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Hybridized tradition, language use, and identity in the US. Latina *quinceañera* ritualⁱ

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1 Introduction

One perspective among studies of ethnolinguistic and cultural assimilation posits that the best predictor of a minority group's vitality is its ability to "adapt its cultural forms to prevailing social, economic and political forces," because efforts to "preserve a people's culture as one would specimens in a jar, no matter how well-intentioned the motive, is often ruinous, and nearly always antithetical to the ways cultures choose to represent themselves at any given time in their history and development" (Meléndez 2003: viii). Thus, it is often the case that the immigrant homeland traditions that endure in the US are modified from their original versions. The *quinceañera*, or fifteenth birthday celebration, is one such tradition that is widely practiced with local variations in many countries of Latin America and has been transported to, and transformed within, the United States.

We consider language a relevant cultural artifact of the *quinceañera* ritual (which will be described in detail) along with food, music, and religious practices, not only because language permeates almost all human activity – which often relies on language for its enactment – but also because, in the *quinceañera*, language is necessary on multiple levels. Examples include the church mass, printed invitations to the mass and reception, interactions with vendors of dresses and photographic services and exchanges with the teen's family members and peers who participate in the ceremony. The multiple meanings contained within this ritual celebration and the extensive activities involved to carry it out, we argue, provide an excellent place to examine the role of language. In particular, we aim to identify the ways in which the Spanish language is used in carrying out *quinceañeras* in Chicago, Illinois. How is the *quinceañera* ritual both reflected through and altered by the use of Spanish and English? Because of the fluid nature of cultural traditions, we wonder to what extent this tradition exists independent of its language of origin (Spanish) and what this might suggest about the trajectory of Latina/o cultural practices in Chicago.

We will first review past work on the elements of the *quinceañera* ritual before turning our focus to language use in United States *quinceañeras*.

2.1 The *quinceañera*: Origins, structure, and meanings

The exact origins of the *quinceañera*ⁱⁱ are unclear. Though often believed to have roots in the Spanish court dances of Europe in native Mexican initiation rituals of the Aztecs and Mayans, there is actually no concrete evidence to support this theory of syncretism (Cantú 1999). Alvarez (2007) claims that the push to legitimize the *quinceañera* by connecting it with an indigenous past is fairly recent (113). In fact, elite communities in Latin America would not have been eager to draw any such connection with an "Indian rite" (Alvarez 2007: 114). While comparisons are sometimes made between a *quinceañera* and a Sweet Sixteen party or debutante ball, there are several elements we will now describe that distinguish the *quinceañera* from these other female coming-of-age celebrations.

2.2 Components of a *quinceañera* celebration

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Despite many differences in individual quinceañeras, there are three key elements generally present in most celebrations in the US and Latin America: a dress, a mass and a party. The quinceañera's dress, often one of her objects of most intense focus, is typically floor-length and puffy, reminiscent of a fairy tale princess dress, although some girls choose more modern formal dresses. As for the quinceañera mass, it has been subject to debate in some US parishes whose churches refuse to offer them because the quinceañera is not one of the Catholic sacraments such as baptism and communion. Other parishes have acquiesced to the tradition, stating that "the quinceañera is an extension of baptism, and an opportunity for conversion, and a chance to encourage young girls to begin a new life of service" (Davalos 1996:111). Some US parishes require that quinceañeras attend specially designed classes on Catholic views of topics ranging from peer pressure, womanhood and family before they can receive a quinceañera mass.

The religious ceremony usually begins with a procession to the church in which the young girl is accompanied by her parents and her *corte* (court) of young women (*damas* or female attendants) and young men (*chambelanes* or escorts). Traditionally there have been seven *damas* and seven *chambelanes*, forming a total of fourteen people in the *corte*, representing the number of years the quinceañera has been alive. However, many quinceañeras today have considerably fewer *damas* and *chambelanes*ⁱⁱⁱ. The *chambelanes* usually wear tuxedos or military-style uniforms and the *damas* wear formal dresses that complement or match the quinceañera's dress. The *dama de honor* (female attendant of honor) and *chambelán de honor* (male escort of honor) are often outfitted slightly differently to set them apart from the rest of the *corte*. At the mass, the priest offers a service that usually makes specific references to the quinceañera if he knows her and her family, but other times the mass is more generic. The young woman prays to "renew her baptismal commitment, strengthen her faith, to ask for a blessing as she enters a new stage in life, to give thanks for arriving at the age of fifteen, and to honor her parents" (Davalos 1996: 109). Among Mexican communities, the young girl may also pray a special devotion with a flower offering to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Many girls receive a prayer book and/or a rosary, often blessed by the priest during the mass.

The mass is usually followed by a reception that takes place in a rented hall or the family's home. In the US and among wealthier Latin Americans, the quinceañera and her *corte* are often transported from the mass to the reception in a rented limousine. When guests have been seated, the quinceañera and her *corte* typically perform a choreographed dance such as a waltz. This group dance is followed by the quinceañera's first dance with her father or other male family member, indicating her newly acquired permission to dance with young men. This is sometimes preceded by the changing of the young girl's flat shoes to high heels – or in some cases, high heels to even higher heels – to signify her transition to womanhood. Sometimes she is presented with a "last doll" to signify leaving behind the toys of childhood and possibly suggesting her future role as a mother (Alvarez 2007). The food served at the reception may be traditional and prepared by the family, or may be a catered menu included in the rental of the reception hall. Music may be provided by a live band and/or by one or more DJs. A cake, often resembling those of weddings in size and elaborateness, is cut and served.

In order to carry out these multiple religious and festive elements, the family must begin preparing many months in advance, sometimes a year or more. Different *padrinos* (godparents) are often called upon to provide financial support for certain aspects of the celebration such as the dance hall, the limo, photographers, videographers, or the dress, among other possible expenses. Gifts are given to the quinceañera, usually in the form of money, although quinceañera gift registries have begun to appear at larger retail stores in both the US and Latin America.

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The quinceañera in the US, according to Alvarez (2007), has adopted traditions from many different Latino cultures that live here, perhaps constituting a form of inter-Latino contact in the US. For example, she notes that Cuban quinceañeras in Miami often hire Mexican mariachis, that the full court of fourteen damas and chambelanes is a Mexican practice now widely adopted by other groups and that the changing of flats to heels may have originally been developed in Puerto Rico. However, in *Images of America: Puerto Rican Chicago*, Cruz (2004: 60) notes that “some Puerto Rican families have adopted the Mexican tradition of a quinceañera to celebrate a girls fifteenth birthday,” creating some confusion about the origins of the various traditions associated with a quinceañera. Most of our participants were Mexican, but several belonged to other Latino groups including Puerto Rican, Ecuadorian and Guatemalan.

2.3 Meanings

There are multiple ways that the quinceañera has been analyzed, particularly since, as Davalos (1996) notes, the ritual reaffirms “being Mexican^{iv}, Catholic, and a woman.” Here we will be drawing from the work of four scholars. Davalos (1996) documents the experiences of twelve Mexican-American girls and their mothers as they recount their quinceañeras in Chicago. Davalos presents aspects of the quinceañera previously unmentioned in public discourse, including arguments between family members about the color of the dress, the location of the reception, and the number of guests. Cantú’s (1999, 2002) ethnographies explored the quinceañera in Laredo, Texas, describing changes that the celebration has undergone over the past thirty years as well as analyzing objects of significance to the ritual. Horowitz (1993) explores the quinceañera in the context of 32nd Street in Chicago, where she spent three years as a participant-observer studying young people in the community. Horowitz explored ways in which the quinceañera reflects “an adaptation to economic and social marginality in a US city” (259) as well as the ways in which the ritual absorbs new meanings and forms within the urban setting of Chicago. Finally, part ethnographic and part autobiographical, the renowned fiction writer Julia Alvarez (2007) offers a comprehensive picture of the quinceañera throughout the US. Woven through her analysis of the case study of quinceañera Monica Ramos, a second-generation Dominican in Queens, N.Y., are Alvarez’s observations and reflections on multiple quinceañeras she attended over a year-long period. We will divide our discussion of this literature into three topics: socioeconomic considerations, ethnic identity issues, and gendered meanings of the quinceañera celebration.

