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Cuban girls and visual media: bodies and practices of (still-) socialist consumerism

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This paper examines Cuban girls' use of photography in coming-of-age rituals to consider what mediated girlhood might look like beyond the reach of neo-liberalism and post-feminism. Cuba offers an interesting context for such considerations, as a place in which the effects of global neo-liberalism remain buffered, and sharply contested by the prevailing tenets of socialism. It is also a place in which many feminist goals have been realized for the average woman, but with minimal reference to the debates of feminism and post-feminism. Despite these apparently serious differences, Cuban girls engage in many of the same mediated practices and rituals as their counterparts across the Americas. Cuban girls' lives are relatively rich in the products of globalized consumer culture and typically include watching US-produced television shows, dancing to music videos and poring over imported magazines. But such incorporation of cultural products that flow (mostly) from the capitalist Americas by no means negates the lived experience of Cuban girls as subjects in a socialist society, whose rights and responsibilities impact in very direct ways upon how they manage their emerging womanly bodies.

Introduction

Across much of Latin America and the Hispanic United States, the 15th birthday is a momentous occasion for girls and their families, as it ritually marks transition from childhood to young adulthood. Typically, once a girl turns 15, she is given more freedom to go out with friends, to have boyfriends, wear makeup and adult-like clothes and make her own decisions in life. This social creation of a sexual(ized) being is frequently represented as an entrée into the happiest phase of a woman's life, where physical beauty and sexual freedom can be enjoyed before the onset of responsibilities that accompany motherhood. Notwithstanding the diverse contexts and practices that mark the girl's 15th birthday as an important moment across the Americas, it commonly serves as a public acknowledgment and celebration of a girl's sexual development: a transition from being governed by her family as a child to having a sexual agency that can appropriately be admired and sought after by men.

Through rituals celebrating the 15th birthday or *quinceañera*, girls are launched into deeply hetero-normative conceptions of gender, sexuality and beauty. As Silje Lundgren has argued, in Cuba gendered ideals are 'connected with conceptions of sexuality in a very specific way: portraying men and women as glued together in a relationship of eroticised complementarity' (Lundgren 2011, 11). Such an orientation leaves little space for subversion or rejection by Cuban girls who cannot or do not conform to such ideals. If in adulthood, Cuban non-gender conforming women remain significantly less visible than their male counterparts (Hamilton 2012, 229–230), then during adolescence they are even harder to find. Thus, the likelihood that a girl would publicly reject the opportunity of becoming a *quinceañera* is extremely rare, and mild deviations from the typical

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excitement that a girl is expected to express about her 15th birthday are usually explained without reference to her sexual identity. While the invisibilization of such girls is one of the many important issues that research on Cuban youth is yet to address, the focus of this study is how such heterosexual norms are inscribed upon those girls who conform, most often enthusiastically, to the practices and ideals of the *quinceañera*.

Following a call from several scholars considering where girlhood studies has come from, and where it is yet to go, this chapter aims to ‘broaden out’ and ‘narrow in’ the global study of how girlhood and adolescence are constructed as social facts (Driscoll 2008; Gonick et al. 2009; Griffin 2004; see also Chin 2003, 11–12). Such a ‘broadening out’ to consider girl cultures beyond the strongholds of Anglophone cultural and media studies also, I believe, requires a tolerance of slicing into ‘narrow’ examples of practices within specific communities to tease out the complex forces that constitute how girls’ practices are made meaningful. Accordingly, my focus in this chapter is on just one aspect of the *quinceañera* phenomenon, in just one place, the visual media – especially photographs – produced by and about *quinceañeras* in the Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba. In 2008 and 2009, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 girls and women aged between 14 and 18, and 20 of their relatives (in 18 cases, the girl’s mother). I observed and interviewed two semi-professional photographers, collected digital copies of more than 200 *quinceañera* images and (to the amusement of all who knew me) sat for my own *quince* style photography session to better understand the physical process undertaken by the girls. Knowing of my interest in *quinceañeras*, friends and research participants whose daughters or other relatives have turned 15 have since added to my digital archive and engaged in detailed conversation about the planning, producing and subsequent circulation of their photographs, bringing the total number of girls whose *quinceañeras* I have learned about to approximately 85. But for the purposes of this paper, I will present the examples of two girls whose experiences are particularly indicative of what I take to be an emerging engagement of Cuban girls with a wide range of digital and visual media, both as consumers of global media and as producers of their own images for local and transnational circulation. These two girls, Carmen and Tania, demonstrate the normativity of *quinceañera* visual media in two ways. Their stories and images were among those that best represented the ‘ideal’ *quinceañera*, as emerging women who embody positive eroticism but within regulated boundaries (Lundgren 2011, 85–90). Second, they highlight the capacity for ritual practices to incorporate sociopolitical change, such as has gripped post-Soviet Cuba, while reinforcing social orders and making claim to the maintenance of tradition (Kelly and Kaplan 1990, 120).

