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Hist208B

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The Phenomenon of the Neo-Quince in the United States, 1990s-2010s

Then Father Smith began the mass in his Irish monotone. “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” I went through the motions: Sit, stand, kneel. I tried to focus on the seriousness of the day, but all I could think about was how tight my panty girder felt (my *abuela* bought it for me, so my *cola* wouldn't look so big), how my cousin's pits were really starting to smell, and how I must have looked ridiculous in my second-hand dress and funny hat.¹

The above scene describes one young woman's experience at her *quinceañera*, the coming-of-age ceremony for Latinas upon their fifteenth birthday. For some young women, the day is a mess of organza, awkward partner dancing, and embarrassing declarations of virginity before God and men. For others, it is a grand party akin to a wedding, complete with helicopter entrances and a beautiful princess dress. Where did this ceremony come from, and why are Latinas still celebrating, if at all? How is it any different from sweet sixteen parties in the United States? First and foremost a cultural tradition, the *quinceañera* is an invaluable lens into the lives of Latinos and Latino immigrants in the United States, and their young women of the future.

This leads us to ask what the role of a woman, especially a Latina woman, might be in the United States. It is important to understand how teenage Latinas see these roles and how relevant they believe these roles are to their lives; clearly, coming-of-age in the United States is different than growing up in a Latin American society and will lead these girls to different expressions of

¹ Adriana Lopez, ed., *Fifteen Candles* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 118

their individual identities. As noted in *Remaking Citizenship* by Kathleen Coll, a lecturer at Stanford University, “citizenship includes women's struggles to make a voice and space for themselves in the family, as well as in local communities and the nation.”² This struggle for cultural expression for oneself, and more broadly, the family, is a particularly female role. Women have a strong tendency of keeping cultural practices and traditions alive for their families, finding and bonding with other members in their community who share their culture, and leading their household. All of these can be found in the celebration of their daughters' *quinceañera*. As the Cuban grandmother and proponent of the *quinceañera* says in the young-adult novel *Cuba 15*, “For why do you think the *quinceañero* exists only for the girls? Because is the woman who carries the tradition forward [*sic*].”³ Such notions largely form the basis for the continued celebration of *quinceañeras* in the United States and Latin America today.

The *quinceañera* has its roots in ancient Aztec traditions, where the young girl was prepared for marriage upon her fifteenth birthday. This ceremony included her informal education of domestic tasks, such as weaving, cooking, and child-rearing. It also likely included a marriage ceremony.⁴ The original purpose of the *quinceañera* ceremony was to signify that the girl was ready for marriage and for the responsibilities of a grown woman; this is still considered the main component of contemporary *quinceañeras*, regardless of where the girl comes from or what traditions she chooses to include on her special day. The phrase Latinas most often respond with when asked about why they are choosing to celebrate their *quinceañera* is “I'm going from

2 Kathleen Coll, *Remaking Citizenship: Latina Immigrants and the New American Politic* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 12-13

3 Nancy Osa, *Cuba 15* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2003), 246

4 No author. “Quinceañera: History of a Tradition,” accessed April 15, 2012, <http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/LA260/quinceanera.htm>.

being a girl to being a woman.”⁵

The significance of the *quinceañera* as a rite of passage is reflected in various parts of the ceremony. There is typically a father-daughter waltz, a changing of the girl's shoes from flats to heels, and the at least theoretical expansion of responsibilities for the girl after her fifteenth birthday, all of which point towards maturity. Some traditions, like the father-daughter dance, the fourteen person court (seven girls and seven boys to represent the first fourteen years of the *quinceañera's* life), or the male escort also point to more obvious symbols of womanhood and marriage. In some traditional ceremonies, there may be a handmade doll displayed, known as the last doll. It is generally believed to either represent the *quinceañera* (which can be used interchangeably to mean the party or the birthday girl) leaving her childhood and becoming a woman, or the possibility of her future children. At very traditional *quinceañeras*, this is taken a step further, and there may be a little boy and girl dressed identically to the *quinceañera* and her escort (drawing similarities to a flower girl and ring bearer), either representing the continuation of the ceremony into the future or the *quinceañera's* leaving behind of her childhood.⁶ These are just some elements of the ceremony that demonstrate how, over time, *quinceañeras* have gone from including a wedding at the end to strongly resembling a wedding themselves, by touching upon various points dealing with womanhood.