To begin, there are interesting socioeconomic facets to the quinceañera. Many US Latinos connect the quinceañera tradition to upper-class families in their home countries. Yet Alvarez (2007) suggests that a complete socio-economic reversal appears to have occurred in some US communities in that “working-class Latinos have adopted what only the wealthy upper classes could afford in their native countries; meanwhile upper-class Latinos disparage the tradition as practiced by people who would have been their maids and chauffeurs back home...” (148). Yet Cantú insists that families across the social spectrum “continue to celebrate their daughters’ coming of age with a mass and a dance” (2002: 17). What seems to differ is the elaborateness with which families of distinct socio-economic class celebrate this ritual. Horowitz posits that the quinceañera serves to affirm or establish social status by demonstrating a family’s ability to pay for a large event, explaining that “the more expensive and extensive the party, the more praise received” (1993: 274)^v. However, the study also emphasizes the scarce resources

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available for such expenses, which may create competition among community members wishing to demonstrate their social status.

The spending associated with these celebrations does not escape criticism from within and outside US Latino communities. Given that these communities are amongst the poorest in the nation, why do they spend such large amounts of money on a party – on average \$5,000, according to a 2006 survey by the magazine *Quince Girl?* Cantú (2002: 16) noted that the quinceañera “baffles outsiders who do not understand the contradictions that it underscores in a community with excessively high dropout rates, high teen pregnancy, double-digit unemployment rates and high levels of poverty.” Davalos (1996: 121) cited clergy who sought to “regulate” the celebration in order to save families from frivolously spending money. Alvarez (2007: 21), quoting a national report citing Latina girls’ high pregnancy rates, suicide attempts, school dropouts, and substance abuse (National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations 1999), ponders the reports’ findings: “Close to one out of every three Hispanic female high school students has seriously considered suicide...30 percent between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four have dropped out of school...Hispanic girls lead their counterparts in the use of illegal substances” (21). After considering these startling statistics, Alvarez asks:

What on earth is there to celebrate? Why are these girls having quinceañeras? [...] How many of these one-night princesses will end up going in the opposite direction of the Cinderella fairy tale: from ball gowns and tiaras and quince parties to life at the bottom of the American heap?

However, Alvarez’ compelling narrative supports another finding of the same study: those Latina girls who avoided such societal traps relied on “protective cultural beliefs and practices that provide an important buffer against depression and risky behaviors” (2007: 22). That is, the quinceañera, “while endorsing a questionable and often expensive fairy-tale fantasy, also involves and investment of time, energy, and attention in a young person, which can pay off in ways that can’t be so easily dismissed” (2007: 22)^{vi}. The public nature of the quinceañera allows for the young girl to feel a sense of support from her entire community. This tangible demonstration of investment allows for the young girl to potentially retain a sense of support through the challenges she may face in the future.

Having considered several socioeconomic aspects of the quinceañera, we turn now to the ways in which this ritual indexes ethnic Latina identity in the US Horowitz (1993) states that the quinceañera ceremony in the US is a “transitional cultural phenomenon” (259) in that it implies a need to affirm “Mexicanness” when one is increasingly surrounded by Anglo influence. She views the ritual as an “urbanized traditionalism” (260), meaning that it presents cultural continuities with the past despite the influences of urbanization and immigration. This hypothesis argues that increased integration into US society does not cause the erasure of the quinceañera, but rather causes the ritual to absorb new meanings and forms. In a more general note about the tradition itself, Horowitz reiterates the vitality of the ritual: “...even as some Chicanos have become more embedded in the dominant culture, the quinceañera has remained a significant ritual” (259–261). Similarly, Davalos (1996) portrays the quinceañera as “an anchor between two cultures” (123). She observes the need among the *mexicanas* to express cultural difference as a reaction to the surrounding hegemonic homogeneity, while simultaneously incorporating practices and meanings from the dominant culture. This negotiation encourages “a rethinking of

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‘tradition’ as an open, and sometimes chaotic, terrain that is constantly reconfigured in everyday experience” (103).

Cantú (1999), like Davalos and Horowitz, recognizes the ritual as a site that both resists and succumbs to the power of the colonizer (73). She describes the quinceañera as a “cultural marker” that allows for its participants to “continue a tradition that stretches back into our cultural history as a conquered region whose population refuses to abandon its traditions and customs even when these same traditions and customs may change and shift” (19). Instead of seeking to reaffirm culture in a “foreign land” as in the studies of Horowitz and Davalos, the Chicanos studied by Cantú in Laredo reaffirm culture by simply continuing the tradition, therefore designating it as a “cultural survivor” (3). Cantú’s study is careful to explain that there is no typical quinceañera fiesta and that “as with most living traditions, we can say that it is being transformed with each performance” (18).

We especially like Alvarez’ (2007) characterization of the quinceañera as a cultural Rorschach test that “allows conflicts and contradictions embedded in Latinahood to surface”, offering a space where Latinas can “view, review, articulate, and perhaps even reframe some of these contradictions” (229). She notes that “while the quinceañera is touted as a marker of ethnicity, it is in many ways an ethnicity with a label that reads ‘Made in the USA’ [...] Even as the younger generations assimilate in every other way to a mainstream culture, they are holding on to this old country tradition, which is actually being created here.” (116). Given the evidence that shift away from Spanish to English is usually complete by the third generation (which we will review in a later section), our interest in the present study is to explore to what degree Spanish remains an element in this “old country tradition” when carried out in the US.

The identities performed in the quinceañera are much more complex than any simple reflection of one singular “Latino family identity”. Identities are multiple and shifting, and this multiplicity is clearly present in the tradition and in the young quinceañera herself:

...culture can vary within one ethnic community. Their [*the mexicanas*] view of multiple identities is different from the dominant perspective of distinct “either/or” identities and nations...[the women] signaled through their smiles and contestation that people are never either Mexican or United States Americans but a hybrid form. (Davalos 1996: 119)

To conclude this discussion of identity, the cultural hybridity demonstrated in the US quinceañera allows for young Latinas to perform several identities. Understanding cultural identity as a *performance* is an important concept within the present study. Rebolledo (1995) underscores this notion: “Having multiple identities in various cultures also allows for shifting perspectives in all areas: since the subject need not be stable, then it can become multiply voiced—that is, it no longer has to be unified and static, but is free to be complex and disparate” (xi). Thus, the quinceañera ritual provides a space in which young Latinas can perform these complex identities.

Finally, the quinceañera has obvious gendered meanings. Horowitz notes that this coming-of-age ritual “publicly communicates that the young woman is no longer a child and that she is available for courtship” (Horowitz 1993: 275) or, as Alvarez puts it, that she is “attractive, marriageable goods” (2007: 19). Alvarez initially viewed many aspects of the quinceañera negatively as a “princess-in-the-patriarchy fantasy, which was at best useless, at worse harmful, to the young girl” (2007: 227), likening it to “a rehearsal wedding without a groom, [sending] a clear message to the Latina girl: We expect you to get married, have children, devote yourself to

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your family” (Alvarez 2007: 56). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has endorsed the practice of quinceañeras precisely because of its focus on young women. Even though the quinceañera is not a sacrament, the group issued a statement in support of quinceañeras, noting that in the Hispanic community it has traditionally been the women who pass on religious education and values (Alvarez 2007: 179).

