

Quinceañera: a celebration of transition?

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Abstract:

The *quinceañera* is a catholic ritual conducted in several Latin-American countries, such as Mexico. This ritual is believed to ‘traditionally’ represent the transition of a girl from girlhood to womanhood at the age of fifteen. Recent literature on transitions to adulthood (both manhood and womanhood) however states that there is a change in that there is now an in-between period in which a girl is neither a girl nor yet a woman. This is conflicting with the ‘traditional’ meaning of the *quinceañera*. The celebration is still very much present in Mexican, especially rural, society, with much money being invested in the ceremony and celebration. This paper states that the *quinceañera* celebration in the rural village of Cuyoaco, Mexico is not (longer) representing the direct transition into womanhood. Other interpretations and functions can be identified. Furthermore, the question is if it ever really did represent this tradition as aspects presented as traditional seem to be better interpreted as ‘invented tradition’ and changed over time. When looking at the impact of the ceremony on daily lives of three generations of Mexican women, they did not experience fundamental changes in their lives after the *quinceañera*. The way womanhood is perceived however does seem to have changed as education has become more important. This paper is part of the master thesis, furthermore consisting of an ethnographic film called ‘A Quinceañera’ following one girl through the preparation and celebration of her *quinceañera*. Both article and film are based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork.

Keywords: quinceañera, girlhood, womanhood, transition, emerging adulthood, education.

Contents

Introduction:.....	2
<i>The quinceañera</i>	2
<i>Childhood adulthood/ girlhood womanhood transitions</i>	3
<i>Cuyoaco</i>	5
<i>Girls in Mexican society</i>	6
<i>Explaining research, methods, ethics</i>	6
Elements & symbols.....	9
<i>Views on symbolization</i>	12
Changing roles of women	14
So what does it represent?	17
<i>The quinceañera as a platform for impression making</i>	18
<i>The quinceañera as a way to negotiate and confirm social relationships</i>	20
<i>The quinceañera as a religious event</i>	21
<i>The quinceañera as the beginning of a period of transformation</i>	22
Conclusion.....	23
Literature	24

Introduction:

Literature on the transition from childhood to adulthood seems to be conflicting with the believed significance of the *quinceañera* celebration, which claims the celebration to mark the girls' direct transition from girlhood to womanhood. This raises the question of what the girls' transition towards womanhood looks like in societies where the *quinceañera* is celebrated. Since the interest of doing this research derived from inconsistency between literature on the *quinceañera* celebration and literature on childhood-adulthood transitions, I will first elaborate on the literature. In this introduction I will furthermore provide contextual information about Cuyoaco and shortly explain my research.

The quinceañera

The '*quinceañera*' is a catholic celebration of a girl's 15th birthday in most Latin American countries. The girl renews her baptismal commitment and asks for blessing of God and her parents as she enters a new life stage: adulthood (Davalos 1996, 109). The ceremony focuses on the relationships between the parents and their daughter and between God and the family. The celebration is believed to 'traditionally' mark the girls' '*passage into womanhood, her commitment to Catholicism, and her debut in society*' (Orlean 1990, 82). It marks the girl's sexual maturity, making her a candidate for marriage (Palfrey 1996). The costs of the celebration are normally divided between family and friends who will all pay a specific part of the celebration. Even when divided, the amounts are relatively high. According to the Mexican CNN, the costs lie between 70.000 and 200.000 pesos (roughly 3.500 and 10.000 euros) (CNN 2009).

There are several ideas about the origins of the *quinceañera* celebration (Lestage 2011, 280). Some state it is a Hispanic influence, initiated by the duchess of Alba who invited young girls into her palace to dress them up as women in the 18th century. Others say it was the Belgian empress Carlotta, who came to Mexico with her husband Maximilian I to rule over Mexico in the 19th century, who introduced the *quinceañera* to Mexico by presenting the daughters of her court to society as candidates for marriage. Yet others say it was an indigenous ritual in which girls were selected by men for marriage that grew out to be the *quinceañera* (Deiter 2010, 48-49; McAllen 2014; Hill 2008, 145). Some state it is a syncretisation between these indigenous customs and the customs of the Hispanic emperor, such as was done with the virgin of Guadalupe (Wolf 1958, 34-39; Davalos 1996, 113). Napolitano however states that the *quinceañera* only started to exist mid-20th century and that it derives from French influences (Napolitano 2002, 131). What is known, is that the

quinceañera used to be a celebration held by the higher middleclass and high classes of society. Nowadays the *quinceañera* is however also highly celebrated among the lower classes.

The *quinceañera* celebration usually consists of two parts. First, there is the church mass in which the girl will thank God for reaching this age. Secondly there is a celebration with food, the girl dancing the waltz, in some cases ‘traditional’ elements and later free dancing (Napolitano 2002, 133-135). Although there is a standardized idea of a ‘traditional’ *quinceañera* celebration, the *quinceañera* celebrations do differ from each other in many aspects. These aspects will be extensively explained later on.

Childhood adulthood/ girlhood womanhood transitions

It is first important to define adulthood, womanhood, childhood and girlhood for different interpretations are possible. Adulthood is defined by the Encyclopædia Britannica as “the period in the human lifespan in which full physical and intellectual maturity have been attained” (Encyclopædia Britannica 2016) childhood then means not having achieved these elements. The physical maturity has to do with biologically being fully developed and fertile and the intellectual maturity has to do with adopting the way of thinking, which is linked to a way of behaving that is expected once being an adult. This is socially and culturally determined (Christie 2005, 302). Therefore, the two elements can be divided into a biological and a sociocultural dimension of womanhood. When using to ‘adulthood’ and ‘childhood’, I refer to ‘adulthood’ and ‘childhood’ for men and women at once, only because the scholars I cite below used it this way. Both elements described above can however highly differ for men and women in timing and form (Marcia-Lees 2000, 1). Therefore, I decided to use the word ‘womanhood’ and ‘girlhood’ to refer to woman adulthood and girls’ childhood respectively. It is hereby still important to take in account both the biological and the sociocultural. The sociocultural element differs in time and space and how this is constructed can therefor only be defined by looking at a certain context at a certain time.

According to several scholars, the transition from childhood to adulthood has changed over the past decades, hereby referring to the sociocultural aspect of adulthood. They state that there is now an ‘in-between’ period, in which the youth is considered to be neither a child nor an adult. According to Lloyd (2005), the transition to adulthood is changing due to “changes in technology, economics, culture, politics, demographics, the environment and education” (Lloyd 2005, 17), which is caused by globalization. The youth are given more opportunities to develop themselves in order to become a successful adult through education.

They are postponing their entrance to adulthood by not entering the labour market or getting married yet. Rather than moving from childhood right into adulthood, there seems to be an interval full of time for self-cultivation and opportunities (Ibid., 2).