In comparison to other parts of the Americas, the visual commemoration of a *quince años* through photographs and (to a lesser degree) DVD presentations is an especially important – and typically the central – feature of the ritual in Cuba. Most Cuban girls also have a birthday party in keeping with her family’s economic circumstances and her own inclinations. But even for families that lack the resources or the inclination to hold an elaborate party, a photography session is seen as almost obligatory. It is the process of sitting for photographs, and the albums that result, which materialize the *quinceañera* moment to be enjoyed for years to come, as photo albums are commonly displayed to friends and visitors for up to 3 years after a girl turns 15. *Quinceañera* rituals draw from a complex regional history of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and race and class hierarchies in ways that are only beginning to be unpacked by the handful of researchers to document *quinceañera* rituals past and present (cf. Pertierra 2012; Härkönen 2011; Gutierrez Domínguez 2009; Napolitano 1997; Watters 1998). In Cuba, they seem to have been celebrated since at least the 1920s or 1930s, although it is unclear how far such celebrations extended beyond the circles of white middle and upper class families. Across the years of the revolution, the *quince años* remained a special birthday for girls, and some kind of

party with commemorative photographs was typical across the high socialist decades of the 1970s and 1980s. But in the past decade, *quinceañera* portrait photography has assumed an importance in Cuban society that is generally described as being unprecedented. Seemingly paradoxically, this invigoration of *quinceañera* commemorative media has resulted from the nation's severe economic crisis of the 1990s, which prompted demographic and economic changes transforming all aspects of consumption and everyday life (cf. Pertierra 2011, 9–34). Market reforms have allowed for small photography and dress rental businesses to flourish, often jump-started by investment from Cubans abroad. Emigrant Cubans have gone from being disloyal *gusanos* (worms) who had left the revolution to becoming the small-scale supporters of domestic and national economies via the flows of remittances and goods that enter Cuba with ease through channels both legal and illegal. Such transnational goods include magazines, movies and television programmes that inspire *quinceañera* trends, as well as the dresses, accessories and camera equipment that materialize them (Pertierra 2012). At the same time, new digital photography technologies have increased possibilities of self-production and semi-professional studio production to perfectly match the needs of the bricoleur-entrepreneurs making a living through Cuba's informal sector. These expanded practices of visual media production produce a set of rituals that the girl undertakes (purveying photo albums, planning for photo shoots, being styled and sitting for portraits) supported by her wider family as an appropriate and pleasurable public debut of her new, womanly body.

Today, even girls in rural or marginal communities, with limited economic means, expect a photo-shoot and subsequent album that is considerably more elaborate than the best examples of previous generations' *quinceañeras*. A typical album comprises two aesthetic genres, i.e. the 'traditional' studio portrait in which long gowns are worn and accessories and props imply elegance and sophistication, and the 'natural' portrait, in studio or on location, in which more casual and modern clothes are worn and the aesthetic speaks more to adult sexiness than to old-fashioned elegance. If wedding pictures and Disney films might embody the former aesthetic, then music videos and celebrity photographs in magazines commonly inspire the latter. Both aesthetics must be found across the selection of images that make up a *quinceañera* album.

Carmen



Carmen turned 15 in 2013, and she spends much of her free time watching movies on her computer, or listening to pop music. In the DVD that is the centrepiece of her *quinceañera* media package, a video-montage of still images taken from Carmen's photography session features a voiceover presenting Carmen's personality, her preferences and her dreams for the future. This formal presentation to the adult world is also signalled by Carmen's appearance, with full make-up, heavily styled hair, a long evening gown, and an air of sophistication and knowingness that is markedly different to Carmen's manner in everyday life, which her mother explains as 'still like a little girl'.