Regardless of how the quinceañera tradition is interpreted by various in- and out-group members, it has taken hold in the United States as a vibrant expression of Latina identity and a way to “hold onto your roots” (Davalos 1996: 114). Perhaps because of this function, Alvarez notes that the quinceañera is “even a bigger deal stateside than it had ever been back home” (2007: 5). The founder of *Quince Girl* magazine notes that one out of every five teenagers in the US is Hispanic, and this population is growing at the rate of 30% compared to 8% for non-Hispanics (Alvarez 2007: 68). Thus it is estimated that 400,000 Latina girls turn fifteen per year. Some of Alvarez’ informants suggest that the quinceañera tradition is still being enacted by third generation Latinas (that is, the granddaughters of immigrants), although concrete numbers were not provided. Others suggested to Alvarez that the next generation’s parents will have been born and raised in the US and “a lot of them won’t even speak Spanish that well. There isn’t going to be that grandparent or parent from the old country pushing for the quinceañera.” This comment links a girl’s Spanish proficiency (and whether she has relatives from Latin America) with the enactment of this cultural tradition, which is a connection we sought to explore in the present study. As suggested by Davalos (personal communication, March 2007), perhaps when a family has shifted entirely to English from Spanish, they do not have the tools – or the desire – to enact a quinceañera^{vii}.

Of the three topics explored in this section – socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, and gender – the focus of our study of quinceañeras will be ethnic identity. In particular, we seek to examine how Spanish and English are used when enacting the quinceañera tradition in Chicago, Illinois, and how young people view the role of Spanish in this ritual. Given this focus, we now turn to an examination of the role of language in the enactment of identity.

3 The role of Spanish in US Latino identity

It has been fairly well documented that Spanish, like other non-English languages in the United States, is rarely spoken beyond the grandchildren of immigrants. Multiple studies over the past thirty years have concluded that, overall, there is a shift to English among these populations by the third generation. This language shift is evident in studies conducted in the Southwest (Bills and Vigil 1999; Bills, Hudson and Hernández-Chávez 2000), California (Rivera-Mills 2001; Hurtado and Vega 2004), New York City (Zentella 1997), Miami (Garcia and Otheguy 1988) and Chicago (Potowski 2004). These studies point to the inevitability of Spanish language shift to English within three generations, while sometimes manifesting varying degrees of bilingualism along the way.

But does this shift in language affect Latinos’ claiming of identities as Latino? That is, to what extent is Spanish language proficiency related to Latino ethnic identity? Phinney, Romero, Nava and Huang (2001) applied a statistical model to survey questions designed to explore how three factors affect the ways in which adolescents in Mexican, Armenian, and Vietnamese immigrant families develop a sense of ethnic identity^{viii}: ethnic language proficiency, cultural maintenance by parents, and interaction with peers from the ethnic group. They found that among the Mexican group, proficiency in the ethnic language was significantly correlated, although not strongly, with ethnic identity; the Vietnamese group showed over twice as strong a

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correlation between language proficiency and ethnic identity than did the Mexican group. In addition, behaviors reported by parents to promote cultural maintenance – and a quinceañera certainly falls within this category – had a significant positive effect on ethnic language proficiency. So parental cultural maintenance bolsters language proficiency, and language proficiency bolsters ethnic identity. Only among the Armenian group did parental cultural maintenance directly influence ethnic identity. These findings of Phinney et al. (2001) are directly related to our study (although we do not seek to establish weights and directions of causal relationships): In what ways does a quinceañera – a form of cultural maintenance – bolster and/or reflect young girls' Spanish language proficiency? And in what ways does it bolster and/or reflect ethnic identity?

Returning to other studies of the relationship of Spanish proficiency and Latino identity, Rivera-Mills (2000) studied 50 Hispanics of various nationalities representing three generations of immigration to the US, finding that only 30% strongly agreed with the sentiment that a person needs to speak Spanish in order to be Hispanic and that the same percentage moderately disagreed. Potowski and Matts (2008) found that 21 out of 24 Latinos in the Chicago area claimed that Spanish was *not* necessary to be Latino; a larger corpus of 70 Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago suggests a similar trend (Torres and Potowski, in progress). In Attinasi's (1985) study, the Latinos in northwest Indiana insisted less on the need for Spanish among Latinos than did their counterparts in New York City (Pedraza 1985).

These findings illustrate that language proficiency does not necessarily play a central role in the construction of Latino/a ethnic identity. The implications of this finding in the context of the quinceañera are of interest to our study: To what degree has the quinceañera shifted to English as one of the many cultural changes that it undergoes? Although the studies by Horowitz, Davalos, Cantú, and Alvarez provide ample evidence of the shifting nature of the quinceañera tradition, none of these studies sought to address language within the ritual itself. One of Davalos' informants briefly references language loss:

Because of who we are and because of who I wanted my daughter to be...my daughter's life has always been Americanized. We live here [in Chicago]. She went to school here. English is her first language, Spanish her second. So, how do you hold on to your roots? How do you put a value to it [if] you can't see it? (Davalos 1996: 115)

Davalos' informant references Spanish language loss, yet the study itself did not seek to expand upon the idea that many young Latinas do not consider Spanish their first language. That is, they may have acquired Spanish first chronologically, but English is now their dominant language. Cantú references the substitution of the traditional Spanish-language prayer book for an English-language Bible as a contested element in the quinceañera celebration (2002: 21). Although it may be concluded that this substitution occurred due to Spanish language loss among the young women, the issue was not a goal of that study.

The present study focuses on the relationships between the Spanish language and US Latino identity as expressed through the quinceañera ritual. Our two primary research questions are as follows:

- What are the general characteristics of quinceañeras in Chicago, and what connections do young girls make between a quinceañera and their identities as Latinas?
- What role does Spanish play within the enactments of Chicago quinceañeras?

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4 Methodology

4.1 Setting

The 2006 Census American Community Survey reported that Chicago is home to 774,042 Hispanics constituting 28% of the city's population, making it the third largest Hispanic city in the United States. The two largest groups of Latinos in Chicago are Mexicans (70%) and Puerto Ricans (15%), constituting the second largest Mexican community in the US outside of Los Angeles and the second largest Puerto Rican community outside of New York City. Approximately 53% of the 2000 Census-reported Mexican population in Chicago was born abroad^{ix}. After Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, 6% of Chicago Latinos identify as Central and South American with 1.8% identifying as Guatemalan. This Latino diversity and high percentage of individuals born abroad serve as important factors when considering the cultural practices present in the Chicago quinceañera.

Over seventy years of Mexican and Puerto Rican migration to the Chicago area has established high concentrations of Latinos throughout various Chicago neighborhoods. Table 1 displays Chicago's five most concentrated Latino neighborhoods.

Table 1. Neighborhoods of Chicago with highest Latino concentrations

Geographical Area	Latino Population	% MX and PR , 2000	% MX and PR, 1990
Lower West Side ("Pilsen")	89% (44,031)	92% MX 2% PR	95% MX 3% PR
Hermosa	84% (22,574)	50% MX 37% PR	35% MX 54% PR
South Lawndale ("La Villita")	83% (75,613)	92% MX 2% PR	93% MX 4% PR
Logan Square	65% (53,833)	50% MX 35% PR	40% MX 48% PR
Humboldt Park	48% (31,607)	51% MX 37% PR	38% MX 55% PR
West Town	47% (40,966)	53% MX 36% PR	52% MX 42% PR

Source: Census 2000 and 1990

The communities of Humboldt Park, Hermosa, and Logan Square were previously primarily Puerto Rican (50%) and have seen an increase in the Mexican population within the last decade. In addition, almost 15% of Chicago's seventy-seven residential communities have Latino populations of 50% or greater. A significant number of participants from the present study hailed from these highly Latino-concentrated neighborhoods.

