes*. Going south, it runs into middle class neighborhoods and the National Autonomous University of Mexico. To the north lies the lower middle class area of the city, and to the far north is the famous shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the northwest is the industrial zone with some working class neighborhoods, and to the east are the airport and the working class zone. North of the airport are the heavily populated, poverty ridden neighborhoods (Encyclopedia Britannica).



Figure 5- National Cathedral

Kinship

The family in Mexico is the single most important institution. With all of the changes that have been taking place in Mexico, the family has stayed the same.

“For most Mexicans the family remains the pivot of their lives. It is not a matter of choice: it is simply the way society is organized. Over 90 percent of Mexicans still live in a nuclear family, and while traditions and social pressures vary between regions and classes, they are united by their adherence to the tribal rules of each extended family. Closed to outsiders, the family is enormously self-sufficient. Interwoven attitudes toward sex, social rituals and religion are shaped at home. The full range of passions—of love, hate, jealousy, devotion and violence can be lived out in the family. Social life involves being with relatives, children have no reason to play with anyone but siblings and cousins, and new spouses are viewed as intruders. Mexicans need few friends because they have many relatives” (Riding 1984:239)

The family social structure consists of *parentela* (extended family), *compadres* (godparents), *cuates* (very close buddies), and other friends. In each of these relationships, there are different expectations of loyalty. The principal family ties are

blood ties, with the *parentela* being an important part of life. It consists of all of the descendents of grandparents on both the father and the mother's side. This bloodline is the most important tie a person has in Mexico. In tracing lineage, Mexicans are both matrilineal and patrilineal. "The person's name, which often includes the matrilineal after the patrilineal, represents this arrangement" (Merrill 1997:117).

The household often consists of the grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents, children, and even married children. Often when two nuclear families live together, each keeps their own budget. Usually, after a few years of living with their parents, married children will move out into their own household. Being a part of the family is a bond that has high expectations of loyalty and reciprocity. It is a place where Mexican people feel secure and confident. In general, Mexican people do not trust people who are outside of their family structure. They often turn first to the family unit for coworkers and business partners. This is changing with the younger generation and among those with higher education and income levels, as they are beginning to become more tolerant and trusting of those outside their immediate family.

There is also a system of *compadrazgo* (godparenting) that began in the 16th century. These *compadres* and *comadres* are non-relatives who participate in the upbringing of the children. They are often appointed before the children are born, and this appointment involves a spiritual bond between the godparents and the children. They partake in the spiritual upbringing and help shape their behavior. Often times, these relationships are made for advancement of one family or another. Parents often look for godparents who will advance the standing of their family while protecting and watching out for their children.

Cuates are very close friends that one spends a great deal of time with. These friends can be trusted with intimate information. These groups are bound together by common interests and intense friendships. With up to ten members, they form a close relationship and look out for each other like part of a family. They can be trusted like family and are treated like family.

In the traditional Mexican family, husbands are the authority, with the wives obeying and taking care of the household chores. While there is a slow change occurring in contemporary Mexican society, there is still a sense that the women are responsible for the household and children while the husbands are the authoritarian figure. There is little respect for the wife by the husband, and he expects to be served by her. The mothers, looking for the affection they thought they would receive from their husbands, look to their sons as their allies. In the middle class, gender roles are changing, although in light of strong tradition. Many urban Mexicans are adopting a lifestyle that is characterized as being more liberal than the traditional lifestyle. More middle class women are working outside the home because of the economic need. Their education level has increased, and the men are beginning to accept this newfound independence of women.

The head of the strong traditional family is the grandfather or great-grandfather. They are treated with reverence and respect, and the chain of command always runs through the men of the family. “The young Mexican is thus born into a highly stratified institution dominated by power, hierarchy, loyalty and submission, and he knows that, with time, he will rise within it” (Riding 1984:243).

Divorce: The divorce rate in Mexico City has increased rapidly in the last few years, and the rate for the state of Mexico increased fifteen fold from 1950 to 1990.

Because the rate used to be so low, even an increase of fifteen fold results in a low number and percentage of people divorced, but it shows a trend towards divorce becoming more socially acceptable. Divorce rates are low due to the Roman Catholic tradition, but are rising at an alarming rate (Pick and Butler 2000: 100-114).

