La Familia

Hermanos caminando con nosotros en La Vega
La Familia: Apoyo Económico

Antes de ir a Guatemala, aprendí sobre la importancia de la familia. Glittenberg illustrated the centrality of family in both Ladino and Mayan citizens throughout To the Mountain and Back. Family functions not only as a provider of a sense of belonging, but also as an economic asset. As illustrated by Glittenberg, every member of the family in Guatemala is expected to contribute to the income.

I witnessed this phenomenon throughout our time in Guatemala. From children following you selling handmade crafts on the street to elderly women working hard at their weaving looms, every member of the family contributed in some way.
You could see it in the way the boys pictured interacted, they truly enjoy each others company. I love this picture because I have pictures similar to this with my sisters and yet they could not be more different. Living in the small, impoverished town of LA Vega, these boys have familial responsibilities that extend far beyond playing with siblings and being carefree children. My sisters and I never had to walk miles to fetch water for my mom and we never worried about whether our crops could feed us for the year. Our pictures like this have Disney World and beach-front vacations as the backdrop. Regardless of the differences between this picture and my own, the love and bond between siblings is the same, which is why I chose this picture.
La Familia

Un paciente llorando a los Misioneros
Además, la familia es muy importante para apoyo emocional. Another instance where I saw the centrality of family in the lives of Guatemalans and the wealth of support provided by family was in Missionaries of the Highway. One day we were working on a three year old boy’s chair for two hours. When he first arrived, this boy was crying and screaming very loudly! Upon recognizing the scream the older brother of this little boy left his classroom and came into the wheelchair room to console his brother. With the help of a translator, the mother explained to me how good the older son was with his brother and how much she appreciated his patience and willingness to help.

We spent so much time before the trip researching and discussing everything lacking in Guatemala, and after my trip when I think of the assets this culture possesses, familial support is at the top of my list!
Attitudes sobre Las Personas con Discapacidades
It may not make sense to follow the section on family with attitudes on those with disabilities, but I found a significant link during my trip. As mentioned, we learned in class that family members must contribute to the family economy. I was immediately curious about the treatment of children with disabilities because of this. Children with disabilities in general are limited to begging as their contribution. Not only do they contribute minimally to the family economy, but their equipment, medication, and treatment drains the family funds more so than a “normal” child would.
Additionally, we discussed in class that when a child is born with a disability society may view this as the mother's fault or shameful. Because of this phenomenon some families leave their disabled child in the home, hidden from the rest of the town.

Los padres de los pacientes era muy afectuosos. Due to my pre-conceived notions about Guatemalan attitudes towards the disabled, specifically children, I was very shocked at what I saw at Missionaries. Most of the children we saw were brought in by their mothers and sometimes even their fathers! You could clearly feel and see the love, adoration, and devotion these parents had for their children. The boy pictured on the left is Christian and his mother waited for over two hours for us to fit him in a new chair! We learned while reading *To The Mountains and Back* that women have many responsibilities to complete from the time they get up before dawn to after it has become dark. So, the fact that Christians mom spent 2 precious hours so that her son could have a better wheelchair disputes my idea that families would be shameful and negligent towards their disabled children.
Another reason why I included the picture of Christian on the left is because I found myself guilty of holding stereotypes about children with disabilities. Christian’s mother told us that he usually used a walker to get around, but when they had to travel long distances she pushed him in his wheelchair. Georganna wanted to put him in a new chair to see if he could propel himself and gain some independence. The second Christian walked to that chair he immediately began pushing himself around Missionaries with the biggest grin on his face. It never occurred to me that Christian could do something for himself, like push his chair. I think the attitudes in Guatemala towards those with disabilities are merely just human nature rather than a cultural phenomenon. It is ingrained in us to make quick judgments, which is what often happens when we view someone with a disability.
El hombre en la derecha tiene 36 años. The picture on the right was included because although this 36 year old had his father with him at therapy, he was the victim of pre-conceived notions towards people with disabilities. I asked his father and his therapist at Missionaries what he was able to do in regards to reading and writing, and they both answered by saying he was not able to do either. The American therapist, Krista, then spent 5 minutes with him doing “pre-writing” skills, and he picked up on them so quickly that Krista told the dad and the therapist that he very likely possessed those abilities, he just needed to be taught. Because everyone in his life assumed he was unable to write, they never tried to teach him. ¡Qué triste!
This picture is a good concluding one for this section. These handicap accessible signs can be seen on the sidewalks throughout Antigua; however, one must first step up a foot and a half onto the sidewalk before seeing this sign. See the irony! It shows Guatemala’s intention of creating equality for people with disabilities, but a flaw in the execution of this plan. One of our translators said this phenomenon is common with many policies not just Decree 135-96 mandating accessibility throughout the country for those with disabilities (Transitions Foundation).
Educación

