

## INTRODUCING U.S. HISPANIC CULTURAL VALUES TO MULTICULTURAL MARKETING STUDENTS: THE CASE OF THE *QUINCEAÑERA*

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### ABSTRACT

Based on significant demographic and value shifts within the U.S., multicultural marketing is emerging as a significant area. Increasingly, companies throughout the United States are targeting Hispanic-, Asian-, and African-Americans. Unfortunately, the college curriculum is vastly behind in the attention that is being paid to multicultural marketing. To succeed as managers, students must learn to see the world through the eyes of the target audience. Including multicultural marketing in the business curriculum will help students prepare for dealing with diversity in the marketplace. The purpose of this paper is to introduce a method to teach Hispanic cultural values within the curriculum of a Multicultural Marketing course.

### INTRODUCTION

Based on significant demographic and value shifts within the U.S., multicultural marketing is emerging as a significant area of focus. Major companies throughout the United States are investing financial and human resources into reaching Hispanic-, Asian-, and African-Americans. Unfortunately, college curriculum is vastly behind U.S. companies in the attention that is being paid to multicultural marketing. Recent graduates are not prepared to be productive in careers that involve recruiting and retaining employees from diverse backgrounds or seeking them out as customers. As a result, companies targeting Hispanics are hiring fluent Spanish speakers and then training them to do the marketing. This reveals a shortage of qualified applicants who are both fluent in multiple languages and possess an academic background in business. Business students need to be prepared to do business with Hispanics. This is because the U.S. Census estimates that Hispanics have emerged as the largest minority group in the United States, representing 15 percent of the U.S. population, and are projected to grow to nearly one-quarter by 2050. The growth of this market has been staggering in terms of its: population (doubling from 22.3 million in 1990 to over 45 million in 2007); purchasing power (from 1994-2004, the rate of growth was three times faster than the U.S. as a whole, and is approaching \$1 trillion); and influence on American culture. The long term growth of this market is even more pronounced as the average age of Hispanics in the

U.S. is under 28, nearly ten years younger than the U.S. population as a whole, contributing to a disproportionately higher birth rate. According to the U.S. Census 2007 Population Survey, about one-third of Hispanics are under the age of 18.

Valdes (2002) provided a thorough segmentation of Hispanics by age. Two of the segments, *Los Niños* (born between 1991-1994) and *Los Bebes* (born between 1995-2000) make up most of the under 18 market. The vast majority of the *Los Niños* and *Los Bebes* generations were born in the U.S., 89 and 96 percent respectively. Nearly all are bilingual and bicultural and nearly two-thirds have at least one foreign born parent. Because many parents of *Los Niños* are Spanish-only or Spanish-dominant speakers, their English-speaking children serve as translators and, thus, are very influential on their choices of brands, products, and services. Because many of the parents are first generation arrivals to the U.S., they are more traditional as demonstrated by their extreme focus on their children's wants and needs, called "*chicoismo*." Korzenny & Korzenny (2005, p. 187) identified guilty feelings that may stem from a mother's inability to provide to children all the things that they want. And, like all English-speaking American youth, these children receive lots of attention from marketers. Both generations are growing up in a country and world that values multiculturalism more than ever and that has shaped their ability to be bicultural and bilingual (pp. 81-89). These young Hispanics, according to Levin (2006, p. 125), "...form a kind of bridge. Not only are they Latinizing the American mainstream, they are Americanizing what it means to be Hispanic in the United States." Levin then quoted, Isis Velasquez, a 21-year old student who said "...[they] practice the traditions of where they're from, but at the same time they have that American influence."

There was a time when most Hispanics were concentrated in major urban areas so the need to educate business students about the Hispanic market in states like Ohio, North Carolina, and Kansas was not as pressing. Since 1990, the increasing resettlement of Hispanics into smaller Midwestern and Southern towns has highlighted the need to educate business students (and all students) to appreciate the cultural differences between the Hispanic and the general market. To illustrate, the U.S. Census reported that North Carolina has seen

the largest Hispanic population growth in the *entire* country since 1990, at nearly 400 percent. A recent *USA Today* (2008) cover story featured the importance of the growing Hispanic population to the survival of rural Kansas towns.