Carmen's *quinceañera* DVD was made by a semi-professional photo studio, alongside three printed photo albums and a CD compilation of photographs including 'out takes'. From these out takes, Carmen's mother selected a series of extra portraits that she especially liked and printed them for another album. Then, Carmen's mother coordinated a second photography session, styled by her friends instead of professionals, for a series of more 'natural' outdoor pictures including Carmen in casual and swimwear. Finally, another album displays prints of the *quinceañera* party, held in an upmarket café-bar. The photographs in this album are less carefully staged, and the photographs were taken with the family digital camera by various members of the party. In a country whose economy has been marked for over 20 years by a serious scarcity of manufactured goods (Pertierra 2011), this array of commemorative media is substantial. Admittedly, Carmen's family comprises educated professionals, and more importantly, members of her extended family who have emigrated send remittances and gifts, all of which enabled Carmen, like her older sister before her, to have a top-of-the-line *quinceañera* celebration. Given that the official average monthly wage in Cuba is around \$20, even a basic photography session would require the equivalent of 4–6 months' salary. Yet people find ways – through personal networks, informal debts and extensive planning – to organize *quince años* photographs even amidst the most difficult of economic circumstances. The efforts that Cubans go to in order to create an elaborate celebration – or at the very least a set of images that represent elaborate abundance – conveys very powerfully the importance of this occasion as a ritual of the most classically anthropological sort.

Tania



When Tania and I met in 2009, she was already 18 years old. The story of her *quinceañera* photographs was less orthodox than that of Carmen, although no less conforming to gender and sexuality ideals. Whereas Carmen's family paid a local small business to produce the main part of their photography package, in Tania's case, her father having his own photography business allowed her to exert more creative control over how and, most importantly, when, her photographs would be taken. Around the time of her 15th birthday, Tania was very self-conscious about her acne, and refused to have photographs taken. Instead, she gave herself a year to improve the state of her skin and used her father's computer to learn basic Photoshop techniques, which allowed her to experiment with self-portraits and then 'improve' the appearance of her complexion. By the time of her 16th birthday, Tania felt much more confident about her real skin, and her capacity to control the final image of her portraits, so her father photographed her in studio and on location. Tania herself continued her Photoshop experiments by creating photomontages, depicting herself against a natural landscape or compositing a close up of her face against a full body image of her on the beach. In the process of learning how to manipulate her own coming-of-age portraits, Tania developed the skills to help her friends as well, and began styling, photographing and editing photography sessions for other young women she knew – sometimes just for fun, or sometimes for a fee.

At first glance, the visual media of Cuban *quinceañeras* seem remarkably similar to those of other teenage girls in the United States and Latin America. Aesthetically, it is immediately obvious that Cuban girls are by no means disconnected from the broader structures and media circuits that inform notions of taste and style across much of Latin America and the United States. For an outside observer, the *quinceañera* portraits of Carmen and Tania look almost indistinguishable from those of their counterparts in Mexico or Miami, and this very indistinguishability is partly what makes these two girls exemplary *quinceañeras*. The styles and trends of the photographs are inspired by circuits of popular media and fashion that flow in and out of Cuba relatively freely; both Carmen and Tania listen to music, watch downloaded TV series and movies, and read magazines that form part of the wider pan-Latino youth-oriented pop culture. Looking at the *quince*s images of Tania and Carmen, and considering Carmen's taste in music and movies, or Tania's enthusiastic production of her own (airbrushed) images, it would be easy to assume that these emerging consumption practices represent a 'new' Cuba in which girls are subjected to yet another iteration of an unfolding and ever-growing post-feminist youth culture in which 'technologies of sexiness' enable/enforce young girls to present themselves for display and consumption while they themselves increasingly define themselves through bodily consumption practices (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010). Such a set of assumptions could more easily be applied to the cases of Tania and Carmen than to the broader Cuban population. Certainly, their whiteness better equips them to fulfil normative ideals of beauty as equated to whiteness (Fernández 2010, 27–53; Lundgren 2011, 27). In any other country of Latin America, Carmen, Tania and their families would identify as middle class due to their levels of education and types of employment. But just as importantly, both girls sit towards the top end of a spectrum of increasingly differentiated access to media and communications technologies (Pertierra 2011, 197–237). Only a handful of their classmates would have the daily domestic access to computers that Carmen and Tania take largely for granted (although they would have access to computers in other spaces such as in the houses of neighbours, in state-run youth clubs, in the workplaces of friends and relatives). Everyday access to digital cameras is growing quickly, but has not yet become the norm for the entire population.

