

Barclay Barrios

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Fifteen Going On Broke

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Comment: Great title!

Our world has an abundance of cultures, traditions, and rituals practiced everyday.

These cultures were created as man created a community. Once man stopped in there nomadic ways they found the benefits to become part of a greater whole. They didn't have to rely on one's self for everything. Each person could expand on their specialty and fill a job in the community. Someone who is good with their hands would become the builder, and whomever had a green thumb was the local farmer. As these cultures developed they created ceremonies to represent a person's growth in their community role. In modern day we can still see some of these traditions. In Julia Alvarez's essay "Selections from *Once Upon a Quinceanera*," she searches for the true value behind the quinceanera and the complex factors that create its worth. Even with these multiple factors, a cultural ritual has value as long as the individual feels the ritual has a purpose.

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Comment: Avoid sexist language

Through the development of retroculturation girls have been able to personally reconnect to this cultural tradition. In Alvarez's essay she talks to the the creator of *Quince Girl* magazine, Will Cain, who coins the term of retroculturation (45). He describes this newly developed phenomenon as the new generation of Latino girls rediscovering their heritage. Unlike the generations before them, "They live on MySpace.com and shop at Abercrombie, but they listen to Spanish radio and embrace diversity" (46). A cultural ritual such as the quinceanera lost its value for the earlier generations. They were new to the country and trying to model themselves into "The

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Comment: OK good - a clear argument. Think about how you can make it more specific and complex.

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Comment: GREAT opening to this para!

American Dream.” The purpose of the quinceanera is for a family to present their daughter as a new woman, who is ready to marry and start her adult role in the community. This ritual would have no value to this newly Americanized Latino girl because she doesn’t relate to the purpose. She has no ties to her heritage roots and the value is gone. On the other hand, through retroculturation the new generation of girls have a desire to connect and flourish in this beautiful “coming out,” party. The modern girl **excepts** her **culture** identity and finds a greater purpose in this birthday tradition. This beautiful tradition would be her launching pad into the next stage of her life. A night of transformation of a pretty young girl into the strong independent woman. In this process she can find herself, which helps create more self value.

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 Comment: Fragment.

With girls identifying with their culture, they discover an ancient rite of passage of the quinceanera. This rite of passage celebrates a girl transforming into a woman. Before we had laws that said on your eighteenth birthday you were a legal adult, we had these rituals. Boys were given a series of tests in order to be considered a man. They had to catch fish or put out burning embers with their bare hands. Accomplishing the tasks was of the utmost importance. It was a test to prove yourself. These rituals had value not only to the person performing them, but to the community. They show maturity and growth in the person’s role in the community. Madeline says, “Boys don’t need a quinceanera. Boys are born men but girls turn into women” (qtd. in Alvarez 47). This quote shows that the value is in the eyes of the beholder. The girl must see the value in the ritual, of gaining maturity, self esteem and a support system of people for the rest of her life. Boys on the other hand, have been told since the time of birth to be a “man.” If they cry or show any form of weakness then they aren’t being a man. Quinceaneras are

only effective when the girl of honor feels she has “accomplished her goal.” She has to recognize that a new chapter is beginning. If the goal is only to be pampered and the center of attention for the day then the tradition is worthless. The worth of these traditions are in the emotional and sentimental value, and not in the price of the dress.

Rites of passage need to have value to the individual, but what kind of value should it have? Value can also have many means in this context. Value can mean worth or cost. Alvarez states, “but though fifteen-year-old girls are really good at knowing how much their dress or makeup cost, they’re not so good at knowing the charges for halls, or what it costs to have beef Wellington instead of Swedish meatballs for a hundred people,” (44). With this new generation of Latino girls we see more of the American consumer. A generation surrounded by advertising and brainwashed to always want to the newest and latest addition of everything. In Alvarez’s essay she describes her experience at a Quinceanera Expo (39). This old ritual has been given a new face and has a high cost. This new face of chocolate fountains and everything covered in glitter. Isabella tells us, “Quinceaneras know no social or class boundaries. You might not have the money but you have a quinceanera for your daughter. The family is making that statement. We might not be rich but we value our daughter,” (qtd. in Alvarez 36). Even though each girl should experience this rite of passage the purity can be shadowed by the cultural capital. Cultural capital is described as, “A family’s throwing its daughter a lavish quinceanera represents a king of cultural statement that counts for a lot more than the dollar cost” (52). The problem develops, though, as to what cost one is willing to give this party. Some families that Alvarez find are willing to “throw the house out the window,” in order to give this to their daughter (43). This obsession of having the best

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Comment: Another fragment.

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Comment: And again.

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Comment: This sounds like a new idea. Make it a new para.

party is not what the ritual was designed to represent. The girl will see no purpose in ceremony if her family is being put out on the streets because of it. No party could ever be more important than your family's well being.

As you can see, the emotional capital of the quinceanera is almost smothered by the superficial cost of the celebration. Girls should see, "If the father is losing his little girl, the mother is gaining a potential girlfriend," (48). The tradition of the celebration is the father having to give up his daughter. There is a traditional father daughter dance that they share, usually accompanied by a song about how, "a daughter's growing up **sound** like something that's going to break her father's heart" (48). The new **fade** of expos have added a new dimension of planning. Girls are able to use this time to bond with their mothers. As girls approach the date they grow in maturity and transform from a child into a peer. These family ties are life lasting relationships that never stop giving. They are the true value a girl gains from this cultural ritual.

During this process girls can gain ever lasting relationships, but also learn so much about themselves in the process. That in and of itself is the greatest purpose a girl can find in having a quinceanera. The quincenera activist Isabella tells us her story, "I was smoking, drinking, I had body issues and identity problems. When I turned fifteen, everybody started having quinceaneras" (36). Isabella's story is proof that simply celebrating someone for a day can turn their whole life around. As Isabella states, "being fifteen, let's face it, it's a tough age." In today's media crazy culture, girls are facing more issues at a younger age. For all you know this one day could save a girl who is struggling **with a body issues life**. That one day to be treated like a queen could give them

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enough self esteem to pull them out of a downward spiral and let them reach for their goals.

Alvarez peels back the layers of this tradition to show its true colors. She discovers all the factors like immigration, culture identity, gender, economics, and community that play a role in these rituals. Even with the strain on the economics we still find the value of community. A girl could **through** the best quinceanera ever and never get a scrap of value from it. Rituals are all about the individuals. Through retroculturation they identify with the culture and the purpose. They gain the family ties for a lifetime. There may be some that only see the superficial and are willing to give everything up to give their daughter one party. Most importantly they find themselves. This is the best way for them to see the purpose in a ritual like this. They see the purpose of helping them mentally and emotionally connect to the transition in their lives and become a member of the community.

Parkin:

You have a lot going for you here. You have a clear argument and overall good organization. I can see that you worked on your transitions and the first few are really good but as the paper goes on I start to lose the overall focus of your paper. Be sure that each para is clearly related to your argument in a logical order. For example the para on value felt out of place and unrelated. I also think the stuff on cult cap should be a para of its own. These organizational issues and the sentence fragments should be your next focus.

Work Cited

Alvarez, Julia. "Selections from *Once Upon a Quinceañera*." 2007. *Emerging: Contemporary Readings for Writers*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010. 34-53. Print.