The Mexican family is a high grid/ high group social structure, with intense loyalty to the group accounting for the high group. Often times, many members of the family enter the workforce to earn enough money for the family group. Rejection from one's family is considered worse than injustice, abuse of authority, poverty, and work conflicts (Merrill 1997:118). The high grid comes from the roles played by the members of the family. The elder members of the family have the role of decision makers and enforcers of virtues that are important to the family. The father is the authority, and each person is intensely aware of his or her role in the family. As De Mente observes, "A daughter studies medicine because the family wants a doctor in the family. A son studies law because his family is keenly aware of the advantage of having a lawyer in the family" (De Mente 1998:109). "The paternalistic and authoritarian structure of the family also seems to prepare Mexicans to accept the hierarchical social arrangements that prevail in the country at large" (Riding 1984:238).

Education system

Any study of a youth culture would not be complete without an overview of the educational system. Education in Mexico consists of preschool and six years of primary school, followed by three years of secondary school and three years of preparatory school called the *bachillerato*, or students may train for a technical trade at vocational school. Those wishing to continue their education may do so in one of three types of higher

education: universities, technological colleges, and teacher-training colleges. Those who graduate from these higher education facilities receive their *licenciatura*. (Merrill 1997:128).

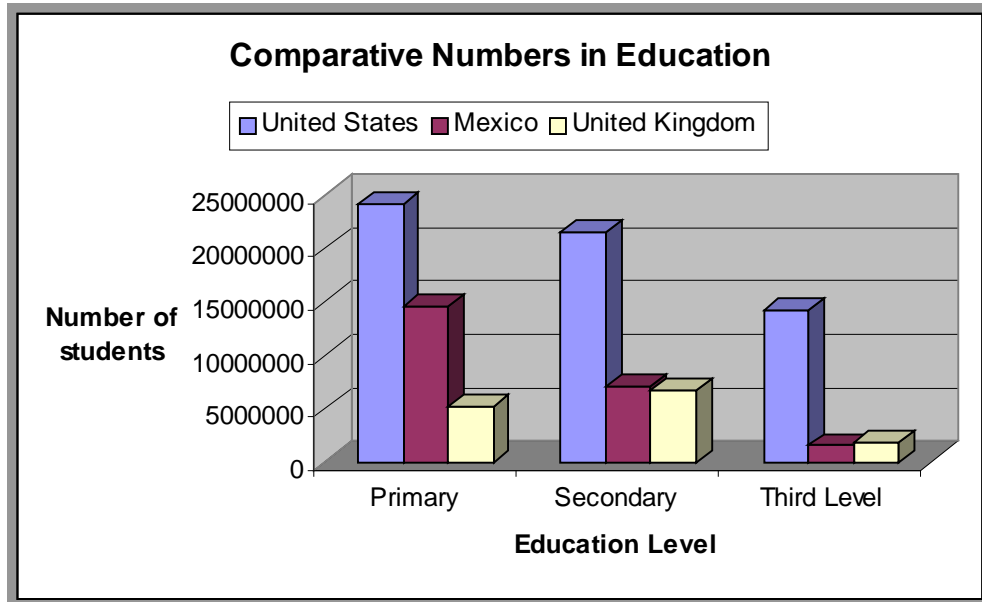


Figure 6- Education Level

“Approximately 27 million students attended school at all levels during the 1995-96 instructional year, more than an eightfold increase from the enrollment total recorded in 1950” (Merrill 1997:127). Although education has made great leaps in the last fifty years, education in Mexico has its problems. For example, the graduation rate was only 62 percent in 1995, students are often unprepared to face the demands of the global economy, and:

“Approximately 15,000 schools, 20 percent of the total did not offer all six primary grades in 1989. In that year, 22 percent of all primary schools had only one teacher. The government could meet only 10 percent of potential demand for special education. Thirty percent of all secondary-school enrollers failed to complete the three-year curriculum. As a result, government education officials estimated that 20.2 million Mexicans had not completed primary education and another 16 million had not finished secondary school” (Merrill 1997:128).

In 1992, the government established the National Accord on the Modernization of Basic Education. This accord transferred the responsibility of funding and staffing of primary schools to the state. The government continues to have authority to establish national policies on education and help with the education in the poor areas through the Secretary of Public Education (SEP).