The key to preparing students to become successful in a multicultural marketplace is to help them see the world through the eyes of the target market. Not only must marketers study the demographics and psychographics of the ethnic target market, they must also learn about the target's cultural values and dynamics. The reasons are two-fold. First, understanding cultural values helps the marketer to avoid offending and making obvious mistakes while communicating with the target market; and, second, it helps to create a marketing message that connects with the group's values, beliefs, motivations, and goals. Educators are not expected to teach students about every cultural difference among every ethnic or racial population in the United States, but it is their responsibility to prepare future businesspeople to appreciate the importance to self-educate before undertaking a multicultural marketing effort. It is important to note that simply acknowledging and celebrating the cultural and lifestyle differences between the target ethnic market and the general market will be appreciated in the marketplace.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a method to teach Hispanic cultural values using the coming-of-age celebration, the *quinceañera*, as a case study within the curriculum of a Multicultural Marketing course. Students that learn about the *quinceañera* ritual will gain knowledge of traditional Latin American cultural rituals and beliefs. In addition, students will discover that by studying the U.S. *quinceañera* that not only are Hispanic immigrants being influenced by American culture (Americanization), they are simultaneously impacting American culture (Hispanization).

A coming of age ritual for girls turning 15 years of age that many from Latin America celebrate is the *Quinceañera*, or *Fiesta de Quince Años*, or *Quince*. The business of the *quinceañera* is estimated at \$400 million in the United States and it is becoming more popular for many reasons. First, demographically the Hispanic population is large, growing rapidly and is young. Second, Korzenny & Korzenny (2005) acknowledged that there is a greater acceptance of Hispanic culture which has led to more families to choose acculturation over assimilation. Parents who felt pressured to assimilate as youth are becoming interested in retro-acculturation, or learning about and celebrating their heritage (pp. 135, 141). Third, as evidenced in King (2008), like most immigrants, Hispanic parents

desire to give children what their families could not afford. All of these factors have caused many parents to encourage their daughters to participate in their own *quinceañeras*. An example of the Hispanization of the ritual and its popularity is that Anglo-, Asian-, and African-American girls are asking their parents to give them a *quince*. This is an illustration of the increasing Hispanization of America. In this paper is a description of the ritual, its origins, and a model that can be used to study the relationship between the ritual and U.S. Hispanic cultural values.

### **The *Quinceañera* Ritual**

There is no such thing as a traditional *quinceañera*. The way the party is celebrated depends on the budget, level of acculturation, country of origin, social class and personal factors. But a "typical" *quince* is often described as a groomless wedding because it begins with a brief church ceremony followed by a wedding-like reception. Usually the *Quinceañera* wears a princess-like pink dress (but the colors vary), a tiara, and flat shoes to symbolize that she is not yet a young woman. Prior to the party the *Quinceañera* will have a photo and perhaps a video shoot. The video might be played at the reception.

First, the *Quinceañera*, her family, and court arrive at the church for what the Associated Press (2008, p. 1) reported as a recently revamped and Vatican-approved ritual blessing in which the young woman rededicates her life to the Lord. Often, the *Quinceañera* will give a speech and perform a candle lighting ceremony, thanking members of her court, her parents, Godparents, and someone who is not there. Following the blessing, she places a bouquet of flowers at the statue of the Virgin Mary, most likely to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

A limousine will take the *Quinceañera* and her court to the reception that often takes place at a banquet hall complete with catered food, a disk jockey, and a formal wedding-like cake. The court includes 14 girls (*damas*) and 14 boys (*chambelanes*) plus her personal *chambelan*; each couple representing a year in her life. The members of the court are formally dressed. Following the court's procession into the hall, the *Quinceañera* will appear before her guests with a dramatic introduction.

The *Quinceañera*'s father will come up front to meet her and will replace her flat shoes with heels symbolizing her transition into womanhood. They will dance the first waltz. She will then dance with other male members of the family. After, the court performs a well-rehearsed (and sometimes professionally choreographed) dance routine. At this

time she will part with her last doll, the *Ultima Muñeca*, by offering it to a younger sibling, other female guest, or will symbolically put it down, leaving behind her childhood.

Unique to Mexican families is the practice of formal sponsorships where various members of the family pay for (or sponsor) the jewelry, the limo, the cake, and other party-related expenses. They are usually honored in the program for their contributions to the family.