So while some girls maintain that they are going through a process of maturing into womanhood, still others choose to celebrate the party merely for the sake of tradition. Several of the women I interviewed expressed their beliefs that the ceremony, especially in the United States, is losing relevancy, and will continue to over time. Many responsibilities and privileges

5 Julia Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (New York: Viking Press, 2003), 17

6 Stephanie Piñeda, personal interview by author, April 19, 2012.

for Latinas are no longer being centered around the timeline of their fifteenth birthday. In spite of this, one girl decided to have her *quince* out of respect for tradition. Similarly, she included certain parts of the ceremony, such as a blessing on a promise ring, in order to honor her mother's wishes⁷. Although the question of whether or not *quinceañeras* will be celebrated for many years to come is still unclear, the reasons why and how they are observed when they are celebrated deserve close investigation.

After noting the significant variations in these *quinceañera* experiences, the question I was investigating then became: how does the observance of the *quinceañera* ceremony differ among Latinas and Latina immigrants in the United States, and when observed, how and why do their motivations and traditions change? Because it is such a personal ceremony, the experience is also highly unique and susceptible to be changed however the girl sees fit. The result is an amalgamation of different *quince* experiences, which have taken place for different reasons, contained different components, and led to different results. One overarching pattern in the observance and celebration of *quinces* is how it has come to be seen as an investment by the community in the *quinceañera* at a time when cultural assimilation, financial hardships and other factors are obstacles to a smooth process of adolescence. In addition, Latino families, especially working-class, celebrate and deliver the modern *quince* with such verve that it has led to a repackaged tradition, where the *quince* is much bigger in the United States than it ever was originally in any of the Latin American countries. Furthermore, the *quince* has become a contested arena regarding the roles of gender and sexuality for young women as well as the continuation of tradition into the future, both of which are highly controversial in their day-to-day life. Together, these three phenomena transform the *quince* into a catalyst for assimilation

⁷ Kataria Ortiz, telephone interview by author, April 5, 2012.

into the Latino-American communities of the United States, and a method of declaring close connections with one's native culture as well as self identity.

I will attempt to look at the contemporary celebration of *quinceañeras* by understanding how it was in the past and its similarities, if any, with other cultural practices in the United States. I will investigate its celebration through various lenses, including class, religion, gender, and sexuality. I will also take a look media and literature, including film, to see how they are portraying the *quinceañera* and coming-of-age process for Latinas in the United States, and if this is relevant to their experiences in day-to-day life. In this way I will try to draw conclusions about how the ceremony is viewed from a collective social perspective, and its relevance to the Latino immigrant experience in the United States in order to make educated predictions about its future.

More has been written on changing self and group identity for Latinos in the United States than specifically on the topic of *quinceañeras*. University of Minnesota professor Karal Ann Marling has compared the ceremony to similar traditional ceremonies found in the United States, and a few other historians have shed light on contested issues within rite. Julia Alvarez has written the most about *quinceañeras* in the United States and the recent changes that have taken place within them; in fact, she has used the writings of many of the historians I have already named and added to their analyses. I come in after Alvarez, using the prior information on identity, cultural assimilation, and the components of the *quinces* to draw out patterns and conclusions. Because Alvarez and I use the same sources in our writing, I am effectively in a dialogue with her and those who came before her.

When looking at a ceremony that is such a rich cultural indicator, the hope is that young

females have as bright a future as the ceremony suggests; however, this is not the case in the Latino community. The current place of Latinas in the United States is less than ideal. Young Latinas rank the highest in rates of teen pregnancy, suicide attempts, school dropouts, and substance abuse. Additionally, more of them tend to come from households that live below the poverty line.⁸ The Latino youth population is the fastest growing group in the United States, according to a study done by the Pews Research Center.⁹ How Latinas view their roles in society and how they value themselves not only heavily influences their own trajectory in life, but it is vital to the future of the United States on an aggregate level. Since their social and cultural roles deal heavily with cultural assimilation, youth culture, and issues of group and self-identity, the role of Latinas is complex and highly particular to each girl. Additionally, the experiences of Latinas on an individual and group level is dynamic and will change as migration patterns continue to change into and within the United States.