Basic Values Continuum

Time/Event: The people of Mexico are event oriented. The clock does not control them, nor are they worried about being on time or being late. “Time is more relevant and fluid to Mexicans” (Kenna and Lacey 1994:29). Mexico has been called the land of “mañana,” meaning more than tomorrow, but sometime in the near future, because of the way they view deadlines and time. They do not see idle time as wasted, but look to enjoy the moment. The event at hand is more important than the next scheduled event. It is not uncommon for them to consider “on time” a half hour to two hours after the agreed upon time. Often, making people wait is seen as a way of gaining power over the person. How long one is made to wait depends on the status of that person concerning the other party.

Crisis/ non-crisis: Mexicans are non-crisis oriented. They are more oriented toward the present than the future and will deal with a crisis when it arises instead of planning ahead of time for it. “Mexicans prefer to make high profits in a short time and enjoy the present. This can be seen in a lack of long-range business planning by Mexican based businesses” (Valadez 1994:41). This has been seen in some of our short-term trips to Mexico. Many times, things that seem very important are left undone until the last

possible moment. We have seen many frustrations among people visiting from the United States of America because of this rule of life in Mexico.

Dichotomist/ Holistic: They tend to be holistic, seeing things from the perspective of everything being connected. The indigenous people of Mexico were extremely holistic. More research on this should be done in order to figure out the social rules in regard to this aspect of the continuum.

Object as goal/ Person as goal: People are seen as more important than objects. The goal of everything in Mexico is people. They would rather enjoy your company than do business with you. Valadez observes:

“If someone has an appointment with you and a friend stops by to visit, no one would ever say to a friend, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t see you now because I have an appointment.’ Friends always come first. Mexicans are willing to lose business before losing a friend, while Americans may sacrifice friendship for the opportunity to do business” (Valadez 1994:40-41).

They find their satisfaction in the relationships they build during business more than in finishing multiple tasks. Much conversation will take place before they will get down to business because they want to get to know people and trust them before doing business with them.

We have observed the tension among the cultures of the United States and Mexico when it comes to object as a goal and people as a goal. Often, when teams from the United States come to Mexico on short-term trips, they have a goal of what they want to accomplish on the trip. Many times, these goals do not get accomplished because they are not the same goals that the nationals have for the trip. They would rather use the trip as a way to get to know the students from the United States. We have begun to change the expectations for these trips to be more relationship oriented than object or goal

oriented. The more missionaries understand that ministry in Mexico is relationally based, the more successful they will be.

Vulnerability as Strength/ Vulnerability as Weakness: Vulnerability in Mexico is generally seen as a weakness. They do not want to disappoint and will frequently tell you what you want to hear rather than lose face, otherwise they will use indirect language when talking about the matter. They only give “good news.” Because of the need for dignity and recognition, Mexicans may avoid taking risks. They would rather not try because they cannot fail if they do not try.

Prestige achieved/ Prestige ascribed: Prestige is ascribed in Mexico. In their high grid, hierarchal social structure, they generally accept their role and station in society. They commonly pay respect to those who have higher prestige than they do. “To Mexicans, title and position are as important as money” (Kenna and Lacey 1994:19). While there is some achieved prestige, it is generally ascribed based on gender, age, socio-economic level, and relationships with people of high prestige. It seems that the younger Mexican people are moving towards an achievement-focused environment, competing for prestige by bettering their education and working their way up the ladder of success. This topic must be investigated further to fully understand the workings of prestige in Mexico.

Economy

Mexico has a free market with rising domination by the private sector. Ernesto Zedillo, the last president, privatized many industries, and this privatization led to a recovery of the economy after a few years of decline. The implementation of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 has also helped, along with Mexico’s

increased trade with other countries. “Income distribution is very unequal, with the top 20% of income earners accounting for 55% of income” (CIA World Fact book). There is considerable underemployment as well as an unemployment rate of 2.2%.

Politics

Mexico is made up of 31 states and one federal district. The president, Vincente Fox Quesada, as of December 1, 2000, heads the executive branch of the government. The legislative branch of the government is bicameral, with the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. There is also a Judicial Branch, where the president selects the justices. The election of National Action Party candidate Vincente Fox in 2000 brought the first candidate from a party other than the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in over 60 years.