Estudiantes de La Vega

Estudiantes de Rafael Landívar
Este fotografías representan yuxtaposición porque son muy diferentes. Estudiantes de La Vega están a la izquierda y estudiantes de Rafael Landivar están a la derecha. When we went to La Vega, we had a day full of cultural displays by the students in 7\textsuperscript{th} through 9\textsuperscript{th} grade. The principal said that these students were very unlikely to attend school past 9\textsuperscript{th} grade, and their numbers had dramatically dropped after 5\textsuperscript{th} grade. The students pictured on the right, however, we university students studying OT/PT. After studying the country before the trip and listening to several explanations in Guatemala, I found that the students in the highlands were less likely to receive higher education because of great responsibilities to the family (remember the economic unit!). The students at the university were mostly from Antigua or Guatemala City, so they were not needed to work in the fields and they had more money than the families in La Vega.
When Glittenberg was in Guatemala, she remarked that most kids did not attend school in the highlands, especially girls. This was back in the 70s, so numbers have increased. One night when we went out to dinner I sat with Gerson, one of our translators. I decided to interview him about disparities in education between the cities and highlands and male versus female attendance. He did not have exact numbers, but they way he explained it was nowadays unless a family was among the poorest of the poor most children received a basic primary education. Then he said a smaller portion of that group would move up to secondary, an even smaller portion would attend university. Something I found very interesting that Gerson emphasized was that people were not dropping out of school because they did not value education, but rather because they valued family over everything, and due to familial responsibilities and needs they dropped out. Gerson said if the family needed you to work during the day or help around the house, you would do it without weighing any other options. Children in cities attended school in higher numbers and for longer because there is more money in the cities, and the children likely do not need to help tend to family fields like in the highlands.
This interview with Gerson really intrigued me, so I decided to look up some numbers to support what he told me. This information comes from a fact sheet created by the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission.

**Attendence/Completion**
Primary school – 78% / 62%
Secondary school – 23% / 10.1%

**Literacy (2008)**
Male – 79.5
Female – 68.7

**Primary School Enrollment (2008)**
Male – 97%
Female – 93%

**Urban female literacy (2009)**
Non-Indigenous - 86%
Indigenous - 55%

**Rural female literacy (2009)**
Non-Indigenous - 62%
Indigenous - 35%

**Urban male literacy (2009)**
Non-Indigenous - 91%
Indigenous - 75%

**Rural male literacy (2009)**
Non-Indigenous - 70%
Indigenous - 58%

Los Hechos
Los estudiantes en La Vega baile “La Danza del Diablo”
Una alfombra pequeña en La Vega

Una Iglesia en Antigua
La religión es prominente en Guatemala. Once again, the foundation of my knowledge on religion in Guatemala came from reading *To the Mountain and Back*. During one of our cultural excursion days we visited a Mayan town called La Vega and were exposed to many different aspects of religion. Glittenberg described a concept of **FOLK CATHOLICISM**, where elements of traditional Catholicism were mixed in with Mayan religious elements. I think we witnessed this in La Vega! The students wanted to teach us about the Mayan people, so they performed religious dances like the one seen in the first picture. The students even performed a sacrifice of a chicken right in front of us in order to bless us with safe travels!! However, mixed in with these displays of Mayan religion were prayers to God and some saints, reflecting strong Catholic influences on religion in Guatemala.
Contrasting with the folk Catholicism seen in La Vega was the strong religious convictions of many of our interpreters. One interpreter, Danny, accompanied us to La Vega and he was very upset by the sacrificing of the chicken because of his strong, traditional Catholic convictions. This incidence showed that just as in the U.S., religion is not a one-dimensional non-confrontational issue in Guatemala. I know I have been guilty of making generalizations about all Spanish-speaking countries being Catholic, which I obviously found to be untrue. The mini alfombra picture was included because it reflects cultural differences between the U.S. and Guatemala even within the same Catholic religion. Ornate alfombras are made for Catholic holidays like Easter in Guatemala, but not in the U.S. Even though it is the same holiday, it is celebrated differently in both countries, which I found to be very interesting!
Además, hay muchos Evangélicos en Guatemala. Besides Mayan religions and Catholicism, another religion was gaining popularity back when Glittenberg was in Guatemala, and I saw it on my visit: Evangelicalism. One day Gerson’s brother Jorge joined us to help us with translations at Missionaries. At Lisa and Rolando’s baby shower we learned that Jorge is a pastor when he said a beautiful prayer for the couple and the baby. The next day we traveled to the boys’ town (red listed on the U.S. embassy list) where we saw there Iglesia de Refugio, which started as an effort to take-in abused children and women. Gerson’s family was so passionate about helping others, and they said it stemmed from wanting to aid God’s mission. We learned that the appeal of Evangelicalism was its denouncement of drinking, and this ideal was evident through the family’s mission. Steve is also involved with this church and the other homes on the block that are a part of it, and the buildings were actually repaired and renovated by drunks. Steve told them as long as they stayed sober they could help with important aspects of the project. Those who broke their sobriety were relegated to hard-labor tasks like picking up debris. This is once again something we learned about that I saw put into action!
Viajes en Guatemala
Viajando en Guatemala fue muy interesante. This picture shows half of our group riding through Santiago Atitlan standing in the bed of pickup trucks! This was not just a fun “tourist” thing for us to do; we saw locals doing the same as if this were a type of taxi service. At the peace park it started to rain hard, so we had to wait a while before we could ride down to the boats in the trucks. Glittenberg said flexibility was paramount in Guatemala because of uncontrollable, and unpredictable forces. Transportation throughout the country was vulnerable to this unpredictability! In the U.S., trains and busses run on schedules so you know more or less when they will arrive. In Guatemala City, severe traffic and congestion delayed the chicken busses and tuk-tuks, which did not run a schedule to begin with.
Because the rain delayed our transportation back to the boats that would bring us across Lake Atitlan, we arrived late to Iximche! Thankfully, Steve talked our way into the ruins. Our American mindset had to be seriously altered in Guatemala. We are so used to following a schedule and valuing punctuality, which is unrealistic in Guatemala. Most of the trip was spent riding in vans, but had we utilized the chicken busses for all of our travels, I know our schedule would have had to be adjusted even more because of the many stops it must make and their general crowdedness.

Even at Missionaries, we had to have patience when our patients showed up hours late for their appointment due to transportation problems. One family could not make it to their appointment because most of the smaller roads in Guatemala are dirt and quickly become hard to travel on when it rained.
EL FIN
Las Referencias