In general, two ways of thinking about this interval can be identified. First, there is the ‘emerging adulthood’ concept developed by Arnett (2000)¹. Arnett states that the interval is characterized by explorations of identity, lifestyles and career possibilities (Arnett 2000, 469-471). According to Arnett, individualistic qualities of character are experienced as being more important than the demographic factors such as marriage and entering the labour market. The two top criteria for being an adult, according to Arnett, are accepting responsibility for one self and making independent choices (Arnett 2000, 471-473). This is in line with what Romo (2014) identified as important to Mexican girls in becoming an adult, namely autonomy and freedom (Romo 2014, 272-274). It seems as if there is a shift towards focussing on the individual qualities rather than the social ones.

The second idea about the prolonged transition-period is the concept of ‘waithood’, as defined by Honwana (2014). Honwana states that access to basic resources that are needed in order to become an independent adult is sometimes difficult in certain social groups due to the socio-economic system that may fail to provide opportunities to grow up healthy, get good education, find employment, form families and contribute to society, enabling the youth to enter adulthood (Honwana 2014, 29). This idea however turned out not to be relevant in my research, which is why I will not further elaborate on this concept².

Regarding ‘emerging adulthood’, it seems more likely for boys to experience this interval than for girls. Especially in the rural areas, where people tend to be poorer, people may be unable to provide their children (especially daughters) with education, and many girls marry as a minor (Lloyd 2005, 8; Arnett 2000, 478). Furthermore, the lifecycle of a girl seems to be more discontinuous than that of a boy. She will be more likely to stop working once she has children, and may be tight to the house more, entering womanhood earlier and thus not having an ‘emerging adulthood’ (in this case emerging womanhood) period (Galambos 2007, 112; Aronson 2008, 56). The expectations of how men and women should behave seem to differ, depending on the society (Marcia-Lees 2000, 1). In general, women are more likely to be tight to the private sphere, whereas men are more likely to be operating in the public sphere (Eriksen 2010, 136-137)

¹ Many scholars have followed this idea of Arnett of emerging adulthood. There is even a journal called ‘*Emerging adulthood*’ (Dulmen 2013, 3-4).

² The emerging adulthood concept may be relevant in a further stage of the girls’ lives, once they finish their education and try to find a job, or maybe in cases of severe poverty. This may be a subject for further research.

The *quinceañera* celebration is only aimed at girls³, which is why this paper looks into girlhood and womanhood. The idea of ‘emerging adulthood’, and in this case ‘emerging womanhood’ seem to be conflicting with the believed significance of the *quinceañera* celebration. Therefore I decided to go to Cuyoaco in Mexico to get an insight into how the present-day *quinceañera* celebration is, or is not connected to local perceptions of the entrance to womanhood, hereby taking into account both the biological and the sociocultural dimensions.

Cuyoaco

To get a grip on the *quinceañera* celebration in Cuyoaco, it is important to first get an insight into the local context. Cuyoaco lies on a 100 kilometre distance from the city of Puebla and counts around 1.500 inhabitants (municipality 2010). Cuyoaco is the head of the municipality, also called Cuyoaco. This municipality is located in the northern-central part of the state of Puebla.

The main economic activity in Cuyoaco is agriculture, with wheat, maize and barley as its main products (municipality of Cuyoaco 2010). It is mostly men, and some older women working on the land. The landowners can be from Cuyoaco or from other places in Mexico. Furthermore there are several industrial factories around the village of Cuyoaco in which both men and women are represented as employees. Another source of income is the distribution of gas. The village of Cuyoaco owns around 100 cars that distribute this gas in to a large area around Cuyoaco, which are only manned by men. In the village of Cuyoaco there are also some small shops, like some butchers, places vending tacos or other food, some stationaries and little super markets. Many of these shops, and mainly those concentrating on preparing food, are manned and owned by women. There are also many women that do not work and focus on the household (Municipality of Cuyoaco 2010).

Regarding schooling, the village counts ‘kinder’, ‘primaria’, ‘secundaria’ and a ‘bachiller’ school. After finishing the ‘secundaria’, children go to the ‘prepa’ (preparatoria) or ‘bachiller’ (bachillerato), for youth between fifteen and eighteen. The ‘bachiller’ is a more technical school in which the students learn more practical things, such as constructing houses. After the ‘bachiller’, most students stop studying and start working, although with the ‘bachiller’ degree you can also enter the university. Most of the girls however, instead of

³ Although it almost never happens, there are some cases of boys having a celebration when they turn fifteen. This is however very uncommon and is told to be only because they want a party, for fifteen is not seen as a significant age for boys, whereas for girls it is believed to be an important age. I will therefore not pay attention to this in this paper.

going to the 'bachiller', go to the 'prepa' in the town of Libres, on an 18 km distance. The 'prepa' in Libres is namely part of the BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla), ensuring people that enter there a place at the BUAP University of Puebla. Most girls go to Puebla to enter this university, or any other university since the variety in Puebla is rather broad. Libres also counts one university, but with only a small variety of studies. There are also girls that stop studying after 'secundaria' or 'prepa' and start working. Some girls get pregnant between fourteen and eighteen, and therefore stop studying.

Girls in Mexican society

Education for girls has become more important to the government. Since the 80, the government has programs, to stimulate girls' education (Lee, personal communication 21th of December 2015)⁴. Education has also become more important to the girls themselves and their parents, with parents pushing their daughters to enter university. Due to this importance given to education, girls tend to keep on studying until they are about 25 years old. It is also considered important to establish financial independence as a girl before marrying and this financial independence is also considered important in becoming an adult. The way womanhood is shaped has thus changed. Girls furthermore do not enter womanhood after the *quinceañera* celebration in Cuyoaco, meaning it does not (longer) represent the direct transition from girlhood to womanhood. It rather marks the beginning of the period in which a girl will transition from a girl to a woman.

Explaining research, methods, ethics

This argument is based on 2,5 month fieldwork in the village of Cuyoaco. I choose to go to a village because I wanted to study the transition in a rural setting, as literature stated that in these areas it is more likely that girls are unable to have an interval-period in their passage to womanhood (Arnett 2000, 478). A friend of mine from the city of Puebla knew a girl in Cuyoaco that was going to turn fifteen and have her *quinceañera* celebration during my fieldwork period. He contacted them and they gave me permission to follow her during this period. This girl is Dani, who lives with her father and mother. In Cuyoaco I stayed with another local family. This family consisted of the fourteen year old girl called Ceci, (who is also a friend of Dani), her mother, two aunts (sisters from her mother's side), one of which is married and whose husband, nineteen year old son and eight year old daughter also live there,

⁴ Alison Elizabeth Lee is a professor in Cultural Anthropology at the Universidad de las Americas Puebla In Cholula, Puebla, Mexico.

plus Ceci's grandmother and her grandmother's sister, so nine people in total. Ceci's aunt does have a third child, a son of twenty years old, but he is living in the north of Mexico where he studies to be a priest. Ceci is planning on having her *quinceañera* the 3rd of December 2016, so living with her allowed me to also follow her in her early preparations and have intimate conversations about her life and expectations.