4.2 Participants and survey questions

We used an online survey delivered through Survey Monkey that was designed for high school students to complete within 40 minutes. Both female and male high school Latina/o students were invited to participate, and all completed surveys were entered in a drawing for three \$100 prizes. Although distributing the survey through high schools eliminates from the participant pool students who do not attend high school, the ease in gathering responses offered through this method was deemed a greater advantage. The majority of the respondents were in 10th grade, so future high school dropouts may have, in fact, been among the survey respondents. We received responses from 384 students attending nine different high schools: seven schools in the city of Chicago (six public and one private) and two in nearby suburbs. An examination of the overall

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demographic characteristics of the eight public schools (Table 2) reveals that they serve students who are of low socioeconomic status and range in Latino populations between 21.7% and 93.7%.

Table 2. Participating high schools

	Location	Charter	% Latino	% low income	Number of respondents
#1	Chicago	Public	79%	92%	85
#2	Chicago	Public	25.9%	98.6%	15
#3	Chicago	Public	21.7%	34.8%	8
#4	Chicago	Public	93.7%	97.7%	56
#5	40 miles west of Chicago	Public	41.6%	16.3%	22
#6	Chicago	Public	27.3%	90.4%	74
#7	Chicago	Public	27.2%	87.5%	67
#8	40 miles southwest of Chicago	Public	22.4%	2.2%	16
#9	Chicago	Private	13%	Not available	7

Surveys were completed by 238 girls and 146 boys, whose average age was 16.6. The respondents were 38% male and 62% female. 85% of them were enrolled in Spanish for heritage speakers classes, a fact which skews our results in at least two ways: we had very few students who had elected not to take Spanish courses, and we had even fewer students who, due to low levels of Spanish proficiency, had been placed in “regular” Spanish courses^x. However, without a minimal level of Spanish proficiency, girls would not have the *option* of using Spanish during a quinceañera, which would have made our examination of language choice issues impossible. In addition, we noticed no major differences between the 15% who were not enrolled in native speaker classes and those who were. Table 3 displays the number of respondents at each high school grade level.

Table 3, Participants’ grade level and average age

Grade (typical age of students)	Number of students	Total	Average age
9 (14-15)	57 (16%)	384	16.6
10 (15-16)	92 (26%)		
11 (16-17)	130 (37%)		
12 (17-18)	75 (21%)		

Almost three quarters of the respondents (277) were born in the US. Of these, 85% had parents who were born in Mexico and who had immigrated to the US after the age of twelve, meaning

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that the respondents themselves belong to the second generation. The 15% of the parents who were not of Mexican origin were from Puerto Rico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Spain. The other 107 respondents were born outside of the US, the majority in Mexico (two respondents were born in Ecuador, one in Guatemala, and one in Puerto Rico). 76% of the respondents born abroad had arrived to the US before twelve years of age; the other 26 had recently arrived as teenagers.

Reported Spanish language use in the households of the participants was quite consistent. Approximately 40% of the participants reported that their parents spoke to them 100% of the time in Spanish, although only 25% of the participants reported using 100% Spanish when themselves speaking to their parents. Approximately 84% of the participants' grandmothers and 69% of the participants' grandfathers spoke to the respondents 100% of the time in Spanish; and in return, 78% of the participants spoke to their grandmothers exclusively in Spanish and 69% spoke to their grandfathers exclusively in Spanish. Thus, Spanish use with grandparents was higher than with parents. Spanish use with their siblings was, on average, approximately 15% of the time. These patterns of Spanish use are very similar to those found in a previous survey of 815 high school and college students in Chicago (Potowski 2004) as well as in other parts of the US.

Our survey utilized a variety of question formats including multiple choice, multiple answer, and open-ended questions. It was divided into a total of 90 sections, although participants only answered relevant sections according to their answers, which skipped them through the survey sections accordingly. For example, boys were not asked whether they had a quinceañera, and girls were not asked whether they had ever been chambelanes. The first eight sections, answered by all students, dealt with general background information about gender, birthplace, school information, family origins, and family language use^{xi}. If a girl had a quinceañera, she was directed to questions about different components including the mass, details about religious preparations, invitations, the dress, items received and bought, music and food for the party, the *padrinos*, the *corte* of *damas* and *chambelanes*, language use during quinceañera preparation and the event itself, and a set of general reflection questions. A female who reported that she would be having a quinceañera in the future was asked an almost identical series of questions addressing her plans regarding these quinceañera components but in the future tense (“Will there be a band at your quinceañera?”). A female who did not or will not have a quinceañera was asked her reasons for this decision. All girls were then directed to questions about their participation as *damas* and their attendance at other girls' quinceañeras. They were also asked about their mothers' quinceañeras. After the initial eight background questions, males were directed to a series of questions about their participation in past quinceañeras as a *chambelán* and their attendance at quinceañeras in which they were not *chambelanes*. All participants then answered a series of questions rating their Spanish skills, general Spanish use, ethnic identity, and church attendance. The participants concluded the survey answering a series of general opinion questions about quinceañeras.

The surveys were our primary source of data, but we also recorded and analyzed the following: a focus group interview with a subset of five girls attending the same high school, a set of three required pre-quinceañera classes offered at one Chicago church, two interviews with a local quinceañera dress and invitation supplier, seven quinceañera masses in Chicago, and two quinceañera receptions in Chicago.

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5.1 Findings

Approximately 47% of the girl respondents reported having already had a quinceañera, and an additional 11% were planning to celebrate one in the future. Thus, in total, 58% of the 238 female respondents (138 girls) either already had or were soon having a quinceañera. Table 4 shows the generations to which these girls belonged (see Appendix A for generational categories). Of these past and future quinceañeras, the majority belonged to G2 and G2.5, reflecting the overall proportion of all girls who completed the survey. We see, however, that three quarters of all G1 and G1.5 girls had quinceañeras, dropping to 59% of the G2 and G2.5 girls, and that just 41% of the G3 girls had quinceañeras. Our numbers are far too small to make any firm conclusions, but they indicate a trend towards less celebration of the quinceañera with increased generation in the US.

Table 4. Generational categories of quinceañeras

See Appendix A for generational categories

Generation	All girls*	Quinceañeras**	Percent*
G1 and 1.5	28	21	75%
G2 and 2.5	128	76	59%
G3	29	12	41%
	185	109/138	

* 185 out of 238 girls answered this question.

** 109 out of the 138 quinceañeras answered this question

Approximately 82% of all respondents, both boys and girls, had attended at least one quinceañera as a guest (that is, when they were not the quinceañera or serving on the corte). The majority of the young men (63%) had been chambelanes at least once, and most had performed this service two or more times^{xii}. Fewer young women but still almost half (46%) reported having served as damas. These high levels of attendance and participation in a quinceañera indicate that the tradition remains strong in Chicago.

We will divide our analysis into two principal sections that reflect the research questions stated earlier. First, we will explore responses that describe Chicago quinceañeras and highlight connections between the quinceañera celebration and Latina identity. Second, we will examine the roles of Spanish within the enactments of quinceañeras as viewed by the quinceañera herself as well as the damas and chambelanes. However, these categories are not completely divisible; ideas about Spanish often entered into discussions on traditionalness of the quinceañera celebration, and aspects of identity are evident in discussions about Spanish use.