The political climate of Mexico is changing, and it is because of the young people of the country. They have seen what happened to their parents’ generation because of the PRI, the ruling party for the last 60 years. This new generation, dubbed the NAFTA generation because of the timing of their rise, has begun to think more radically about the political structure of the country. They are independent minded young people who make up the majority of Mexico’s voting public, and they are ready to vote for anyone but the establishment. They are tired of the economic crisis in their country and are looking to do something about by becoming entrepreneurs, but the unemployment rate is still highest among the young adults. More people under 30 live in poverty than any other age group in Mexico. They are looking for things that work, and the new parties have to work better than the old ruling parties, so this generation of young people are looking to them for help. This new generation has become the votes that count the most. Any party

that is looking to have influence in the future better look to them for their votes (Padgett 1997:20-24).

Worldview

Religion: Ninety percent of Mexicans claim to be Catholic, though many of them are nominal. The role that religion plays in society is vast, as can be seen by the fact that the two most famous buildings in the *Zócolo* are the presidential palace and the National Cathedral. But the history of the Catholic Church in Mexico is not a good one. From the outset, Catholic missionaries sought to destroy the Indian religion and everything associated with it. They came with the intent to convert Mexico's population to their brand of the Catholic Church and increase the power and wealth of the church. By 1810 there were 12,000 Catholic Churches in the country, with Mexico City under the joint rule of the three parishes.

Church leaders, along with the government and military, attempted to keep all education away from the Indians, fearing that they would lose control over them if they became educated. The church, wealthy from charging for various religious rituals, eventually came to own at least half of all the land in Mexico, with the bishops earning salaries that were hundreds of times more than the average worker. In 1857, the Constitution declared that the church could no longer charge poor people for sacramental blessings, and those who could afford were only to be charged a little. This was called *La Ley de las iglesias*. After this, the clergy would not marry, bury or absolve anyone who accepted the Constitution. In 1861, the reformers in the church won the battle over this new law.

There had been a long battle of power between the church and government, including the church encouraging France to invade Mexico, ousting the president from power. After many struggles, an article of the Constitution in 1917 declared the clergy as the biggest enemy of the country. A major part of the Civil War from 1910-1920 was



Figure 7- Virgin of Guadalupe

because of the fighting among the church and the government. With the help of the American ambassador to Mexico Dwight Morrow, the churches and government came to a truce in 1929. Today, many Mexicans blame the Catholic Church for the poverty of the country (De Mente 1996:145-152).

Virgin of Guadalupe: The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe seems to grip the nation. Everywhere you go in Mexico City, there are shrines to the Virgin of Guadalupe. It was during the time when the Spanish were annihilating everything pertaining to the religion of the indigenous people. The Indians believed that the earth and elements of nature were gods, and their primary responsibility was to preserve their heritage and group. To the Spaniards, their primary responsibility was to destroy all that the Indians believed to be true. This is the historical perspective of when a brown skinned, *Mestizo* virgin appeared to an ordinary Indian in December of 1531. His name was Juan Diego, and she told him to build a temple to her on the spot where they were standing. The bishop, however, would not listen to a poor Indian, and denied the request. A little later she appeared to Juan Diego again, but again the bishop would not listen. The third time, the Lady gave

him roses to bring to the bishop. The bishop took the roses as a sign because roses could not grow at that time of the year, and a portrait of the Lady appeared on Juan Diego's coat, and they built the church at Tepeyacac. Today there are two basilicas on that hill. The first one, which was built in 1709, held 2,000 people. The newer one, built in 1976, holds up to 20,000 people.

The view of the Virgin today is one of a loving, accepting mother. The appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe brought the cultures of the Indians and the Spaniards closer together, giving them both acceptance and unconditional love. Many of the people pray to her because they will tell her things they think only women would understand (Brummel 1999:18-22). "According to anthropologist Eric R. Wolf, the Guadalupe symbol links family, politics, and religion; the colonial past and the independent present; and the Indian and the Mexican (Merrill 1997:126-127). In a recent poll from the National Autonomous University of Mexico found that nine out of ten Mexicans say prayers to the Virgin or a saint.