Despite – or rather precisely because of – this seemingly easy insertion into global or pan-Latino youth cultural consumption, however, it is dangerous to assume that girls like Carmen and Tania, with their everyday confidence in using digital media whether as consumers or producers, are engaging in some sort of generational transition towards becoming ‘self-actualizing’ consumers in a post-socialist, neo-liberal, post-feminist world. There is undoubtedly something ‘new’ about the kinds of consumption in which Carmen and Tania’s generation are engaging with ease. A much wider array of global media, including youth popular culture, and especially US American and/or Latin American popular culture, is available to Cubans today than there was in the Soviet era from the 1960s to the late 1980s. This is not only due to the changing global and national political climate, but also to the technological possibilities that have transformed access to digital media and communications for low-income communities around the world. Policies that limit the legal sale of such technologies through official outlets have modified, but by no means curtailed, how digital and new media have impacted the consumption of media and popular culture by Cuban citizens. Since the post-Soviet crisis known as the Special Period traumatically disrupted Cuba at every level in the early 1990s, an evolving mixture of market reforms, attempts at global trade and emigrant remittances have emerged alongside existing state structures. The maintenance of a revolutionary consciousness, albeit with post-Soviet adaptations, creates a seemingly contradictory society, which looks bizarre to many academic commentators (including myself), but is all that has ever been known to Carmen, Tania and their contemporaries. As children raised in this period of unforeseen transformation at the political, economic and cultural levels, they form the first generation of Cubans to grow up with no personal experience of the high socialism that shaped their parents, nor of the heady years of building the revolution to which many of their grandparents were committed (Gutierrez Domínguez 2009).

But in the face of such interesting and rapid transformation, it is easy to overlook the degree to which all Cubans, including Carmen and Tania, continue to live within a socialist society even while significant market reforms in the post-Soviet years have changed many of their everyday practices and experiences. Practices of consuming, circulating and producing visual media exist within a context – of politics, economics, family structures and more – which creates quite a different picture of just how these seemingly neo-liberal post-feminist media practices might be understood. It is not within the scope of this article to adequately address every element or influence that would shape what it means to be a girl or young woman in Cuba today. I would like to mention just two elements that work against ideologies of neo-liberalism and post-feminism as explanatory devices for the *quinceañera* and her visual media: first, the ongoing presence of state socialism in Cuba, and second, the role of family and community in the production and celebration of the 15th birthday.

The Cuban revolution, which has changed in the post-Soviet era but remains a (still) ‘actually existing socialism’, continues to inform the experiences of contemporary Cuban girls. This is so even for girls who, like Carmen and Tania, engage and identify with many aspects of globalized media culture and the practices that are associated with them. While 15-year-old Carmen may know all the words to the latest One Direction hit, she and all her classmates spent the month of October supporting the revolution by working in agricultural zones or doing other community labour. Tania’s choice for University was to study computer science, but she has never had Internet access at home. Like all Cuban children, their schooling has exhorted them to be ‘pioneers of Communism’ in the mould of Che Guevara (*¡Pioneros por el Comunismo, seremos como el Che!*). As teenage girls,

they are undoubtedly aware that contraceptive pills and abortions, along with gynaecological care and other medical services, are freely and cheaply available. Should they get married, the Family Code of 1975 that is read out at the ceremony explicitly accords equal rights and responsibilities to women and men. These are just some of the examples that suggest the ongoing frameworks of socialism that shape, in part, what it means to be a girl or young woman in Cuba.

Further, as with many better-documented coming-of-age rituals, the *quinceañera* process through which girls are quite literally physically groomed for womanhood emphasizes the role of family and community in creating personhood. Of course, individual *quinceañeras* have a degree of agency in determining the details of ‘their’ birthday celebration; girls vary in their degree of enthusiasm for the portrait sessions, and express stylistic preferences by choosing certain colours, styles, locations and poses, even at times experimenting with the genre or pushing at the boundaries of what is seen by their elders as ‘good taste’. But there are many stakeholders in a *quinceañera* celebration, and the desires of any individual girl are frequently outweighed by the demands and desires of others. Among these stakeholders are photographers and dressmakers running their businesses, networks of relatives inside and outside Cuba who help to pay for the photography sessions, female peers with whom a *quinceañera* is sharing and/or competing in the experience of turning 15, and the broader public of women, men and children, whom the *quinceañera* can expect will be viewing the final photographs.