5.2 Characteristics of Chicago quinceañera celebrations

A large majority of the quinceañeras in our study, 78%, held their celebrations in the US^{xiii} because our focus is the quinceañera in the US setting, we will focus on these 91 Chicago quinceañeras. As a first step of analysis, we sought to determine which of “traditional” elements were present in these celebrations, including those identified by Cantú (2002) and the other work we have cited here. One way to determine the passing on of traditions is to compare these girls’ quinceañeras with those of their own mothers. However, an overwhelming number of the quinceañeras’ mothers (88%) had not celebrated quinceañeras. Three quarters of these girls stated that their mothers’ lack of a quinceañera celebration had been due to financial limitations. A possible result of this – when a girl’s mother did not have a quinceañera – is that there may be more flexibility for the girl to change elements of the ritual; her mother does not have a narrative

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from her own quinceañera to insist upon for her daughter. Conversely, it may be precisely due to not having had a quinceañera themselves that a mother might cling to ideals from Mexico that she wishes to vicariously perform through her daughter. Among the four quinceañeras in the focus group interview, none of their mothers had quinceañeras due to financial limitations, and they stated that as a result their mothers played very large roles in their own quinceañeras. We also asked them whether having a close relationship with the mother was necessary to have a quinceañera, but they cited cases of family members who were not close to their mothers but who still had quinceañeras. In one case the preparations brought the girl closer to her mother, but not in all cases. The 13 respondents whose mothers did have quinceañeras noted that their own quinceañeras were very different from those of their mothers (having been either more or sometimes less elaborate).

The ways in which our respondents described their quinceañera celebrations, and their motivations for having one, showed great similarities. Slightly more than half (52%) of the girls stated that they decided to have a quinceañera because they viewed the celebration as an “important part of their culture” and thus a strong indicator of Latina identity. Another 48% said that their quinceañera was a response to a family member’s desire that they have one. It appears that culture and family continue to play key roles in the enactment of US quinceañera celebrations. However, Alvarez (2007) noted that all of the quinceañeras she asked gave her “the same pat answer” about what her quinceañera meant to her, including “I’m going from being a girl to being a woman” and “It’s part of my culture.” In fact, all of them mentioned “the princess dress as one of the biggest reasons to have a quince” (2007: 37). Thus, it is probably not accurate to read too deeply into the responses of the quinceañeras to this question on our anonymous survey, except to note that they cited “culture” and “family” as motivators. The four quinceañeras in the focus group interview all agreed that they initially did not want the attention, but in the end enjoyed their quinceañeras because for one day they were able to feel like a princess with eyes on them.

The girls’ responses did attest to the strong role of *compadrazgo* within their celebrations: 79% had padrinos sponsoring different items. In particular, over half stated that padrinos paid for their shoes, cake, prayer book, rosary, invitations, photos, pillow, necklace, and the videographer. This high level of *compadrazgo* indicates that these girls’ communities relied on a practice with origins in Mexico – as noted by Horowitz (1993), it is the intensity of the family network, *compadrazgo*, that allows such celebrations to occur, and through the quinceañera these relationships are publicly dramatized and evaluated, affirming the moral solidarity of network members who claim to have similar virtues in spite of changes brought about by immigration:

Now that many 32nd St. residents are born in the US and some prefer to use English over Spanish, some do not feel as comfortable in Mexico as they might wish and see themselves as being different. The use of *compadrazgo* links Chicago Mexicans to their Mexican past as do serving Mexican food and the printing of invitations in Spanish. (275)

In fact, food and invitations served as important as carriers of “Mexicanness” in these quinceañeras. Almost 70% of the quinceañeras noted that the food served at their reception was Latino/Mexican food. Additionally, 45% of these girls explained that family members prepared this food. The language of the invitations will be explored in the section about Spanish use, but

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we will note here that 86% of the girls said that all of their invitations had been printed entirely in Spanish.

Arguing that rituals always denote a transformation, Cantú (2002) alleges that ritual behaviors and objects take on great significance in marking this change. There are many behaviors and objects involved with traditional quinceañeras, most of which our respondents indicated that they had at their own quinceañeras. For example, 65% of the respondents changed from flat shoes to high heels and 89% had a first dance with a male relative. However, the music for this first dance was an area of cultural innovation. Only 29% of the quinceañeras specified having danced a waltz for their first dance, as is the tradition. Additionally, several English songs were named for the first dance. Music in general was sometimes a site of contention within the enactment of the quinceañera, with parents wanting traditional music in Spanish and the quinceañera preferring hip hop or reggeaton^{xiv}. Almost 60% of the participants specified that mostly Spanish music was played during the quinceañera dance, specifically naming *banda*, *norteña*, *ranchera*, *salsa*, *cumbia*, or *bachata*. Only one respondent noted that all English music was played during the dance. Additionally, 80% of the participants who had live bands stated that the bands spoke mostly in Spanish, while 17% of the bands used both Spanish and English. Only one respondent stated that the live band used mostly English. Those participants who had DJs noted that 43% of the DJs spoke in Spanish with 54% of the DJs mixing Spanish and English. Although the use of Spanish is the focus of the next section, it is worth pointing out here that the music, the DJs playing the music, and the live bands appear to be strong domains of Spanish language use within US quinceañeras.

Returning to ritual behaviors and objects, 81% of our quinceañeras had damas and chambelanes – anywhere from four to twelve damas and between four and fifteen chambelanes. Interestingly, both our survey and interview participants tended to have more chambelanes than damas. 89% of our quinceañeras received a necklace, 86% received a prayer book, 79% received a medalla and a last doll, and 71% received a rosary. Approximately equal numbers hired a photographer (97%) and a videographer (96%), and while videography is a relatively new technological invention, professional photographs of this event have been common for years in Latin America. As for the mode of transportation between the mass and the dance hall, 46% of our quinceañeras rented a traditional limousine while 22% rented a Hummer limousine. The remaining 32% used some other kind of transportation, including two respondents who used a family car or truck and one who stated that she walked, but the remaining participants specified that they used more luxurious vehicles such as new trucks, Hummers, Escalades, and Landrover Limos. Given that the Hummer limo has made its way into quinceañera celebrations in Latin America (as seen on the MTV3 program *Quiero mis quince*), this may be seen as a technological adaptation, much like videography, rather than a cultural adaptation.

Lastly, the quinceañeras' dress choice showed much variation. Both Alvarez (2007) and Cantú (1999) mention the most traditional colors for quinceañera dresses as white and pastel colors, and that white is most common in Latin American countries. Of our quinceañeras, only 7% wore a white dress. Almost a quarter wore pink, 20% wore some variation of blue, and 14% wore a variation of purple. The rest wore red, gold, black, orange, and champagne colored dresses. Chicago quinceañeras – and perhaps those around the US – exhibit more varied dress color choices, an observation which was confirmed by the dress vendor we interviewed as well as ads in *Quince Girl* magazine. One quinceañera in the focus group described her celebration as very untraditional, stating that she did not wear a dress because she did not want to spend money on one that she would not wear again. She encouraged her invitees to wear jeans. Rather than

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have a special mass, she simply attended the regularly scheduled Spanish mass at her parish. Additionally, she had damas but no chambelanes.

The majority of these Chicago quinceañera celebrations were a mix of traditional elements (rosario, mass, shoes, dress, corte, padrinos, food, music) with newer (videography, Hummer limos) and US-based elements (food, color of dress, DJs speaking some English and playing English-language music). In addition, the fairly strong use of the padrino system contributes to the traditional nature of the celebration. We now turn to an analysis of language use in the enactment of these Chicago quinceañeras.

5.3 Spanish use in the enactment of quinceañera celebrations

After getting a sense of how Chicago quinceañera celebrations are constructed, our second research question sought to understand the role of Spanish in the enactment of this ritual. Quinceañeras were asked two direct questions about the value of Spanish in a quinceañera celebration. The first question asked, “Was^{xv} knowledge of Spanish *useful* for your quinceañera? Please give a few examples.” The second question asked whether knowledge of Spanish was *important* for a quinceañera, with examples. These two questions, one about usefulness and the other about importance, yielded interestingly different results. First we will discuss responses to the first question about usefulness, dividing them into the most popular responses: family, mass, and vendors.