There are several alternatives to a “typical” *Quinceañera*. Although becoming less popular, some *Quinceañeras* will go American-style and elect to go on a trip or receive a car in lieu of a ceremony. Alvarez (2007) explained that some girls skip the ceremony and party altogether and simply do a photo shoot wearing rented dresses, bringing along a hairstylist and/or makeup artist, and paying for time at a fancy hotel lobby or a pretty outdoor venue. Some families will elect to have the party on a cruise ship or at an amusement park, such as Disneyland (pp. 76, 79-80, 121-132).

### TEACHING THE MODEL

Hawkins, Best and Coney (2004) suggested a model for identifying differences among cultures. They identified eighteen pairs of cultural values that can be plotted as opposite sides of a continuum. This model may be used to introduce students to cultural differences. Students are required to read *Once Upon a Quinceañera* and view the movie *Quinceañera* to prepare them to build the model in class (Table 1). In this section are several of the values identified by the three authors to understand U.S. Hispanic culture by using the *quinceañera* ritual as a case study.

The Hispanic culture values the collective group's activities and obligations are to the extended family (*la familia*) (Campbell, 1995; Cancela, 2007; Figueredo, 2002; Korzenny & Korzenny, 2007; Noble & LaCasa, 1991; Valdes, 2000). Korzenny and Korzenny (2007, p. 45) asserted that the family is the decision-making unit for purchases and such decisions become further complicated by varying levels of acculturation. For most U.S. Hispanic families, party planning responsibilities are shared among the *Quinceañera* and several members of her immediate and extended family, including her mother, godmothers, cousins, grandmothers, and even friends. Additional members of the family participate in the ritual as members of the court, sponsors, and/or assisting with the party on the day of the event (Figueredo, 2002, pp. 151-152).

Whether Hispanic culture automatically gives social power to males is difficult to determine. Undoubtedly, Hispanic culture is male-dominated but this is changing (Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; Noble & LaCasa, 1991). Cancela (2007, p. 94) stated that in public “the man rules” and without hesitation that “Mom is the [household] decision maker, even if it doesn't look like it.” The contradictions regarding gender roles within Hispanic families also exist within the context of the *quinceañera*. Obviously, the celebration focuses on the coming-of-age of women. The *Quinceañera* and her female family members do most of the planning of the party, and Alvarez (2007, p. 63) claimed many mothers also pay for it as husbands and fathers may be absent altogether. While planning the *quinceañera*, the girl's wishes often override those of the father and other members of the family, which may indicate a more balanced view of gender roles and power. There exists no equivalent coming of age ritual for boys. However, the father has a more visible and symbolic role in the ceremony.

The U.S. Hispanic community is diverse in its composition and is relaxing its stance on how rituals are practiced. Whether externally imposed (the U.S. Census uses “Hispanic” as the measurement of those declaring a Latin American heritage), or as Fox (1996, p. 239) contended a response to discrimination, or simply what Soto (2005, p. 48) coined as a “shared immigrant experience,” their individual cultures blend into a pan-Hispanic culture once in the United States. As Alvarez (2007, p. 26) explained, “we had become La Raza, one people.” This is evidenced by the influence of Pan American and Jewish practices on the ritual (Appendix 2). Alvarez (2006) explained that a traditional *quinceañera* dress is pink and it is often viewed negatively by elders if the girl chooses to wear another color or style but then added, “But in the transport to the USA, the color of the dress has become, along with a lot of other things, democratized” (pp. 26, 41). It would not be argued that there is a tremendous amount of leverage in how the *quinceañera* is planned and this is a direct result of the demographics and positive attitudes about diversity among U.S. Hispanic teens.