Evangelical Church: Recently, there has been an increased rate of growth in the Evangelical church in Mexico. One hypothesis for this growth is the fact that there is not a very good clergy to laity ratio in many parts of the country. For example, in the diocese of Mexico City, there was in 1993, a ratio of one to 17,112 (Bowen 1996:57). Part of the reason the Evangelical church is growing is that there are more clergy working for the Evangelical Church. One way the Catholic Church has been trying to circumvent this problem is by developing a lay led small group approach. This small group approach also worked among Baptist missions in Mexico City. Because the missionaries could only obtain visas for six months, they began women's Bible studies that were led by the

national women. These Bible studies resulted in the birth of ten churches in Mexico City (Reed 1995:72-76).

The Evangelical population in Mexico City is less than other parts of the country because of the strong ties to the Catholic Church in the capital. Johnstone and Mandryk tell us that in Mexico City, “Only 1.9 percent of the population is actively involved in one of the 2,300 or so evangelical congregations” (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:441). The Evangelical church is losing approximately one third of the people they baptize (Bowen 1996:68), and it loses many of its second-generation members because many people drop out after they turn 20 years old. More than 50 percent of males leave the church after they turn 20. Many of them stop attending church altogether, but some of them begin attending the Catholic Church with their wives when they get married. There is also a period of rebellion within young men where they drop out of church and then come back later in life.

There is very little cooperation among churches. This varies among denominations, as some denominations are very close knit and work together on everything. The Adventists, for example, have a very structured way of doing things for all of the denomination, while the Baptists believe very strongly that each congregation should decide things individually. The individual congregations do not support the structures of the Presbyterians and the Baptists very much, so they rarely have the funding or the ability to implement the programs to reach their goals. Within the National Baptist Convention, approximately 40 percent of the member churches did not financially contribute to the Convention. Interdenominational cooperation is supported even less, resulting in many different churches doing many different things. There are

attempts to have local associations of pastors, but these meetings are scarcely attended. The denomination that attends the most frequently is the Pentecostals, especially the Assemblies of God, and the Presbyterians are more likely to attend than the Baptists.

In 1982, CONMEX was formed as an attempt to bring the churches together, but the local churches have not embraced it. Very few pastors interviewed by Bowen had ever heard of it, although CONMEX claims to represent over 10,000 churches. The basic function of this organization is for the leaders of the Evangelical denominations to have a base to meet with each other if needed. The individual pastors still see their major task as winning souls and growing their own church for economic and social reasons. Cooperation with others might lead to sheep stealing and comparisons with others whose leadership skills might be better than their own (Bowen 1996:157-163).

Machismo: The traditional view of *machismo* is different than that of a Mexican. It has been an important factor in Mexican society for over 300 years. In English it is translated into “manly.” *Machismo* in the Mexican context means a lot more than manliness. “The cult of masculinity no longer rules absolutely in Mexico, but it is still a major element in all aspects of Mexican society, giving the society much of its character, style, and tone” (De Mente 1996:176). Mexican law favors men. According to it, a man can divorce his wife if she commits adultery. But a woman can only divorce her husband if he has slept with a woman in his home, a public scandal or insults his wife. Men have legal rights to have a mistress as long as they are discreet about it and are polite to their wives. Wife beating is illegal in Mexico, but it is still common. Some Indian tribes in Mexico believe that beating their wives for their sins now is saving her from a beating in hell. Upper-class Mexican men think *machismo* is a key factor in molding and keeping

their family and personal relationships. They also see it as the source of discipline that instills courtesy and high moral standards in their children.

Missionaries: The Catholic Church has attributed the recent growth of the Evangelical church to help from outsiders, especially missionaries from America. Recently able to obtain religious visas, there are 2,190 missionaries in Mexico from 190 agencies and 29 countries (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:440); however, missionaries have not played a significant role in the growth of the church. The churches that grow the most are the direct result of national leadership.

“In theory if not always in practice, missionaries had come to accept that indigenous leadership and local responsibility were the secrets to sustained Evangelical growth” (Bowen 1996:167).

Missionaries are beginning to understand that their role is to be one of supporting the local church, but many are not sure of how to support without controlling the church or having it become dependent on them. The Mexican constitution does not allow foreigners to minister in the churches, although this is not always enforced. Their role must definitely be one of supporting the local, indigenous church. “There are well over 100 Bible schools and seminaries training thousands of future leaders at all levels” (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001:440), and in order for the church to grow, it needs leaders who are trained and capable of doing the work of the ministry.