5.4 Communicating with family members

Of the 79 girls who answered that Spanish had been useful in their quinceañeras – almost 60% of the quinceañeras who answered this question – half of them specified the need for Spanish to communicate with family members at the event. According to Horowitz (1993: 269), “while the mass provides the sacred aspect of the ritual, the party afterwards is more concerned with dramatizing community and family” by “providing additional symbols of the link between the young woman and her family and among community members.” As mentioned earlier, the vast majority held their quinceañeras in the US but noted that “All my family speaks Spanish,” or, more specifically, that family members were monolingual or dominant in Spanish (“My aunts and some of my cousins speak only Spanish” and “Most of the people there knew Spanish a bit better than English”). Some girls cited the need to publicly thank their family members for their help at the reception.

At this point it is relevant to mention that 36% of the girls had sent some portion of their invitations out of the country, mostly to Mexico. Assuming that some of these relatives attended the quinceañeras from abroad, Spanish would likely be necessary for them to understand. It is also interesting to note that the number of invited guests ranged from 25 to 600 and averaged 200, and that 86% of the girls said that all of their invitations had been printed entirely in Spanish. Another 12% had their invitations printed bilingually in both Spanish and English, and only one girl had her invitations printed entirely in English. No one had a portion of their invitations printed in Spanish and the other portion in English; the invitation provider we interviewed suggested that her clientele viewed this practice as “unclassy.” Thus, the invitations are a realm of quinceañera enactments that takes place primarily in Spanish.

5.5 Mass

Of the quinceañeras, 29 girls specified that Spanish had been useful for their mass. But in fact, 87% of the quinceañeras had a mass and, of these, 86% of the masses were in Spanish. Thus,

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Spanish for the mass was in fact important for a much larger majority of the quinceañeras than those who mentioned the mass as a realm where Spanish had been important. An additional 12% of quinceañeras had a mass that was bilingual in Spanish and English. Only two participants had masses conducted in English, indicating that the mass is another domain of strong Spanish presence in a Chicago quinceañera. When asked why they had a mass, the quinceañeras' most common response highlighted the importance of tradition. They stated that the mass was part of a religious, cultural, and family tradition. In addition to receiving a blessing, some participants emphasized the importance of renewing the promises made at baptism. One quinceañera explained, "Because that is the most important part of a quinceañera, to renew my baptismal vows." Other participants mentioned that the mass is part of the "Catholic tradition," the "Mexican tradition," and that it is "family tradition." As part of the family tradition, several participants stated that they had a mass to please their mothers or grandmothers. However, a quarter of the quinceañeras explained that the mass was equally or more important than the party ("Because it is the whole purpose of the quinceañera. You have the party because you celebrated the mass"). Lastly, giving thanks was also an important factor in deciding to have a mass. One participant stated, "To me the most essential part of that day was the mass because I had to give thanks to God for giving me such a special family and letting me get to that special age where I become a woman in God's eyes."

Of all the quinceañeras who had a mass, 58% performed a reading from the Bible during the mass. Of these girls who completed a reading, 87% read in Spanish and 13% read in English. When asked why they decided to read aloud from the Bible during the mass, over half of the girls (59%) stated that it was a requirement specified by the Church or specifically by the priest. However, 30% of the girls made their own decision to read during the mass stating that "the quinceañera was mine and I thought it would be nice if I read," or "I wanted to read the reading because it was an important day in my life and the reading related to me." The girls explained that the readings were mostly selected by the priest; only 20% of the girls selected their own readings or assisted the priest in selecting the readings. In addition to the quinceañeras and the priest, the participants also cited that close friends, family members, and volunteers from the church performed readings, most of which were conducted in Spanish.

When we broke down the language of the mass by generational category, we discovered that all G1, G1.5, and G2 quinceañeras had their masses in Spanish. Of the three G3 quinceañeras who had a mass, two had their masses in English and the other had hers in Spanish. There were several interesting differences regarding the usefulness and importance of Spanish according to generational category. Only one G1 quinceañera claimed that Spanish was not important for the mass. Of the G1.5s, only 18% claimed that Spanish was not important with comments like, "Here in the US the people mostly speak English." Of the G2s, however, slightly more than a third (38%) stated that Spanish was not important. One participant both acknowledged the importance of Spanish, but also its loss: "If you are not taught Spanish it's not like you can do anything about it but I think it would fit more because it is a Latino tradition." Of the two G3s who had a mass, one who had her mass in English stated that Spanish was not important or useful for the quinceañera celebration. The G3 quinceañera who did have her mass in Spanish stated that Spanish was useful, but not important. Thus, we see a trend that with increasing generational category, there is less of a sense that Spanish is important for a quinceañera mass.

At the focus group interview, the four quinceañeras were asked about the option of masses in English. None of the girls had chosen to do this, but mentioned that it was possible and acceptable. In fact, all of them had attended quinceañeras in English; one of the girl's sisters had

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celebrated her quinceañera mass in English. However, they agreed that “it takes away a special and personal touch” when the quinceañera mass is held in English. They spoke of their heritage and culture as being represented by the Spanish language. They all agreed that if a girl does not hold her mass in Spanish because she cannot speak it well, this is acceptable, but if she conducts her quinceañera in English because she is embarrassed of her culture, this is not acceptable. One of the quinceañeras mentioned that although she does speak Spanish well, she knew she wanted her quinceañera in Spanish.

Finally, some parishes require that the quinceañeras take part in preparation classes. A total of 28 girls indicated that they had participated in anywhere from one to fifteen of these classes. Approximately half of the girls had attended classes conducted solely in Spanish, 19% attended classes conducted solely in English, and 38% attended classes in both English and Spanish. The classes we observed in June 2007 were conducted in both languages: in Spanish during the two classes that parents were required to attend, and in English during the two classes for the girls only or when the girls spent a brief period in a separate room during the classes their parents attended^{xvi}. Of the future quinceañeras, 66% anticipated that their classes will be conducted in Spanish and 22% anticipated that their classes would be in a bilingual format. None of the future quinceañeras anticipated the use of English only during their preparation classes, even though 19% of the past quinceañeras in fact had classes taught in this way. Three of the four quinceañeras in the focus group interview had attended required preparation classes, which stressed the increased responsibility placed upon the quinceañeras to stop violence in their communities; encouraged them to share personal and emotional experiences; and focused on the quinceañera as a rite of passage that focuses on the mass and family, rather than a Sweet 16 which can be “extravagant and does not focus on tradition, family, or religion.”

Thus, Spanish language use is extremely high in the domain of the religious celebration of the mass and in the preparation classes for the mass. Bilingual or English only formats for the mass, the readings, and the preparation classes were significantly lower than the Spanish only format. Because most girls stated that the mass was part of a cultural, religious, and/or family tradition, this may imply that the use of Spanish in these religious spaces of the quinceañera correlates with tradition, i.e. Spanish is a part of family, cultural, and religious tradition. It also suggests that religious spaces can be sites for language maintenance. However, outside of these highly scripted and “traditional” spaces, how prevalent is the use of Spanish only in the quinceañera? We turn now to other domains of this celebration.

5.6 Vendors

The survey asked a question about language use with vendors – “What language did you/your family use with [type of vendor]?” The findings revealed that Spanish use with these vendors was quite high. Table 5 shows the language use reported by the quinceañeras who responded to this question.

Table 5. Reported family language use with vendors

	100% Spanish	Mostly Spanish	100% Spanish <u>or</u> Mostly Spanish	Both equally	100% English	No item	Unsure
Photos	49% (55%)*	20%	69% (75%)*	14%	1%	12%	5%
Dress	47%	20%	67%	17%	9%	4%	2%

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Flowers	46%	16%	62%	16%	7%	6%	9%
Video	44% (50%)*	18%	62% (68%)*	15%	2%	11%	9%
Band	49% (66%)*	11%	60% (77%)*	7%	7%	26%	6%
DJ	39% (44%)*	18%	57% (62%)*	20%	5%	11%	7%
Hall	39%	11%	50%	11%	26%	8%	3%
Limo	22% (30%)*	7%	29% (37%)*	11%	25% (35%)*	28%	7%

* The resulting percentage when responses “not having this item” are removed.