In order to find respondents, I decided to approach the friends of Dani and Ceci. This way I could also use methods that are conducted in groups since there is a feeling of trust towards each other. Furthermore, since Ceci is one class under Dani, in this way I could both include girls that just turned fifteen and girls that are going to turn fifteen within the next 1,5 year to see both expectations and reflections. Via the girls I could also include their parents and grandmothers. This way I was also able to see different expectations and relations within families. Of course I did not share information that for example girls told me in confidence with their parents or grandmothers or the other way around. I furthermore also included four girls between the age of sixteen and twenty that I met in the village to also be able to incorporate the possible changes in girls' lives after their *quinceañera* celebration. Because some of the girls told me confidential information, I decided to change their names for this article. Only Dani and Ceci are actual names since they will be recognizable by the special position they had within my research and film. Another important respondent is the pastor of the church of Cuyoaco, Hugo Morales since the *quinceañera* is a celebration tied to religion, coming with expectations from the church as well.

The main persons in my research and film will also be referred to in this article. These are Dani (short for Daniela), her mother and grandmother. During my field research, Dani turned fifteen and had her *quinceañera* celebration. I followed her and her family during the preparations and celebration. Furthermore, I included several friends of Dani and their families. First there is the fourteen year old Ceci, whose family situation I have stressed out above. Her father left when she was little and she does not really have contact with him. Second, there is the fourteen year old Isabel, who lives with her grandmother. Her mother works and lives in another village during the week and is only here in the weekends. Isabel does not have contact with her father, who also left the family. Third, there is the fourteen year old Lupita, who lives with both parents and her two little sisters. Fourth, there is the fifteen year old Carmen, who lives with both parents and three sisters. Then there is Olivia who is nineteen, studies in Puebla and is only home in the weekends. Lastly there is the seventeen year old Monica who goes to the 'prepa' in Libres and lives in Cuyoaco with both parents and two younger brothers.

For this research I used several qualitative methods, namely (participant) observations⁵, semi-structured in-depth interviews⁶, h-diagrams⁷, group discussions⁸, photo elicitations⁹, network analyses¹⁰, and diagrams on both the schedule of a *quinceañera* party and the preparations months before¹¹. I chose for these qualitative methods for they are aimed at understanding behaviour, experiences while trying not to interfere in the local context. To understand what someone's social reality is like, the context is needed for this highly influences one's reality. This can only be researched with qualitative methods (Boeije 2009, 253-254).

Furthermore I used film to follow Dani in the preparations and celebration of her *quinceañera*. This was used both as an instrument for several methods and as a means of registration. Filming during group sessions and interviews enabled me to re-analyse it afterwards, and also show it back to my participants to have them reflect on it (Nijland 2006,

⁵ (Participant) observations were done during the preparations and celebration of the *quinceañera* and during the daily life of Dani and her family. (Participant) observations make it possible to see meanings through symbolic interactionism (Spradley 1980, 8-9). This intensive participant observation gave me an insight in the social life of Dani and her family, and that of her friends.

⁶ I held semi-structured in-depth interviews with Dani, four of her friends, all of their mothers and in some cases their fathers and grandmothers. I furthermore conducted interviews with two older girls and the local pastor. These interviews were aimed at understanding how the *quinceañera* celebration is conceived, what expectations there exist about the girls' futures and how these two can be connected. The purpose of ethnographic interviews is to "*Reveal the cultural meanings used by actors, and to investigate aspects of the culture observed which are still unclear or ambiguous even though they have been subjects to close observation*" (Gobo 2010, 191).

⁷ With the H-diagram, I divided a paper in two, one part standing for positive, and one for negative. I then asked the girls in a group session to individually take post its and write down elements of the *quinceañera* and place them either in positive or negative. Following this, they had to group similar post its and reflect on why they were either positive or negative. The H-diagram encouraged the girls to really reflect on their opinions.

⁸ I held group discussions within the family of Ceci and the family of Dani. Topics were expectations of a *quinceañera*' and expectations of the girls growing up. Since both the construction of the celebration and the maturing of a girl are things that are done through negotiation within the family, the group discussion helped to see how these negotiations are constructed, for the interaction and hierarchy within a family is reflected during the group discussion (Morgan 1996, 129-152).

⁹ I held Photo elicitation sessions with the girl, in which I asked them to reflect on pictures of other *quinceañera*-girls and I asked them to revise *quinceañera* magazines and cut out elements they liked and disliked. Furthermore I asked Dani to reflect on several pictures I took from her and her family during preparations and daily activities. Photo elicitation '*can bring out information the researcher cannot evoke through verbal stimuli as he has yet has no idea of the significance in question and/or cannot choose the proper terms in combination with the culture in question's world of ideas*' (Nijland 2006, 55).

¹⁰ I did network analyses with the girls and their mothers in order to understand who are the people that financially contribute to the *quinceañera* and how these people are related to the girls' family. I choose network analysis as a method for it is ultimately designed to gather this relational data, for 'relations are not the properties of agents, but of the relational systems of agents built up from connected pairs of interacting agents (Scott 2013, 3).

¹¹ I used a customized version of diagramming, in which I asked the girls and their parents to make a schedule of the day of the celebration, and an overview of the period prior to the celebration, including its preparations. This participatory appraisal technique of diagramming is aimed at enabling "*local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act*" (Chambers 2002, 3). It is thus a fitting method to make the girls and their parents analyse their own ideas.

53). Regarding my topic, having a documentary as an end product adds something to my research, for behaviour related to girlhood or womanhood, relations between people and emotions are better understood visually and in their context, which text wouldn't be able to give insight in (MacDougall 1998, 75)¹². The film presents a case study of one *quinceañera*, and the article provides the broader context to the *quinceañera* in Cuyoaco and provides a deeper analysis.