Current Youth Missions Activity

We have not been able to research all about the current youth missions activity in Mexico City, probably because there does not seem to be very much documented work. The type of research we have conducted has been concentrated on documented work, so we have not had the opportunity to interview people in regard to this project. We know

that there are many missionaries in the country, but we have not had much contact with many of them. There is one team from SEPAL international working on youth ministry training in Toluca. They have made extraordinary leaps in their research of youth ministry, including creating a Spanish website and resources for youth workers in Mexico. They have told me that there are no training programs for youth ministry in any seminary in Mexico. I have also been told that youth ministries in the Pentecostal churches are becoming very popular. Many other youth ministry organizations exist in Mexico, and this is an avenue that must be explored in the future.

Youth Issues

Pop culture: The culture of the United States has been penetrating Mexico through the avenue of popular entertainment because there has been very little Mexican interest in creating the programs for these various forms of entertainment. The old, typical Mexico is being replaced by these more popular, imported brands of culture, especially by the middle class and urban poor.

Popular forms of entertainment are picture books called *fotonovelas*. They are much like comic books and appeal mainly to the semi literate poor people of slums in the big cities. There are 70 million comic books and *fotonovelas* sold each month.

The government owns many of the studios to produce movies and many of the movie theaters, but they have failed to keep pace with the import of foreign films from the United States and elsewhere. According to the law, at least half of the films that are shown are to be made by Mexico, but that is not always the case. Many of the movies made by Mexico have no appeal for the middle and upper class people who would attend the movies.

The popular music in Mexico imitates that of foreign countries as well. The middle class people are drawn to American style music while the poorer people listen to more traditional mariachi and salsa. The government has not been able to use popular music as a medium for self-expression and culture.

The typical Mexican child spends more time in front of the television than he does in the classrooms. Advertisers are shaping the values and preferences of the young people. In 1981, the government conducted a survey of primary school children about television reality and national reality, and the results were that the children knew more about the television than they did about the country in which they lived. The television is becoming the principle influence on the attitudes of the population (Riding, Distant Neighbors).

Sex, AIDS, and abortion: Historically, the view of sexuality is different for male and females. It is expected that males are to be sexually active, but if girls think about sexual activity, they are considered promiscuous. This is a result of the cultural structure of gender roles. Males are considered more of a man because of their sexual activity. Females have been expected to remain pure until marriage, and society has basically looked past this inequality. The role of the Catholic Church in this view of gender roles was not really explored, but is something that would be good research. Females are less open to talking about sex because they are afraid to be considered promiscuous by both the males and females. While the traditional roles of males and females are changing, the traditional thoughts are hard to break within the culture (Castro-Vásquez 2000: 479-492). There has been widespread education about AIDS and other forms of sexually transmitted diseases. Many young people are more worried about how an unwanted

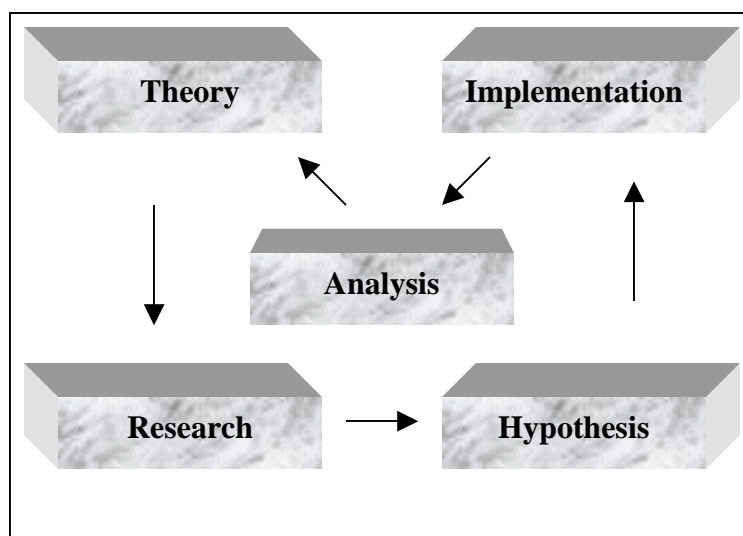
pregnancy would affect their goals and dreams of economic success. While abortion is illegal in Mexico, many illegal abortions take place, especially among students. Only one in five women who get pregnant between ages of 12 and 29 will have the baby (Castro-Vasquez 2000:479-492). The adult rate of AIDS in 1999 was 0.29 percent. There are 150,000 people living with AIDS, and 4,700 people died with AIDS that year (CIA world factbook).