We see that language use with several vendors was mostly or entirely in Spanish, including with photographers (69% of respondents), dress vendors (67%)^{xvii}, flower vendors (62%), videographers (62%), the musical band (60%) and the DJ (57%). However, some girls did not have one or more of these items at their quinceañera (“No item”), and when these responses are removed, the percentage of Spanish use increases, as shown by the numbers with the asterisks. Most notably, 77% of girls who had a band and 75% of girls who had a photographer said that either only Spanish or mostly Spanish was used to interact with these vendors. Language exchanges involved with renting the reception hall and the limousine took place more in English. Thus certain vendors provide sites of Spanish use surrounding the enactment of a quinceañera celebration. Although it may be the parents and not the quinceañera who do the most speaking with these vendors, many girls spend a lot of time with their mothers planning and interacting with vendors (Alvarez 2007).

We have just reviewed responses to the question of whether Spanish was *useful* for girls’ quinceañeras. The second question asked whether Spanish was *important* for a quinceañera. This question was asked immediately following the question about usefulness, and the responses it elicited tended more toward cultural explanations of the role of Spanish. 70% of those who answered this question replied affirmatively, citing reasons like these:

“If you think of yourself Mexican enough to have a quinceañera you should also feel Mexican enough to know Spanish.”

“Yes. Because the tradition of a quinceañera is from a Hispanic background. Having a mass in English looks bad (in my opinion).”

“I think it is important because it really brings out your culture. I don’t think that the quinceañera would be as memorable if you did everything in English, it is something that you will remember and take with you as a part of your culture.”

It is clear that these young girls strongly align Spanish language use with cultural identity. The 30% who replied that Spanish was *not* important for a quinceañera can be summarized in the following comment: “I don’t think its very important, because if you know Spanish it might be because your family also speaks Spanish. If you don’t speak Spanish and neither does your family, you still won’t have a problem communicating.”

5.7 Spanish use among damas and chambelanes

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At the five quinceañera masses we observed in Chicago, before the beginning of the ceremony, the corte members waited nervously waiting by the door of the church, speaking primarily English among themselves. At one celebration, the unmarked code choice among the corte was fluent codeswitching. Spanish was not the language of communication among the corte in the masses we observed, but the corte members did respond to oral requests and instructions in Spanish from the priest, the quinceañera's family members, and other Spanish-speaking adults. Verbal responses to these requests were usually not required – for example, an adult might simply use Spanish to instruct the corte members to move to the right – but when a response was required, the young people responded in Spanish. In one case we observed, a chambelán did not appear to understand or speak Spanish, so his peers translated for him.

On our survey, members of the corte were asked whether Spanish was useful to carry out the role of a dama or chambelán. As was mentioned earlier, 63% of the young men had been chambelanes at least once (the majority had performed this service at least twice) and 46% of the young women had been damas. It is important to recall that these young men and women are often the quinceañera's peers (although sometimes family members such as cousins or aunts/uncles) who provide additional data points on the extent to which the quinceañera celebration encourages Spanish use among US Latino youth. Before exploring these responses, we will mention that before this question about whether Spanish was useful to be a dama or chambelán, corte participants were asked what was necessary to be a dama or a chambelán. The overwhelming majority of responses cited the need to learn the dance steps and purchase the attire; knowledge of Spanish was not mentioned in any of the 140 responses to the question of what is required to be a corte member.

However, when asked directly whether Spanish was useful to be in the corte, 75% of the chambelanes and 63% of the damas responded affirmatively. Many stated that this was because the family members of the quinceañera are Spanish-speakers – one young man specified that “people compliment you and ask you questions mostly in Spanish.” A few mentioned that the mass would be in Spanish, but many more specified that the dance instructors conducted the pre-quinceañera practices entirely in Spanish. Thus if they wanted to understand the instructors in order to learn the dance routine properly and not let down the quinceañera, knowledge of Spanish was useful. A handful of corte members mentioned cultural and identity-based reasons, including that only through knowing Spanish “you will understand why the quince años are so important to the girl and her family” or stating that “Spanish is what we are,” “It is a Hispanic tradition!” “We are all Mexican.”

The corte members who stated that knowledge of Spanish was *not* useful for being a dama or a chambelán – 37% of the damas and 24% of the chambelanes who responded to this question – offered responses including that they did not have to speak to anyone at all during the event and that “you just follow what everyone else is doing and you'll be okay”. Two other comments were polar opposites. One dama wrote that the quinceañera herself did not know Spanish, while another wrote that Spanish was, “Not really [useful] because you're not the quinceañera.” The former comment suggests that English monolingual girls have quinceañeras, while the latter implies the opinion that quinceañeras must know Spanish.

To provide another reference point about the language use of the corte members, the quinceañeras themselves were asked whether their cortes used Spanish. “Did the damas and/or chambelanes speak any Spanish, either during the preparations for your quinceañera or during the actual event? If yes, please give a few examples of when they spoke Spanish.” Out of the 45 responses we received to this question, only nine reported that their corte members did not speak

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any Spanish. The other 80% said that their corte used Spanish for tasks such as practicing for church, learning the dances, or speaking with the quinceañera's family members.

5.8 Non-quinceañeras

92 of our female respondents did not have a quinceañera. Twenty-seven of the girls cited that their families did not have the financial resources for a quinceañera celebration. Others stated that they simply did not want their families to spend the money for a one-time celebration. One girl explained, "Why waste so much money when it's only going to last for one day?" Sixty-three of the girls noted that they were not interested in a quinceañera or that they preferred a gift in place of the celebration. The four focus group quinceañeras mentioned friends and family members they knew who chose gifts over a quinceañera celebration, but suggested that perhaps those girls "did not understand how special the quinceañera celebration could be." Three girls stated that they preferred to use the money to visit family in Mexico, suggesting that the time in Mexico was more important than "one night of a party."

Several girls' responses seemed to be linked to questions of identity. One G3 girl stated, "Having a quinceañera is seen as a very stereotypical thing to do, being a Hispanic, but I'm just not really attracted to those sort of things." This participant's response suggests a desire to distance herself from "stereotypical" Latino identity markers. Additionally, a G2 Mexican stated that she did not have a quinceañera because "en mi familia no tenemos esas tradiciones de las quinceañeras (in my family we don't have the quinceañera tradition)." This poses interesting questions for the study of the quinceañera celebration within families of mixed Latino heritage.

6 Conclusions: Hybridized tradition, language use, and identity

A question asked early in this chapter was whether having a quinceañera bolsters and/or reflects young girls' Spanish language use, and whether it bolsters and/or reflects their ethnic identity. We conclude that, among the youth we surveyed, quinceañeras in Chicago generally do simultaneously bolster and reflect Spanish language use. Between 60-70% of the quinceañeras stated that Spanish was either useful or important (or both) in the enactment of their celebration. All of the focus group quinceañeras agreed that in the future they would like their daughters to have quinceañeras, and wanted them to be celebrated in Spanish. The *corte* members as well – usually adolescent peers, at least half of them male – also claimed high importance of the Spanish language in their roles in the celebration. We did see, however, some degree of hybridization involving the use of English in several arenas, from vendors, music played, the language of DJs and even the mass.