Elements & symbols

To understand to what extent the *quinceañera* represents the girls' transition to adulthood, it is important to first understand what the *quinceañera* in Cuyoaco looks like. Although there is no single form of a *quinceañera* in Cuyoaco, several patterns can be detected. All the girls for example wear a puffy long dress, usually in a pastel colour. All the *quinceañera* celebrations consist of two parts, first there is a church mass in which the girl is accompanied by so called *padrinos de velación*. The second part is the social part, which will be held at a different location, either the girls' houses or a rented salon. Here, food will be served and the girl will dance her waltz with her *chambelanes*¹³, consisting of 'traditional' and 'modern' dances and a family dance, all gathered under the name 'waltz' (to be explained later). In between these waltz dancing, there is also a toast in which the one of the parents, normally the father, gives a speech. After this, live music will be played and people will dance. Within the celebrations, several symbolizations can be detected. It is important to realize that symbols are multivocal,

¹² For my film I combined observational and participatory modes (Nichols 2010,115-123). Hereby I thus partly show life without intervening, and sometimes actively participate to understand the 'why' behind certain things (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). I tried to conduct the interviews in a more conversational way, within the context so it would not break too much with the more observational mode, following the example of 'Swamp Dialogues (2014) by Plajas. I furthermore chose to show the preparations and celebration of the *quinceañera* in a chronological order. This gives the film an narrative structure that gives "order and meaning to the material" (De Bromhead 1996, 5). I intertwined these preparations with the daily life of Dani and expectations of her becoming a woman. The film of Solvang 'yesterday a girl, tomorrow a woman' (2014) served hereby as an inspiration. Regarding the camera handling, I in some cases followed the action and in some cases made steady shots. I wanted there to be a balance for following the action all the time may make the viewer's experience rather negative for there is too much going on just by the movement itself. This is inspired by 'sweetgrass' of Ilisa Barbash & Lucien Castaing-Taylor (2009), in which there is a good combination of steady shots and following the action creating both the sense of excitement and rest.

For ethical considerations, it is important to make your work accessible for the respondents (AAA Code of Ethics, 2012). I decided to first go back to show the film to the participants to see whether it corresponds with their experience, before further distributing it.

¹³ Boys that will accompany the girl during the church mass and dance several dances with her during the celebration. In Cuyoaco these are usually male friends of the *quinceañera*, while in the city it are usually contracted dancers. The amount of *chambelanes* differs per *quinceañera*, but normally there are between four and eight *chambelanes*. One *chambelan* is chosen as the 'principal' *chambelan*, dancing most parts with the girl. They practice the waltz dance with the girls during weeks or even months.

and can thus be understood differently by different people (Eriksen 2010, 231). It can furthermore be understood differently through time and space. In my research, I look at the perceived significance in present-day Cuyoaco. This significance seemed to be understood in a rather similar way by all respondents. I will now give a description of the different parts of the celebration and their symbolizations.

As mentioned above, the celebration starts with a church mass. This church mass is named as the most important part of the *quinceañera* celebration by all the girls, mothers and grandmothers. All the girls and their families are catholic, and the *quinceañera* is seen as an important event for catholic girls. In the church mass the girl thanks God for having reached this age and also thanks her parents for guiding her this far. According to the priest of the church in Cuyoaco, the *quinceañera* mass is “*the way to remind the girl that she needs to continue to go to church and a way for the girl to give a word of gratitude for reaching the age of fifteen.*” The *quinceañera* is not a sacrament, and thus not an obligatory part of a girl’s religious path. Never the less, a girl has to have gone through the stage of the Holy Communion in order to be able to have a *quinceañera*.

All girls mentioned that they have *padrinos*. These are close family members or friends that financially contribute to the celebration. The most important *padrinos* are those of the *velación*, the church mass. These *padrinos* pay the mass and accompany the girl during the mass. Normally these are the godparents of the girls’ baptism. There can also be *padrinos* for other elements of the celebration such as the music, the decoration, the dress, the drinks, or for the traditional elements that will be explained later on. The amount of *padrinos* differ from case to case. Although the *padrinos* contribute financially, the symbolic meaning is considered important too. Being asked to be a *padrino* is an honour, and also gives you a certain role within the celebration and is a way for the girl to emphasize certain relationships.

Another part of the *quinceañera* that is considered to be important and is always included at the party, is the waltz. These usually consist of more ‘modern’, fast songs and more ‘traditional’, slow songs, a surprise dance and a family dance, coming with different clothing (See the film part of this thesis ‘A Quinceañera’ 2016, 29:53 – 34:38). The girls practice for these different waltz dances weeks and sometimes months in advance. Her *chambelanes* will dance these dances with her, and thus also practice with her. During the family waltz, the girl will dance with all the male family members, starting and ending with her father. The bond between the girl and her father is considered to be important during the celebration. It seems as if the girl is considered to be daddy’s little girl. This family waltz is

believed to symbolize the girl saying goodbye to her family as a girl, and to her father as being his little girl.

During the dancing of the different waltzes (excluding the family waltz), there are several elements that can be included. First, there is the ‘última muñeca’ or ‘último juguete’, in which the girl dances with a toy, together with a younger girl, mostly a family member. At the end, the girl gives this toy away to the younger girl. Second, the ‘primera zapatilla’, in which the flat shoes the girl is wearing are replaced by her ‘first heels’. Third, there is the ‘corona’, in which the girl is crowned. Lastly, there is the ‘medalla’, in which the girl gets a medal. The latter two elements are not that common to use in your celebration in Cuyoaco.

These four optional parts all have a perceived significance that seems to be understood in the same way by everyone I spoke to. The ‘última muñeca’ or ‘último juguete’ symbolizes the girl saying goodbye to her girlhood, leaving this stage for good. The ‘primera zapatilla’ symbolizes the girls’ entrance to womanhood. The ‘corona’ symbolizes the girl as the princess of the family and in the eyes of God, showing that from now on you should be honest and humble. The ‘medalla’ symbolizes the love and support of the parents or friends, depending on who gives it to her. Next to symbols, is the idea of a transition also literally mentioned by both the presenter at the celebration. He continuously announces the girl being presented to society as a ‘señorita’ (a term used to refer to a unmarried woman in daily life) (See ‘A Quinceañera’ 2016, 30:24 – 30:32).

The celebration is thus filled with elements that have a certain symbolization. These symbolizations can be linked to the idea of ‘rites of passage’, as explained by van Gennep (1960) and Turner (in Carus Madhi 1987). The first phase of a rite of passage, separation, can be found in thanking god for the former phase of life, the dancing with the male family members as a goodbye of the girls’ state as a girl within the family and in the dancing with the last doll, symbolizing the separation of the girl from her status as a child/girl. It thus symbolizes the separation of a certain ‘cultural condition’ or ‘state’ of the girl being a child/girl (Carus Madhi 1987, 5). The second phase of a rite of passage, margin, or liminal phase, can be found in between the symbolization of the separation and the following symbolization of the aggregation, or integration phase. In this period it is not really clear what is communicated about the state of the girl. The third phase of aggregation is symbolized by the girl having her flat shoes changed by her first heels, symbolizing her entering a different stage, namely womanhood.

What is interesting, is that the girl is presented a princess, which has clearly been influenced by Disney movies. Ceci for example told me that she wanted her dress to look like

the dress of princess Anastasia, of the Disney film Anastasia, and furthermore also wants to dance her family dance to a song of this film. When talking to the generations of both the mothers as well as of the grandmothers, they all told me that they did not have the symbolic elements mentioned above, nor did they have a big puffy dress. It used to be more modest and the church mass used to be more central, and mostly only accompanied by a family dinner instead of a bigger social event. This points out that these princess, Disney influences are rather recent and probably tied to the United States of America as an important influence in this for there is a stream of migration from Mexico to the USA, bringing back influences.