Traditionally, Hispanic culture is based on collectivity (Figueredo, 2002; Korzenny & Korzenny, 2005; Valdes, 2000) and cooperation, but in the U.S. this is changing. Alvarez (2007, p. 110) summed up the competitive motive involved in planning the party by explaining, “And so, what is left is a hodgepodge tradition stitched together, sometimes not so seamlessly, with hearsay, some history, and a lot of keeping up with the Garcías” often with detrimental financial consequences on the family. Here is

another instance of the influence of American culture on Hispanic families. In an episode of MTV's *My Super Sweet 16*, a reality show that focuses on teenage coming-of-age celebrations, where American teens are exposed to extreme forms of materialism and the desire to have the most sensational party, the show documented Stephanie Lopez's *quince* in Miami. The following is a portion of the show's description: (omitted because of space restrictions)

Hispanic culture is based on tradition (Campbell, 1995; Cancela, 2007) but in the U.S. we see Hispanic cultural values evolving. This is best illustrated by the many ironies that have resulted in the increasing popularity of the *quinceañera* within the U.S. Hispanic community. First, Alvarez (2007) argued that although the motivation to celebrate the *quince* is to connect Latinas back to their heritage, the irony is that many aspects of the ritual were not practiced in their countries of origin! Instead they were adopted from other countries (Table 2). Another paradox is that many of their mothers and grandmothers did not celebrate a *quince*. They were either too poor to celebrate them back home or there was too much pressure to assimilate once arriving in the U.S. to draw attention to cultural differences. The pressure for older Latinas to leave behind their home country's cultural practices was very strong. Now, cultural differences are accepted and often celebrated. Alvarez (2007) pointed out that today's mostly bicultural Hispanic teens live in both worlds and pick and choose which aspects of each culture to adopt.

A "traditional" U.S. *quince* incorporates aspects of celebrations from many parts of Latin America and making them "more elaborate and expensive than they ever were back home" (pp. 5, 75). In her story describing the *quince* for twin girls, King (2008) said, "Big Quinceañeras are based in traditions, but they've grown as Latinos pocket books have." The parents commented that their daughters' *quince* cost more than their wedding. There were two instances in Alvarez's (2007) book when a father and then a girl justified the extravagance of the celebration. Each defended the expense of the celebration by saying that there was no guarantee that the girl will ever marry, and if she does and the marriage ends, the whole event will be regretted (pp. 72, 75). This demonstrates a truly American-influenced concern.

The acceptance of cultural change as the norm is also verified by the hodgepodge of approaches by

which the U.S. *quinceañera* is celebrated. One could see the available options by visiting informational websites such as [www.quincegirl.com](http://www.quincegirl.com). A complete absence of tradition is evidenced when families elect to go on a vacation, or host the party on a cruise, a Las Vegas chapel or at Disneyland.

Cancela (2007) explained that customarily Hispanics place less importance on the acquisition of material wealth. However, the increasing extravagance of the *Quinceañera* signals that U.S. Hispanics are becoming more materialistic. The large investment made in the celebration may be explained by Korzenny & Korzenny's (2007, p. 22) suggestion that "the relevance of products and services to enhance human experience as opposed to sheer materialism can be very appealing to Hispanics." In addition, younger, U.S. born, and more acculturated Hispanics resemble their Anglo-counterparts on the higher value they place on materialism. For example, in Glatzer & Westmoreland's (2006) film *Quinceañera*, the *Quinceañera*-to-be wants her parents to rent a Hummer stretch limousine for her special day. When her mother presents this desire to her husband he does not believe that his daughter could ever place a greater importance on the Hummer over the spiritual importance of her *quince*. Soto (2006, p. 14) added that negative attitudes about acquiring debt are also changing in the U.S. Hispanic community as acculturation increases and banks are actively pursuing the market. Parents will often take on debt to throw the party. Alvarez (2007, pp. 4, 19, 62-67) questioned the expense of the party over saving for their daughter's college education or other expenses. The prices of the parties vary widely but Alvarez (2007) concluded that a *Quince Girl* 2006 national survey, finding an average cost of a *quinceañera* at \$5,000, seemed low. An interview she had with a Miami-based event planner prices a "cheap *quince*" at around \$20,000 with many reaching \$80,000 (pp. 67, 152).

Studying the U.S. *Quinceañera* ritual provides business students insights about U.S. Hispanic cultural values. This, along with participating and/or observing other ethnic and racial group rituals, activities, and consumer behavior gives managers an opportunity to succeed in their multicultural marketing efforts. By using cultural insights along with traditional demographic and psychographic data, marketers can build a strategy that is appealing to growing ethnic and racial target markets.

**References, Tables, and Appendices Available on Request**