The *quince* is alive and well in various Latino communities in the United States. Although families make the decision to celebrate a large affair or not based on their circumstances, there is no denying its presence, especially in the South and in communities with heavy Latino populations. In the United States, *quinces* have taken on similarities to cotillions and debutante balls, highlighting the grandeur that the ceremony now warrants. Marling writes, “It cannot be accidental that the venues in which the *quinceañera* thrives-- the border states and the warm-weather South-- are also prime spawning grounds for big-time pageant culture.”¹⁰

8 Alvarez, 21

9 Pew Hispanic Center, “Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America,” accessed April 5, 2012. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/12/11/between-two-worlds-how-young-latinos-come-of-age-in-america/>.

10 Karal Ann Marling. “Rites and Regalia of American Debdom,” (2004): quoted in Ilan Stevens, *Quinceañera* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Press, 2010), 5

The mentality of bigger-is-better has bled over onto *quinceañera* celebrations, and there are concerns that the performance aspect is upstaging its significance as a coming-of-age ceremony specific to Latinas. Additionally, the exchange now goes both ways as more and more ethnicities are deciding to make a huge splash with their own versions of the *quince*-cotillion. Marling continues, “One of the ironies of life in Texas, on the permeable Mexican border, is the turnabout appropriation of Latin culture by well-to-do Anglos.”¹¹ The *quince* has become something that can be celebrated by girls of any ethnicity, if they so choose, because of the draw of its flashy components: elaborate dresses, showy dance numbers and enough food to resemble a wedding banquet more than a sweet fifteen party.¹² In some respects, it has become something to be picked up when convenient, for any family that has the money to pull it off regardless of cultural relevance. The *quince's* role thus far has been a way for girls to declare their womanhood, not their wealth, and to affirm their cultural roots even as different locations and communities offer alternate identities. By lightening up on the symbolic meaning and focusing on the material aspects, as evidenced by variations of the 'neo-*quince*', the *quinceañera* has lost some of its intrinsic significance along the way. When looking at other North American coming-of-age ceremonies, we are able to see if it is still regarded as relevant, and how.

Quinces are also increasingly becoming strikingly similar to weddings in their splendor, naturally bringing up issues of the girl-to-woman transformation. Various components of the ceremony have evolved the *quince* into what author Julia Alvarez calls “a rehearsal wedding without the groom.”¹³ There is a white dress, which signifies, at least theoretically, the girl's

11 Karal Ann Marling. “Rites and Regalia of American Debdom,” (2004): quoted in Ilan Stavans, *Quinceañera* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Press, 2010), 6.

12 Alvarez, 99.

13 Alvarez, 56.

virginity, she performs a waltz with her father and has a court of young men and women; and some girls have even taken to throwing their look-alike porcelain doll over their shoulders like a wedding bouquet. All of these continue to place significance on the outward appearance of the ceremony while other components, such as true maturity or sexual purity, fall by the wayside. This has serious implications for what is expected of a young girl before and after her *quince*. At work here are serious gender roles which will be discussed later.

When it comes to saying who exactly celebrates *quinceañeras*, it is hard to make generalizations. One girl I interviewed, who identifies as Puerto-Rican American and celebrated her *quinceañera*, said that in her experience, she has only seen Puerto Rican and El Salvadoran girls celebrate their *quinces*.¹⁴ Additionally, she maintained that Puerto Rican weddings are very extravagant affairs that focus on the latest trends, from the dress color to the party's theme. I also interviewed a girl of El Salvadoran descent, who celebrated a very large and traditional *quince*, affirming the validity of the first girl's experience. According to a professor at the University of Maryland, in Argentina in the 1980s, the *quince* was dying out and largely a working-class phenomenon. As a girl growing up in the middle-class, she did not have a grand party, but rather three small celebrations at her house, one for each of her group of friends.¹⁵ This demonstrates the relevance of the ceremony to girls by class and also the fluidity of the traditions to best fit each girl's desires. A thirteen-year-old girl of Puerto Rican and Mexican descent living in Texas staunchly declares she will never have a quince, primarily because they tend to be tasteless and far too expensive¹⁶. It would be erroneous to believe that one group of Latinos celebrate *quinces* in only one way; it is much better to conclude that a *quince* differs as much as a Latina's

14 Katiria Ortiz, personal interview with author, April 5, 2012.

15 Isabella Alcañiz, personal interview with author, April 4, 2012.

16 Isamar Ramirez, telephone interview with author, April 2, 2012.

experiences does, whether that is through variations in national origin, place of residence, economic status, or even how old she was when and if she immigrated to the United States.