Views on symbolization

Regarding the symbolization of these elements, I found different reactions during my research. First, the elements were seen by some girls as being inaccurate compared to their own wishes or experiences. Isabel (fourteen years old) for example said she didn't really care about the 'última muñeca' because "... *I already stopped playing with toys, so it doesn't make sense*". She on the other hand did not expect to completely leave behind her girlhood after her *quinceañera* celebration. Ceci mentioned that she felt that in some cases it doesn't make sense for the girl "*will continue playing with toys even after their celebrations*". The same goes for the symbolization of the zapatilla: "*it is not like I am going to wear heels or be a woman all of a sudden*". Although Ceci and Isabel did not think the symbolization was correct, they still wanted to incorporate it in their celebration because they think it "*looks nice*".

There were also some girls that did not want to include these elements in their celebration, such as Dani and Monica. According to Dani, it did not really "*call her attention*". She thought it was very traditional and she wanted her celebration to be more 'modern'. Also Jhona, who is the instructor of the Waltz dance of both Dani and many other girls in the village, called these aspects "*exaggerated, backwards and country side like*".

On the other hand, other girls told me that they saw these aspects, especially the 'última muñeca' and 'zapatilla', as important and nice parts of the *quinceañera* celebration. They also saw them as 'traditional' elements, but mentioned this as a positive thing. As Isabel stated "*these traditional element are part of our local tradition and it is nice to have them in your party. I don't like having all these modern things in my party*". Although Isabel, and others, wanted both the última muñeca and the primera zapatilla to be part of their celebration, they did think that what they represented is not accurate to their experience of growing up.

The opinions about these elements are thus mixed. What all girls agreed upon is that these elements are the traditional elements of the *quinceañera* celebration, representing the

transition from girlhood to womanhood. The traditionality can both be a reason to incorporate them in your celebration as well as to leave them out. Some girls wanted a more modern celebration and felt that these elements did not fit in, and other girls thought the fact that it is traditional makes it a beautiful element.

Another thing the girls agreed upon is that they will not become a woman right after the *quinceañera* celebration, and that the representation does thus not make sense. But as shown this does not automatically mean that the girl will not include the elements, for she may still like it for tradition sake and/or for the way it looks. Also the two older girls, Olivia and Monica, mentioned they had these ‘traditional’ elements in their celebration. Now reflecting back, Olivia mentions “*well, after I turned fifteen nothing really changed. I kept going to school and later went to prepa and now the university in Puebla, but of course I have changed over the years and became more mature, more responsible*”.

Turning back to the theory of ‘rites of passage’, an important detail of the last phase, the ‘aggregation’ phase, is that the individual is “*in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and “structural” type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards*” (Carus Mahdi 1987, 5). It seems like the symbolization of the girl passing from girlhood into womanhood does not correspond with the expected behaviour of the girl. The behaviour, norms and ethical standards that are expected of a woman in the local society are namely not in line with what girls, or their families, expect or experienced in the time following the *quinceañera*. This will be further explained and explored in the next section.

As mentioned before it turned out that the older generations did not have these symbolic elements, and yet the girls all mention the symbolic elements being so called ‘traditional’. Isabel’s mother for example said “*I didn’t have the last doll or first heel. These are new things, we didn’t use to do that back then*”. So although these elements are named as traditional, they don’t have a long history. Rather, it seems to be an ‘invention of tradition’ defined by Hobsbawm as “... a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). So the tradition of incorporating these symbolizing elements can be seen as invented as their origin is rather recent.

The *quinceañera* celebration is recently becoming very much commercialized, especially in the city. There are special *quinceañera* fashion events, showing the new trends of the season. There are also several *quinceañera* magazines, aimed at informing girls about

the trends and things needed for a *quinceañera*, creating an image of ‘the perfect *quinceañera*’. Furthermore there are *quinceañera* planners, comparable to wedding planners, and groups of *chambelanes* that can be hired. It is very possible that the ‘invention of tradition’ is partly invented by this *quinceañera* industry.

What is evident, is that the ‘traditional’ *quinceañera* ideal presents the ideal constructed sociocultural role woman as being princess-like, feminine, with a future as a wife and mother. This thus also presents the ideal role of a woman to be tied to the house. It however became clear that this used to be the ideal role of a woman in the past, but that this has changed over time. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

Changing roles of women

To understand the changed expected sociocultural roles of women and how this is tied to the idea of transition after a *quinceañera* it is important to look at education. In the generation of the girls’ grandmothers, schooling was very limited. You were considered to be lucky if you could attend primary school for a couple of years. The grandmother of Isabel for example stated that “*In my time, going to school was not a normal thing. I only attended primary school for two years, and then I had to help working because there was no money for school anymore*”. Many women from this generation learned how to sew, and started working as a tailor. The grandmother of Dani stated that her husband “*asked her to stop working when we got married, and I did this without thinking it through. This is my biggest mistake*” (See ‘A Quinceañera 2016, 11:07- 11:37’) . Also the grandmother of Isabel mentioned this. For the generation of the grandmothers, it used to be normal to give up working because the husband would demand this, and then become a housewife and mother.

For the generation of the mothers, it still was rather hard to get education¹⁴. The mother of Carmen for example said that “*I never had the opportunity to study. I really wanted to but it was not possible because of money problems*”. Some of the mothers, instead of having a good education, helped their parents in their shops, or later opened a shop together with their husband, such as the mother of Dani who did both. Two of the mothers got divorced, so they now have to work in order to get an income. They themselves however never had a real education, making it hard to earn enough money now. Reflecting back, both stated that they wished to had had more education. The generation of the mothers, it was

¹⁴ A suggestion for further research would be to see what role the *quinceañera* played in the generation of the mothers and grandmothers, for the educational system was not that developed in that time, providing them less opportunities to develop themselves and have an ‘emerging adulthood’ period.

normal to work less if the situation allowed it. Getting divorced is the most important reason to work full-time, but poor education makes this hard. It is interesting to note here that from the generation of the grandmothers to the mothers, marriage has changed. For the generation of the grandmothers it was socially unacceptable to get divorced, and staying with a man if the relation does not work, and especially if he would not be loyal to her, would give the woman a status as 'doña'. For the generation of the mother this however changed. Although it was still not seen as a good thing, it started to happen and become more accepted.