Quinceañera: The biggest day in the life of a young girl is her *Quinceañera*, or celebration of their fifteenth birthday. It is an important rite of passage for the girls of Mexico. They are no longer girls, but they are now women. This day becomes a family affair, with everyone attending the celebration.

The girls receive many symbolic gifts on this day including rosaries, Bibles, crowns, and flowers. Traditionally, this is the day where young girls are shown to be available for courting and marriage (De Mente 1998:258-259).

Strategy

This paper is only part of the cognitive blueprint set forth by Dr. Richard Lewis,



which includes theory, research, hypothesis, implementation, and analysis (Lewis 1991: 15-16). The research done here is only the beginning of the analysis of the youth culture of Mexico City, but it will provide a

Figure 8- Cognitive Blueprint

springboard for the ministry of training youth workers in that part of the world. It is our understanding that youth ministry will not look the same in every part of the world and should be done in a culturally relevant way. We intend to understand the culture in order to use that culture to reach the culture. It must be stressed the strategy presented here is tentative and will be adapted as necessary. This strategy includes observations of the rules of life made from our first attempt at researching the culture of Mexico City, their implications for youth ministry training in the region, and goals for our ministry as International Youth Leadership Trainers.

Observations:

1. Family is important.
2. Catholic Religion is traditional, but not necessarily part of everyday life.
3. Schooling is becoming increasingly important.
4. United States culture has a major impact on Mexican youth culture.
5. The evangelical church does not keep the young men.
6. There is little cooperation among churches.
7. Teen abortion rates are high.

A word about prayer is important here. We understand that prayer is the foundation of our ministry, and we know that strategy must be born out of prayer. It is significant to note that prayer has been and will continue to be part of the ministry in Mexico. These plans will accomplish very little if not anointed by God. We believe that God has given us the ability to research a culture to learn the rules by which the game of life is played in order to be effective in His ministry. This strategy will continue to develop as God reveals more of His plan to us during times of prayer.

PHASE 1: Language learning

We will begin our time in Mexico with an intense six months to a year of language learning. Spanish is the primary language in Mexico, and it is known as the largest Spanish speaking country in the world. Therefore, it is imperative that we spend a good portion of our time learning to understand and communicate with the people. This language training will include study of the culture of Mexico, because knowing the culture will help us understand the language. An option for this language training is to live with a Mexican family during our study, and we will weigh that option in the future.

PHASE 2: Relationship Building

Because relationships are so important, we will begin to get to know the people of Mexico who are involved in youth ministry. Our research has indicated that Mexicans will not do business with you until they trust you, and they prefer to get to know you over getting straight to the business. Therefore, we will be looking to establish trust with people from the beginning, often asking ourselves if what we are doing or saying is building or undermining trust. It will be important to establish relationships with those who are involved in education, youth ministry, youth ministry training, and Biblical training in the seminaries and Bible Schools. We will spend time listening to their thoughts on youth ministry in their country as well as the youth culture, and we will actively pursue relationships both with people involved in youth ministry and with young people themselves.

PHASE 3: Further Research

Further research will continue throughout the time we are in Mexico. Because the research in this paper has been limited to library research, we must continue the research

with personal accounts of the culture by interviewing Mexicans. This step of the research will include several steps.

Step 1: We will continue to study the culture of Mexico through library research in the United States. This will include in-depth studies on various aspects of the culture because this project has only briefly touched on numerous topics. We would like to take more time to understand the culture of Mexico through the resources that are available to us in the United States.

Step 2: Youth Ministry International has taken several groups of college and high school aged students to Mexico on short-term trips. These trips in the past have been used for evangelism, street ministry, and youth ministry conferences. We will begin using some of these trips as research trips, attempting to understand the culture more in order to develop a greater strategy for youth ministry. These groups will map neighborhoods of the city, finding out the schools and churches, while talking to the residents about various issues of the overall culture as well as the youth culture. It would be good for these groups to investigate the impact of the culture of the United States on Mexico.