Despite all these personal experiences with the refusal of or decline in celebrating the quince, there are various indicators that point to the suspected longevity of the *quinceañera* ceremony. In her book, Alvarez points to what she calls retroculturation: a return of the third-generation of immigrants to want to go back to their culture and reestablish ties¹⁷. This can take the form of learning Spanish, or carrying on the *quinceañera* tradition. The girl I interviewed who had celebrated the most traditional *quince* declared that she also wants her daughter to celebrate it traditionally and was adamant about instilling the desire for one in her from an early age.¹⁸ As evidenced by the statements of this *quinceañera*, the decision of whether or not to celebrate is largely dependent on the birthday girl and her family. Beyond this, community has an influential, but not deciding, role.

Similarly, the *quince* will continue to be part of the landscape of Latina adolescence in the future as long as girls continue to be given the freedom to personalize it as they see fit. One positive note about the personal interviews is that among those who celebrated their *quince*, none of them were forced and the girls were happy to have the party; I believe this is largely because the traditions have become so fluid and allow the girl to celebrate exactly how she wants. One girl had a purple butterfly-themed celebration¹⁹, and, as mentioned before, another did not have a traditional ceremony but three small, informal parties to commemorate turning fifteen. This allowed each girl to commemorate her fifteen birthday in some way, carrying on the roots of the tradition, but without the components of the ceremony that she felt were irrelevant to her self-

17 Alvarez, 69-70.

18 Stephanie Piñeda, personal interview by author, April 19, 2012.

19 Katiria Ortiz, telephone interview by author, April 5, 2012.

expression.

The most prominent trend in the observance and celebration of *quinceañeras* in the United States is the role of class; its discussion has come up in publications, personal interviews, and the media. The working classes go to greater lengths, despite lacking financial resources, to be able to throw their daughters the birthday party of a lifetime. Will Cain, the president and founder of *Quince Girl*, a magazine for about four hundred thousand Latinas on all things *quince*, states “The point is that even working-class folks who don't have a whole lot of purchasing power are going to devote a significant portion of their resources to this one tradition.”²⁰ This trend, however, is singular to the United States, because when looking at the countries from which these Latinos came, it was known that the poor and working classes did not have *quinceañeras*, even simple ones. As Alvarez candidly puts it, “Even as younger generations [in the United States] assimilate in every other way to a mainstream culture, they are holding onto this old-country tradition, which is actually being created here.”²¹

The rise of *quinces* as a working-class phenomenon has many possible reasons, most of which have to do with the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital can be understood as the social and economic circumstances that contribute to an individual's well-being and performance. Working-class families who may lack some social or financial resources undeniably have a desire to show that they are able to provide their daughters with a grand party just like any other family can. This also deals with the concept that I will refer to as investment: because a young woman may not be able to have certain resources such as a good education or an ideal family life, the *quince* is seen as an investment in the her that almost makes up for those

20 Alvarez, 68.

21 Alvarez, 116.

deficiencies. The logic is that if a family cannot properly provide for a *quinceañera's* adolescence, they can make up for it with a well-executed party. By spending time planning and executing the party, the *quinceañera* gains status and stronger familial relationships; for example, just the amount of time spent with her mom choosing a dress or rehearsing the waltz with her father in preparation for her big day provides her with extra doses of quality time and opens up the door for conversations about cultural heritage. Additionally, after the party is carefully planned and executed, the *quinceañera* emerges with the feeling of having been special enough to deserve months of effort and a day in the sun that will remain unrivaled until her wedding day. These positive emotional effects on a young girl should not be overlooked. Alvarez echoes this by saying, “[Turning fifteen] happens only once. Poverty, on the other hand, can last a lifetime.”²² Although the financial implications are severe, (following weddings trends yet again, *quinces* can cost up to tens of thousands of dollars and average at \$5,000)²³, families believe that the benefits outweigh the very real costs.

Even the media echoes the idea of the *quince* as being a social tool and redeeming celebration for the working-class. In the film *Quinceañera* (2006),²⁴ directed by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, the *quinceañera*, Magdalena, comes from a simple family, where her father is a preacher and they are clearly struggling to make ends meet. However, it goes without question that she will have her *quince*, even if it means borrowing her cousin's dress. Throughout the movie, Magdalena asks to rent a Hummer limo for the party as her cousin did, and after her parents strongly debate the price, she receives one, reinforcing the idea that for the special day

22 Alvarez, 48.

23 Alvarez, 67.

24 *Quinceañera*, directed by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, released August 2, 2006 (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.

even working-class families will go to great lengths.