Since the 80's, education for girls has become more important to the Mexican government. Since then, it has been focussing on education, which was one of the important consequences of the Mexican revolution. In 1997 the government started a program, called Solidaridad (1997 to 2002), followed by a new program called Progresá (2002 to 2007), which changed names to Oportunidades (2007 to 2014) and now goes under 'Prospera'. These programs focus on reducing poverty, including education as one of the biggest components (Attanasio 2011, 37-40; Diaz-Cayeros 2003, 1-4; Meyenberg 2004, 4). One of the policies is giving money to the mothers of children that are in school from the 3th grade on. During 'secundaria', the program gives more money for girls than for boys to stimulate gender equality since there is still this idea that women are more for the household and thus don't need to study, making parents in general to favour investing in the education of their sons (World Bank 2014; Lee, personal communication 21th of December 2015).

Not only the government is more focused on girls' education, also the parents and grandmothers of my respondents were very clear about their wishes to give the girls education in order to be able to be financially independent. The families of Carmen en Isabel do not have a lot of economic possibilities. Carmen did turn fifteen a couple of months ago but did not have a *quinceañera* celebration. Her mother stated that "*Me and my husband have four daughters together. That is the disadvantage why we cannot celebrate the quince años. Because I have to save money so they can study, that's what I want, that they study*". Isabel is turning fifteen in a little over a year. She lives with her grandmother and her mother, who is divorced and works and lives in another village during the week. Isabel's mother says "*Maybe the economic situation doesn't permit us to have a party. I think it is more important for her to study. Before, there were many girls that didn't have a study so then when they would divorce they couldn't do anything. I want my daughter to be able to be independent*". Also Ceci's mother stated that she wanted her daughter to have a proper education, so in case she will separate from her future husband, she can still earn herself a living. You can see how the mothers now experience divorce as a possible scenario for their girls and they now want their

daughters to be independent. The grandmother of Dani furthermore said that *“a girl should not only be tight to the household, she should also be able to develop herself through study and work”* (See ‘A Quinceañera’ 2016, 11:45-11:58). The parents and grandmothers all would like the girls to work when they grow up, and later combine this with a role in the household.

Also from the church, girls are stimulated to study. The priest of the church in Cuyoaco, Hugo Morales, told me that he thinks it is very important for girls to study. *“Before, there was the idea that if girls do not get married before eighteen, they don’t serve for marriage nor anything else anymore. But now, girls themselves realize this is not true... they can realize things in their lives... Because they study in the city, their minds are opened... they realize that they have other options than just staying at home and have children”* (See ‘A Quinceañera’ 2016, 13:01 – 13:28). During the quinceañera mass, attention is paid to the girls’ schooling and successfulness, stimulating her to study and give something back to society in order to become a ‘good woman’ (See ‘A Quinceañera’ 2016, 25:49 – 26:21). There is very much the idea that going to the city will change their mentality and stimulate them to develop themselves. This is in line with the general idea that people tend to see the city as being more modern (Ferguson 1999, 82-93). Globalization and connectedness to the city are believed to be liberating and ‘backwards traditions’ are being connected to local cultures (Tsing 2000). This is why the church now stimulates the ideal of a woman becoming an educated, successful, public figure who can combine this with a role in household, rather than solely a home-bound mother and wife figure.

Also the girls themselves are focused on their studies. All of them, except for Isabel who won’t have the money for it, are planning on going to the University of Puebla. Dani would like to study international business, Ceci quantum mechanics, Carmen gastronomy and Lupita does not know yet. Isabel is thinking of going to a university closer to home to study medicine. Dani and Carmen are now in their final year of ‘secundaria’. They are now taking a course at the BUAP ‘prepa’ of Libres to make sure they will be able to pass the admission test. Once in this ‘prepa’ they will be assured of entering the BUAP-university in Puebla. Ceci and Lupita are also planning on doing this next year when they will be in their final year of ‘secundaria’.

The girls all mentioned similar reasons for wanting to study. They think it is important to develop themselves in order to be able to be financially independent. They wanted to do certain studies because of their interest in these fields. The ideal mentioned is first to study, then become financially independent and then marry. As Ceci stated *“I only want to start*

dating and get married after I finish my study and have my own income. I don't want to need a man financially". The same goes for Dani *"I first want to study and then get married"*. All the girls mentioned wanting to get married between the age of 25 and 30. They also all mentioned that they want to continue working once they get married. As Isabel mentioned *"If I get married I would like to keep working, even if my husband is working too and we don't need the extra money. I would like to help to cure people"*.

However, the girls also told me stories about classmates of their age that already got pregnant, ran off with their boyfriend or got married. Dani for example said that *"a classmate of mine got married last year. How old she was? She was only fourteen. She now lives with her boyfriend and stopped school"*. Dani's grandmother also mentioned that *"there are many girls that get together when they are like fifteen or seventeen, very young"* (See 'A Quinceañera' 2016, 10:27 – 10:41). Although this does happen now and then, it is not that normal. It rather seemed to be a real fear of mothers and grandmothers, making them focused on preventing their (grand) daughters to get married and pregnant at a young age and thus also making them notice all the cases of when it did happen. In the home environment of Ceci, gossiping about girls that got married at an early age, and disapproving this happened quite often. I saw this in many homes. Also the girls all disapprove of this and think it is *"very stupid"* (Ceci). So although getting married young does happen, it is not the norm and the opinions about this are very negative and girls are stimulated to keep studying instead.

Because of this wish for education for the girls by the girls themselves, their parents and their grandmothers, there are many girls who keep on studying. Through this education, girls are postponing their entrance to womanhood. The ideal for girls is to become financially independent before getting married, which can only be accomplished by education. This fits in the idea of 'emerging adulthood', for these girls are exploring their identities and future possibilities (Arnett 2000). The ideal for the sociocultural dimension of womanhood is thus changed. It no longer means becoming a good mother and housewife, but becoming part of the society as a financially independent person to later combine this with marriage and children. So not only the timing of womanhood but also the shape of womanhood has changed.

So what does it represent?

As demonstrated above, the *quinceañera* as a ritual does not (longer) represent the transition from girlhood to womanhood regarding the socio-cultural dimension, for the girls all plan on

studying and become financially independent before getting married. They furthermore plan to stay active in society once married. The representation of ideal womanhood as done by the ‘traditional’ *quinceañera* clashes with the ideal womanhood expected by society. If a girl would take the presented ideal to society, she would block her own development in becoming a successful woman to society’s standards. The celebration is however very much present in Cuyoaco, and a lot of money is invested in the *quinceañera* celebration. Furthermore it is a celebration that involves many emotions and expectations of both the girls, their parents and their grandmothers. This raises the question why it is celebrated and what it represents to the girls and their family. I will now explain the different functions and meanings of the *quinceañera* celebration as identified in the field.

The quinceañera as a platform for impression making

The *quinceañera* is a way for the girl and her family to present her to society. Although this does not mean that the girl hereby becomes a grown woman in her daily life from now on, she is presented to society in a way she has not been seen before, as a woman. It is the first time she is wearing night-time make-up, her nails are being done, she is wearing heels and a ball gown. These are all aspects can be styled in the way the girl and/or her family want it. In this way it is a platform to present the girl and show society who she is as a person.