As for ethnic identity, we appeal to theories of identity construction as ongoing negotiations and performances over time (e.g., Butler 1999) and also to Papastergiadis's (2000) concept of hybridity as the negotiation of difference. To recap our major findings, almost 60% of our female respondents had or were planning a quinceañera and slightly over 80% of all respondents had attended at least one quinceañera, indicating a strong continuing presence of this tradition in Chicago. Most of the celebrations contained traditional elements including a *corte*, gifts of a necklace and a prayer book, changing shoes, a first dance with a male relative, and the *compadrazgo* system of financial sponsorship. Indeed, slightly over half of the quinceañeras stated that their motivation for having one was to reaffirm aspects of their cultural identities. However, we can say that, as with its attendant language use, the quinceañera ritual in Chicago has experienced some degree of hybridization through the introduction of elements such as less traditional *cortes* (composed entirely of *damas* or of *chambelanes*, for example), non-traditional

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dress colors, non-Hispanic food and music at the reception, and a song other than a waltz used for the first dance. Clearly, language and culture overlap; some might say they are the same thing, as embodied in Agar's (1994) term "languaculture". In our survey comments, we saw a connection between the role of the quinceañera and the role of the Spanish language in promoting ethnic identity, echoing the findings of Phinney et al. (2001) that, among Mexican Americans, proficiency in Spanish was significantly correlated with ethnic identity and also with behaviors reported by parents to promote cultural maintenance. Very few in our study claimed that Spanish is totally unnecessary to enact a quinceañera. Yet it is worth noting that shift may be afoot: a few all-English masses had occurred among our population, and we saw a modest trend toward less enactment of quinceañeras with increased generation in the US – echoing findings that there is less Spanish use with increased generation in the US.

Butler's (1999) work on gender performances – how people "do" being male or female – may be useful in understanding how young girls in the US "do" being Latina. Ethnic identity, as with other aspects of individual identity, can be seen as a series of performances, and the quinceañera is clearly an elaborate performance, one that unmistakably announces that an individual is fifteen years old, Christian, and female. For these Chicago families, a quinceañera is also a performance that fairly recently crossed a geographical and sociocultural border from Latin America into the US, such that in addition to age, religion and gender, having a quinceañera in Chicago signals that the person is Latina^{xviii} amidst a predominately Anglo culture. Latino families are to various degrees (and usually increasingly with each generation) integrated into mainstream Anglo culture, within which they can be seen as "feeling a part and feeling apart" (Block 2007: 21). Papastergiadis (2000) notes that when there are such contradictions, a hybridity is formed as people negotiate the difference between the past and the present, which "encounter and transform each other" (170). The quinceañera celebrations we have described here, it seems to us, take more from the past than from the present, but there are some signs that third and fourth generation Latinas may enact their identities in ways that either do not include quinceañeras, or that include them in ways that are substantially transformed, including exclusive use of English. Identity in general, and linguistic identity in particular, are fluid, non-monolithic entities that respond to a multiplicity of individual, familial, and other local as well as broader influences, and the quinceañera is another arena in which teenage females can enact ethnolinguistic identities.

Specifically regarding language use practices in quinceañeras, Farr (personal communication, June 2007) pointed out that instead of a binary opposition and neat mapping of the type "English = modern, Spanish = traditional," there is likely a continuum of affiliation with the mainstream. This observation has been supported by our data in the sense that there was hybridization both in the "traditionalness" of the quinceañeras as well as in language (for example, 15% of girls sent a portion of their invitations in each language). Alvarez, too, argues for an expansive view of inherited cultural practices:

Young Latinas [are negotiating and expanding] the ground of their ethnicity. They very hybridity they inherit because of their dual cultures in addition to the global culture in which they are coming of age means that the traditions we pass on to them have to take into account a more complex and multifaceted and contradictory young person than we ever were at their age. (2007: 259)

We conclude with one of Alvarez' questions: "How much can a tradition be stretched and

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changed until it morphs into something else?” (Alvarez 2007: 94). When the family’s Spanish disappears, does the quinceañera celebration disappear as well? Alvarez posits that quinceañeras in the future will have, “if not a Spanish accent, a Latino flavor” (2007:7). For the time being, at least among first and second generation Chicago Latinas, the quinceañera provides a domain for Spanish language use and ethnic identity performance.

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Appendix A

Generational categories

Note: These categories have been used widely in sociolinguistic research and seem to have some explanatory value for certain linguistic behaviors, although they cannot explain all social phenomena.

Abbreviation	Age of arrival in US	Parents
G1	After 11	Arrived to US as adults
G1.5	Between 6-11	Arrived to US as adults

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G2	Before 6 or born in US	Arrived to US as adults
G2.5	Born in US	One parent is G1, one is G2
G3	Born in US	One or both parents are G2

ⁱ We wish to thank Karen Mary Davalos, Jason Rothman, and Julia Alvarez for insightful comments on this chapter. All interpretations and errors belong to the authors.

ⁱⁱ These authors defined “ethnic identity” as a subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the feelings that accompany such group membership.

ⁱⁱⁱ We have been unable to locate information on the number of Chicago Puerto Ricans born in Puerto Rico. The Census does not consider Puerto Rico to be “abroad,” thus the 2.1% of Chicago’s Puerto Ricans that were born “abroad” according to the 2000 Census had non-US birthplaces that did not include the island of Puerto Rico.

^{iv} Following Alvarez (2007) we use the term *quinceañera* to refer to the celebration itself as well as to a girl celebrating one.

^v This may be due in part to the high cost associated with purchasing the necessary formal attire. In addition, as will be mentioned later, it can be difficult to find young men who carry out the chambelán tasks successfully.

^{vi} As we have just explained, the quinceañera tradition is enacted by many communities other than Mexican. But this quote underscores how a quinceañera represents three major points of identity construction: ethnicity, religion, and gender.

^{vii} Similar observations have been made about bar/bat mitzvah celebrations (Salkin 1996).

^{viii} Alvarez is more staunchly critical about the ways in which the quinceañera is marketed to US Latinas through products, websites, and magazines, cautioning against corporations being allowed to distort Latino traditions not based on the needs of young people but rather on their own bottom line.

^{ix} Further comparisons can be made with bar/bat mitzvahs regarding language use. The entire ceremony is conducted in Hebrew and the bar mitzvah reads from the torah in Hebrew for at least twenty minutes. In most cases, these passages are memorized and the young person does not have a clear idea of what s/he is saying.

^x Due to demographic realities in Chicago, Spanish for heritage/native speakers courses in the city and outlying areas tend to be filled with second generation Spanish speakers – the children of immigrants – who tend to have quite strong levels of oral Spanish proficiency. See Valdés (2002) and Potowski and Carreira (2004) for more on Spanish for heritage speaker courses.

^{xi} Unfortunately, we did not require answers to these questions. Students were thus able to skip questions, which leads to irregularity in the number of respondents to each question.

^{xii} According to articles in *Quince girl* magazine, it is fairly common for quinceañeras to rent chambelanes through the agency that choreographs the group dance. This suggests that it can be difficult to find among one’s peer group young men who will reliably perform the duties of a chambelán. It may be the case, then, that young men who prove to be reliable chambelanes are called upon my multiple quinceañeras because of his good reputation, thus our finding that many boys had carried out this function more than once.

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^{xiii} Of the 16 quinceañeras who held their celebrations in Mexico, approximately 71% were G2s. This is an interesting area for future exploration. 6% of the quinceañeras were held both in Mexico and the US.

^{xiv} Although reggaeton is sung in Spanish, the suggestive lyrics and dance moves are often criticized by the older generations.

^{xv} Girls who were still planning their quinceañeras were asked whether Spanish *would be* useful for that future event. Unless otherwise indicated, results for past and future quinceañeras are reported together.

^{xvi} Some of the documents handed out during these classes were prepared bilingually. We noticed no errors in the English version, while the Spanish version had spelling and accentuation errors, such as “le dia” instead of “le di a”, “algien” instead of “alguien”, “amado” instead of “ha amado”.

^{xvii} We did not ask whether the dress had been purchased in the US or abroad. Alvarez (2007:39) notes that some families will buy their dresses in their native countries for much less than the US price, and that it is popular in Miami to rent a dress from the photo studio.

^{xviii} There may be some exceptions, as Alvarez (2007) notes that some girls from other groups, such as Filipinas and even Anglo girls, are having quinceañeras. However, it seems overwhelmingly the case at present that quinceañeras are Latina events.