Most quinces include a religious portion in the ceremony, and priests frequently find themselves trying to mediate between encouraging spirituality for Latino youth and chastising the event for some of its more controversial components. As such, the role of the church in contemporary *quinceañeras* is a controversial one, especially in terms of the ceremony's implications on gender and sexuality for Latino youth. Many priests also take issue with the extravagance of modern-day *quinces*. Priests are divided on whether or not to agree to celebrate quinces, and some put certain restrictions depending on the community. As Loyola Marymount University professor Karen Mary Dávalos writes in *La Quinceañera: Making Gender and Ethnic Identities*, “Catholic officials who regulate the celebration claim they are saving *mexicanas* and their families from frivolously spending money or from focusing on social prestige or beauty.”²⁵ Clergy frequently find themselves in the place of needing to reassert the 'real' meaning of a quince and place religious significance in it whenever possible. Some priests jump at the chance to officiate *quinceañeras* because it is a chance to evangelize and emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus at a time when many young people do not attend church.²⁶

Additionally, many priests have issues with the component of the court. The court of the *quinceañera's* best *damas* (ladies) and *chambelanes* (male escorts) is a tradition that is commonly held across national origin, generation, class, and location in the United States, although the specific number may vary. Because the court and male escort strongly resemble a wedding, many parishes are trying to do away with it. Reverend Peter Rodriguez of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Chicago implies that “the *quinceañera* should not resemble a

25 Dávalos quoted in Stavans, 24.

26 Dávalos, quoted in Stavans, 13.

wedding precisely because of what a wedding ceremony permits: sexual activity and expression.”²⁷ The goal is to limit the “heterosexual expression” of the ceremony and give the religious component the focus it deserves.

The controversial role of religious institutions and issues of morality is relevant to adolescent Latinos, especially young women, and likely will remain so. The film *Quinceañera* reinforced this as Magdalena's father, the preacher, was much angrier than her mother about the shame that Magdalena brought upon not only her house, but her church. Because of her father's position, her family's integrity was constantly scrutinized. In addition, the church served as a gathering place for the Mexican community, adding another dynamic for gender roles and sexuality in a social and cultural context. The controversy of religion in *quinceañera* ceremonies was also echoed in the way that Magdalena's father opposed the Hummer limo and its unnecessary extravagance for much of the film.

Aside from her father's reaction, the film also focused on the idea of sexual purity, discussions of which are perhaps the most compelling and controversial byproduct of dealing with the entire *quince* process. Magdalena was kicked out of her house before her *quince* because she had gotten pregnant outside of marriage. The issue of her virginity is clearly important to her father, as he is a preacher, but her mother and the community (friends of both Magdalena and her mother) react to it as well. The film added a plot twist by making it clear that although Magdalena was impregnated, she remained a virgin. This introduced questions dealing with boundaries (when her boyfriend suggests she tell her father the truth about what happened, she replies, “Why? So he knows how far we *did* go?”) and the reverse issue: whether or not her sexual activity, and the larger issue of general promiscuity for Latino youth, would have mattered as

²⁷ Davalos, quoted in Stavans,14.

long as it did not produce real consequences.

Sexual purity comprises a large and contested part of *quinceañera* ceremonies today, made manifest in several components of the ceremony. The traditional white dress color in several countries has been understood to signify that the *quinceañera* is still a virgin, much like a wedding dress²⁸. However, it has become controversial and even irrelevant as it is known that many young women do not remain chaste until their wedding day. Chastity is not simply a rule imposed by society; it is actually related to the ceremony as it was intended to be a rite of passage and a signal to the community of the girl's maturity and readiness for additional responsibilities such as marriage and child-bearing. As the white dress color is increasingly phased out for more flashy, expressive dresses, perhaps the meaning behind it is being thrown away as well. One must question the role of the *quince* in accurately representing the experiences of young Latinas if certain components such as dress color are only being upheld for tradition's sake, if at all.

These changes go hand-in-hand with a general downwards shift in the timeline of female adolescence. Young women have gone from being ready for marriage and increasing responsibilities at age fifteen, to celebrating a rite of passage even as they put marriage on hold for education. Today, they are experiencing a blend of increased responsibilities with opportunities for careers and higher education, but with the loosening of sexual restrictions. Females are putting marriage off until later, still expected to become full members of their communities, and entering the adult world earlier than ever before. Things that were restricted for an older teen, such as the application of makeup and the association with males for courting purposes, are occurring well before their fifteen birthday, and sexual acts intended for marriage

28 Lopez, 111.

are occurring earlier as well.