Presenting the girl as a personality can be linked to literature on the ‘self’ and identity. First, it is important to realize that there are two different ‘selves’. The ‘self’ as the ‘I’, as the ‘observing agent’, and the ‘self’ as the ‘me’, or the ‘object of self -observation and self-evaluation’ (van Meijl 2003, 18). The ‘self’ as ‘me’ can thus be observed and is presented during the quinceañera celebration. Goffman (1959) states that presenting yourself will be done using the body, language and requisites to profile yourself. This performance will be read by the public who will then try to place the person, and the person will then try to adjust according to the reaction of the public. Performing the self is therefore comparable to theater (Goffman 1959). The quinceañera can be said to be a more literal example of how the ‘self’ is presented in a theatrical way. As Amartya Sen (2006) states, we can choose our own identity within certain constraints, depending on the situation. Important variables herein are budget and expectations (Amartya Sen 2006, 31). These expectations are influenced by “local knowledge, regional norms, particular perceptions and values” (ibid. 34-35). Van Meijl (2003) states that the presented self, or ‘me’ *is* “made up of three components: material aspects (body, clothes, possessions), social aspects (relations, roles, reputations) and spiritual aspects (thoughts, consciousness)” (van Meijl 2003, 18).

As mentioned before, the ideal presentation of the girl as a woman at the *quinceañera* is as a princess and a future wife. The presentation of the ‘me’ is thus rather the ‘me’ within the boundaries of this ideal that is linked to the *quinceañera*. This ideal role will be performed during the celebration, but will then again be put away, as the girl is not considered a woman after the celebration and the societal ideal of a woman is different than the one presented. It however still gives the girls’ some space to show their identity as a person.

The negotiation about how to present the girl, or the ‘me’, is done between the girl, the mother and the grandmother. In the case of Isabel *“I will decide what my party will be like together with my mother and grandmother. The costs are very important in this as well. Maybe my grandmother and mother will give me two options about some things and then I can choose”*. Her mother also mentioned her role, saying that *“for my daughter, I don’t want her to put shirts on without sleeves, but this is what I think. And at time she is here she has to do more or less what I say. Isabel she likes it, but I don’t. She should be covered. Her dress will also be not that extravagant”*. In this case it is thus very much the mother having much to say in the way Isabel is presented. In the case of Dani however, her mother leaves her pretty much free in what she wants. She said that *“It is her night so I want it to be the way she wants it to. We would have liked the party to be in a ‘rancho’, but Dani does not want this because then some of her friends cannot come. So now the party will be here in the village”*. The amount of agency of the girl herself in the presentation does thus differ per case.

One of the main goals of the celebration, as named by the girls, is to make sure to leave a good impression on the invites. As Dani mentioned *“I really want my invites to have a good time. I’m also afraid that I will for example fall with my heels and that people will talk about that”*. It was also named as a negative aspect of the *quinceañera* by the girls. Carmen here said that *“there is always going to be people that do not like something so it is hard to impress and please everyone”*.

A wish that comes from both the girl and her parents is for the celebration to be original. In this way the girl is presented as a unique person, an individual. Some girls expressed a wish to be ‘modern’ by not including the ‘traditional’ first heel or last doll. Others wanted to include these elements to emphasize how they like their traditions and would like to keep them this way, presenting themselves in this way as well. The same goes for the kind of dress. The mother of Isabel would like her daughters dress to be modest, covering her shoulders as well. Olivia had a dress especially designed for her by someone in Puebla, and furthermore was also given a trip to Disneyland, Paris, emphasizing how ‘modern’ she is.

The girls would like other people to remember their party as being ‘different’. One evening, my host sister Ceci asked me to come sit with her and look at her secret *quinceañera* document. But before being able to see it, I had to promise not to tell anyone about what I was about to see, and of course I promised. Inside of the document there were many images of dresses, heels and decoration of venues and a list of *padrinos*, invited people and ideas for a menu. Ceci explained to me that this was inspiration she had for her own party. But, she said “*You cannot tell anyone about this, because other girls may want to steal my ideas*”. She furthermore said that “*Even my friends do not know about this, because I once told one about my ideas for the menu, and then when I arrived at her party, she had the exact same food as I was planning for my quinceañera, while when I told her what I was planning to do, she said something completely different*”.

Another way of making an impression or showing off is through the money invested in the celebration. By investing money you can show the invites your financial possibilities and will be better able to meet the wish to be original as well. It is also a way as parents to show how much you care about your daughter. Investing in the *quinceañera* celebration has therefore much priority for the parents of the girls. This is in line with what O’connor says: “Enlarging the costs of a ritual can be a way of showing off or positively change your status within the community” (O’Connor 1989, 117). A way to cover certain costs is to have *padrinos* for certain aspects of the *quinceañera* celebration. However, having less *padrinos* and thus covering the costs yourself as parents is a way to impress people, showing them you don’t need financial support to pay for the celebration. But even when having *padrinos*, parents need to cover many costs and this sometimes forces them to take a loan. In the case of Ceci, her mother for example took a loan through her work of 2.000 euros to be able to pay for her daughters’ *quinceañera*. Meanwhile, a part of the roof of their house has fallen down a while ago and there is no money to fix this. But rather than fixing the roof, the money is invested in the *quinceañera*. This ritual thus very much goes together with debts, which very often is the case with rituals (Yoffee 1998, 321).

The quinceañera as a way to negotiate and confirm social relationships.

padrinos are not only included because of their financial support, it is also a way to confirm and tighten family and friend relationships. Being asked as a *padrino* is seen as an honor. This favor of contributing money does not have to be returned per se since the persons are close to you and contributing is a sign of this close relationship. Desperately wanting to pay it back may come across as not feeling at ease with the person paying, and thus not having a feeling

of ‘*confianza*’, hereby insulting the other person. As Graeber mentions, it is not always necessary to repay debts for it may be seen as cutting off relations or kinship ties when repaying the debt (Graeber 2011, 92-94). However, if a person is close to you and you have been a *padrino* at their *quinceañera*, it is seen as an insult if they don’t want to be a *padrino* at your *quinceañera* when you ask them to. According to Ceci, “*it then feels like this person is letting you down, while you thought there was a lot of ‘confianza’ between you*”. In this way, the *quinceañera* as a ritual is thus also a way of (re-)negotiating and confirming social relationships.