Step 3: We will conduct another library research project based on information we can find in Spanish. It will help us with our language learning as well as understanding the culture of Mexico. It is clear that there is more information on Mexico in Spanish than there is in English, so we continue to take some of the topics listed in this project and study them using Spanish resources as well as English resources. Many of the English resources also come from an American point of view, so it is important to understand the Mexican point of view of various aspects of culture. Our research of the

culture is never going to be finished as Mexican youth culture is constantly evolving just like American youth culture.

PHASE 4: Development of culturally relevant curriculum

The purpose of Youth Ministry International is to train nationals for youth ministry in local churches throughout the world. We strongly believe that youth ministry will be most effective when done by nationals. In our research, we have seen that the Evangelical churches that are growing in Mexico are doing so because of strong nationally leadership. It is our desire to see youth ministry be successful in Mexico, and we believe that the most effective way of doing this is to help develop quality youth ministries that are led by nationals.

We will be looking to partner with established institutions such as seminaries and Bible schools while working with nationals who are involved in youth ministry to develop a training program for these schools. It is important to have a professional degree in order to have credibility, so the partnership of YMI and established institutions will give those completing the program credibility by certifying them. We would like to see youth ministry become a professionally recognized vocation by the local church.

Youth Ministry International has developed a plan for training youth workers that will be adapted using a culturally relevant curriculum. This curriculum and plan will include field training as well as classroom work. Because the typical university offers degrees in two to three years, we must remember this while developing the curriculum. The classroom training will include a proper Biblical philosophy of ministry as well as some training in cultural analysis so the future youth workers in Mexico City will understand how to study the culture of the young people with whom they are working.

The fieldwork will be done at a number of certified training sites, giving accountability and hands on training to those involved in the program.

Youth ministry in Mexico will include ministry to the family. It would be difficult to establish a ministry that does not include family in a culture where family is the most important aspect of life. The establishment of leadership positions for young men within the church would possibly help the decrease drop out rate among young men, and the problem of teen abortion would need to be addressed by youth ministry as well, because the rate is so high although abortion is illegal. Networking and cooperation among churches is a matter of concern because if the churches are to reach the phenomenal number of young people living in Mexico City, they must work together. Also, youth workers need to become *cuates*, great friends who share things with each other, including the struggles of ministry. This will help prevent the burn out of the youth workers.

PHASE 5: Implement Strategy for Center for Youth Ministry

After a culturally relevant curriculum has been developed and a number of youth ministries have been established, it will be time to implement a Center for Youth Ministry with the culturally relevant curriculum. This implementation will already have been in the works, and trust will have already been built with those who are directing the institution. To implement this strategy for the Center for Youth Ministry, Youth Ministry International will officially recognize the institution and begin pouring itself into training youth workers through the classroom and church experience. The International Youth Leadership Trainers from Youth Ministry International will serve in the capacity of directing the Center as well as teaching at the beginning of Phase 5. The entire time,

however, they will understand that they are looking to develop national leadership for the Center for Youth Ministry.

PHASE 6: Develop national leadership for CYM

This phase will take place after the implementation and successful work of the Center for Youth Ministry. It is an important step because Youth Ministry International is looking to develop more than one Center for Youth Ministry in the country of Mexico. It will be important to have national leadership so they can continue to develop the curriculum based on culturally relevant information. This national leadership will be prayerfully sought out.

PHASE 7: Evaluate

There will be an evaluation process after the first six phases of the strategy. Remembering that this is a preliminary strategy, it is difficult to develop an extensive plan for evaluating the success of the strategy. We would speculate that the evaluation will take place with the leadership of Youth Ministry International and the International Youth Leadership Trainers along with those nationals who were involved in the process of establishing the Center for Youth Ministry. This evaluation will be necessary for the future development of other training centers in the country.

PHASE 8: Repeat the process

After the evaluation, we will discover the strengths and weaknesses of the current strategy and develop a revised strategy based on the findings. The process will then be repeated in another part of Mexico City or Mexico, in order to develop successful youth ministries throughout the country.

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