The restrictions placed upon these young women through sexual expectations and gender roles are seen as a continuation of patriarchal social ideas. The *quince* may be an extremely special day in the girl's life, but arguably, that one day is the extent of its influence. According to Bruce Lincoln, who teaches at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the ceremony is an initiation which gives the *quinceañera* a status and time of mystic power, but in exchange for actual power in society²⁹. In other words, it is more of a performance than a truly consequential act. The girl theoretically emerges a woman, but is still young in age and freedom. As part of a marginalized ethnic group in the United States, she likely faces poverty, and the hard numbers say she is the most likely to face a variety of teen issues, including pregnancy, substance abuse, suicide and an incomplete education. Although Latinos view the *quince* as an investment, and one that is important because times are especially hard, the facts of life are not actually changing. The tendency to repackage the *quince* as a wedding or extravaganza of a lifetime only helps to create a fairy-tale world for a day.

The power a *quince* has in creating a fairy-tale day also relates to cultural identity in that it aids the older generations in bringing some of their golden days to the United States along with them. In the novel *Cuba 15* by Nancy Osa, *quinceañera* Violet has to deal with the planning of a celebration she does not know enough about or particularly want. The whole process is orchestrated by her father's mother, an Cuban immigrant who lived through communism under Castro. She refers to the pre-Castro Cuba as “*muerta*” (meaning 'dead') and reminisces about the beautiful country club she used to be a part of, implying that the splendor of old Cuba has been

29 Alvarez, 57.

lost³⁰. By pushing for Violet to complete her *quince* she is bringing to their Chicago suburb one of the positive experiences of Cuban life and seeing that it will be carried forward in the coming generations. Throughout the tale, it is clear that Violet's father does not know much about *quinces* either, which he avoided as much as possible when making his new life as a young boy in the United States. In this family, the *quince* has been chosen for two purposes. Primarily, it has been chosen as the means to carry forward a family tradition that was close to extinction, thereby bringing back part of the good life of pre-Castro Cuba. Secondly, although Violet's grandmother, who was not likely working-class, had a formal ceremony growing up in Cuba, it is an important tradition stateside, by extension, a mark that the family consciously declares itself part of the Latino community in the United States. As Alvarez notes, Marling states “even the most assimilated high school sophomore, in this one rite of passage, acknowledges her ethnicity...”³¹

The decision of how and whether to celebrate a *quince* for Latinas in the United States heavily depends on the girl and her family. No significant patterns have been found among national origin, generation or location within the states. What does stand out is the role of class in deciding to have a *quince* in the first place, and the role of religion in determining many of its major components. The overarching trend is that the *quince* is much more popular in the United States than it ever was back home, and that this newfound emphasis, especially by the working-classes, has led to its repackaging into a grand day of performance, traditions, and symbolism. Many of the *quince's* components that hint at gender roles have sexual overtones that many clergy have taken issue with, and the rigidity of those gender roles suggest a continuing system

30 Osa, 31.

31 Karal Ann Marling. “Rites and Regalia of American Debdom,” (2004): quoted in Julia Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (New York: Viking Press, 2003), 141.

of patriarchy in Latino culture.

But the future is not entirely bleak for *quinceañeras* and their families. *Quinceañeras* are frequently celebrated as a way of affirming a daughter's special place in the hearts of her friends and family as well as proudly declaring Latino heritage in the United States. Young Latinas have continued their desire to celebrate by personalizing their experiences to fit who they are and how they wish to express themselves. The relevancy of *quinceañeras* is hard to narrow down to a single formula, but it is important to note their origin and continued celebration as deeply embedded in tradition. As Alvarez aptly summarizes, “We don't have to prove the legitimacy of these rites. They are what they are, part of our human legacy.”³² I believe the decision of whether or not to celebrate *quinceañeras* and how to exactly go about doing so will change as migration patterns into and within the United States continue to change; components, discussions, roles of gender and sexuality, social and cultural influences, and the real or implied power of young women will also alter to mirror these changes. What we can be certain of is that whenever there is a desire to celebrate, no matter what the reason, there will be a very memorable way.

32 Alvarez, 113

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