The quinceañera as a religious event

As indicated before, and as also can be read in the importance of impression making, the social part has become more important. But this however does not mean that it has lost its religious meaning. All the girls named the church mass as the most important aspect of their *quinceañera* celebration. Ceci for example mentioned that “*the church mass is the most important part of the celebration because you have to give a word of thankfulness to God*”. And Isabel said that “*the most important part of the quinceañera is first of all the church mass. And then the food. The mass to thank God for reaching the age of fifteen. The food to thank the invited people for joining me at the mass*”. The importance given to the mass by the girls (and also their families) thus emphasizes the religious role of the celebration.

Although the *quinceañera* is not a sacrament, and thus not an obligatory event in the religious life course of a girl, it is very much tied to these sacraments. As the local priest of Cuyoaco said, a girl “*can only do her quinceañera when she did her holy communion*”. This thus illustrates that the celebration is thus very much tied to Catholicism for only Catholic girls who underwent their communion can have a *quinceañera* celebration.

The religion also plays an important role as the keeper of the morale, which can be defined as an “...interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible” (Haidt, 2012, p. 270). Religion always has to do with morality (Norenzayan 2014, 373-274). This was highly visible during the church mass of Dani’s *quinceañera*, where father Hugo Morales created the ideal picture of what a girl and young woman should be and behave like. Ideally she focuses on her study, helps her mother in the house and develops herself (See ‘A Quinceañera’ 2016, 25:49 – 26:21). Also outside the church itself, the morality is used to regulate the girls’ behavior. Many girls were told by their parents for example that they would not be allowed to have a

quinceañera celebration if they would have a boyfriend before the age of fifteen. The *quinceañera* thus both functions as a way to communicate the morale to the girl, as well as a means to make sure the girl behaves according to a certain morale until she is fifteen.

The quinceañera as the beginning of a period of transformation.

Although the girls mention that the symbolization of the *quinceañera* for entering womanhood does not make sense, and they plan to study before becoming a grown woman, the *quinceañera* celebration cannot totally be disconnected from the transition from the girlhood to womanhood. It is true that nothing directly changes after the celebration. The girl will go on with her life just like she did before. Yet there are also ways in which it is still connected to the transition to womanhood.

First, there is an expected change from the different persons involved. The generation of the grandmothers for example all mentioned that when you turn fifteen, you will “*start thinking in different things, you will not think like a little girl anymore. It is the start of a new phase of your life*” (grandmother of Dani). Also some of the mothers mentioned this. Ceci’s mother for example said that “*I don’t think that anything will change but from then on Ceci will gradually start to think like a young woman, being more mature and taking more responsibility*”. The mother of Isabel stated that after your *quinceañera* “*you are not a little girl anymore. You leave the stage of illusions and start the stage of life. Nothing really changes though*”. Dani also mentioned that “*I’m not thinking of boys and getting married that much, but the coming years this will change*”. The idea is thus that the mindset will gradually change.

Secondly, the *quinceañera* is seen as a starting point from which the girl will gradually be allowed to have more freedom and responsibility. Isabel for example mentioned that “*I will probably be allowed to stay with my friends maybe one hour more after school*”. Her mother says that Isabel “*will get a little more responsibility, but this is little by little, corresponding with their age*”. Having boyfriends will not be allowed right after the celebration, but will also gradually change afterwards. Having a boyfriend before fifteen is however seen as not done, while after fifteen it is no longer seen that much as a scandal. Dani’s father for example states that “*Dani cannot have a boyfriend. She first needs to finish her study, if not she will get distracted, maybe from eighteen on*”. There were some girls, such as Lupita and Isabel, who did already have a boyfriend. In the case of Lupita, her parents did not know this. She told me “*if they would know, they will not allow me to have a quinceañera. This is the condition my parents made for the party*”. She furthermore told me

that they would also not allow it after her *quinceañera*, and her parents confirmed this. In the case of Isabel, her mother disapproved of her having a boyfriend but she also mentioned that “*I just want her to behave well, not to have a boyfriend, to focus on the study. I told her this, but who knows. I tell one thing and she thinks something else. I cannot control her. Here in this house, well maybe if they are older than fifteen yes, but rather when she is done studying*”.

This idea of the *quinceañera* being the starting point of the girl developing herself in becoming a woman can be linked to the idea of ‘emerging adulthood’. As mentioned before, ‘emerging adulthood’ is an interval characterized by exploration of identity, lifestyles and career possibilities, gradually accepting more responsibility and making more independent choices (Arnett 2000, 469-471). As mentioned above, this is in line with what my respondents mentioned about the period after the *quinceañera* until their financial independence and marriage, planned around the age of 25 to 30. Although the *quinceañera* does not mark the exact moment when this is changing for every person, it is the age from when on it is becoming socially accepted for a girl to little by little grow up and behave as a woman. The *quinceañera* can therefore be seen as marking the beginning of the ‘emerging adulthood’ period in which the girl gradually becomes less of a child/girl and more of a woman, developing and exploring herself with the eye on the future. The ideal is to study, find work, become financially independent, develop yourself, and eventually get married and have children while keep working.

It is important to at this point go back to the distinction between the biological dimension and the sociocultural dimension made before. As explained, the sociocultural expectation of a woman’s behaviour and mind-set has changed and the time to develop this behaviour and mind-set is ideally prolonged. The age of the *quinceañera* can however still be linked to the biological dimension of womanhood, for the physical development of girls is biologically determined and thus not influenced by ‘environmental and sociocultural influences’ (Christie 2005, 302).

Conclusion

Although the literature on the *quinceañera* mentions the celebration to be the transition from girlhood to womanhood, presenting the girl as a woman ready for marriage, this paper showed how the symbolization and transition to womanhood are more complex. The *quinceañera* is full of symbols that are believed to symbolize the transition to a womanhood characterized by

the ideal role of a woman as wife and mother. The *quinceañera* hereby functions as a platform to present and negotiate this ideal ‘self’ as a woman. These symbols however seem to be included for the idea of them being ‘traditional’. This ‘tradition’ however seems to be invented for both the mothers’ and grandmothers’ generation did not have these aspects. Within the symbolized ideal there is still some space for the girl to show something of her own identity. However, the symbolized ideal role of the woman as mother and wife furthermore clashes with the expectations of family and society, as the aim for woman is to become a contributor to society as a financially independent person, which later can be combined with a role in the household, marriage and motherhood. Because of this aim, girls ideally continue their studies, gaining responsibility and freedom step by step on the way. Rather than standing for the direct transition to the sociocultural dimension of womanhood, the *quinceañera* marks the beginning of a period that could be defined as ‘emerging adulthood’. From that point on it becomes socially accepted for girls to gradually change, develop and convert to be a woman. The *quinceañera* furthermore has the functions of confirming and enforcing relationships and a way to both control and express Christian morality. Part of this Christian morality has changed and encourages the girl to meet the sociocultural ideal of womanhood in the future. Although the *quinceañera* does not mark the entrance to the sociocultural dimension of womanhood, it can however be linked to the biological dimension of womanhood, as the timing of physical change has not changed over time.

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