Above all, the mother, in particular, is typically the protagonist of planning a photography session; it is the mother who discusses the details with photographers, who attempts to choose the clothes and styling, who ensures that clothes or jewellery given as gifts from relatives are included in key shots and who most actively proffers photo albums to be purveyed by visitors, relatives, neighbours and colleagues for the months and years subsequent to the images’ production. Tania was an outlier in terms of her personal control over how and when her *quinceañera* photographs were produced, and even here, such control was largely determined by her relationship to family, as her father was the photographer. Carmen’s story was in this sense a much more typical one; Carmen’s mother had previously organized her older daughter’s 15th birthday and therefore came to Carmen’s photography session with experience and opinions. But, as she explained, she relished overseeing Carmen’s *quince años* because Carmen was herself deeply invested in and delighted by the process, whereas her older sister had been less interested, and mostly sat for photographs to please her family.

This active role of the mother as promoter of her daughter’s public sexual blossoming can seem surprising to outsiders who are used to reading images of teenage girls’ performing adulthood as acts of defiance or problematic disorder (cf. Egan 2013, 1–19). But within the Cuban context, there is nothing disorderly about the display of adolescent bodies; these images of 15-year-old girls, even in the most deliberately knowing and alluring examples of the genre, are produced to be admired, by women and men, as appropriate expressions of an emerging sexual agency. It is important, here to differentiate between representations of Cuban adolescence in Cuba, and those of Cuban-American and other Latina girls in the United States. As a cultural minority whose representations are frequently read as statements of ‘sexual-aesthetic excess’ (Hernandez 2009), Latina girls may frequently find themselves in a sort of double engagement with, on the one hand, cultural traditions of the *quinceañera* that speak to a pride in their heritage, and, on the other hand, a broader national context in which their self-presentation is read as problematically ‘Latina’ in their sexual excess (Valdivia 2010, 108–123). But in Latino US communities as well as in Cuba, despite the obsessively heterocentric orientation of

quinceañera ideals, in practice the planning and producing of a *quinces* is, like girl culture more broadly, less directly about boys than about engaging in homosociality with peers and adult women through shared practices of beautifying the body, albeit in order to increase heterosexual desirability (Hernandez 2009, 85; Lundgren 2011, 123–125).

Without paying attention to these and more elements of Cuban girlhood, it would be easy to ‘read’ the images that Carmen and Tania have produced for their *quinceañeras* as examples of a sort of global encroachment of post-feminist girl culture that, in this case, finds its heartland in contemporary Miami, is circulated through the mediation of magazines, social media profiles and MTV reality shows, and is enacted with remarkably consistent aesthetics across the various communities of ‘neo-liberal’ Latin America. Neo-liberal conditions undoubtedly shape the production and mediation of a booming *quinceañera* industry, increasingly aimed at younger and presumably more vulnerable target markets. But that is not to say that the cultural practices of the teenage girl are always best understood through such conditions of production.

Young Cuban women’s cultural practices cannot be understood as shaped by the forces of neo-liberalism and post-feminism alone. The Cuban example is relevant here precisely because girls are often engaging in the same types of practices, using the same images, aesthetics and products, as girls in the United States (and are especially engaged with the same images, aesthetics and products as Cuban-American and other Latina girls). Yet Cuban society cannot be described as neo-liberal; the political and economic context is so vastly different to that of the United States, we are forced here to pay attention to other possibilities of understanding how and why girls are formed and form themselves in their interactions with media technologies and media contents. Using Cuban girls as an example to ‘push back’ is not merely to provide an example to flesh out the existing understanding in Girlhood Studies that girlhood is a social and historical construct, which varies within and beyond the so-called West. It also brings into sharp relief a broader imperative, in studying contemporary popular culture and contemporary girlhood, to critique and at times, move beyond, a singular focus on neo-liberalism and/or post-feminism as the defining prisms through which the consumption and production of media and culture should be understood.

Neo-liberalism, Post-feminism, resistance and agency: exploring the limits

Such a call to critique and explore the limits of both neo-liberalism and post-feminism is by no means unique, and unsurprisingly parallel debates can be seen in the analysis of both labels, whether as historical conditions or as explanatory models, over the past decade or so. In my own ‘discipline’ of social anthropology, an intellectual concern with neo-liberalism exploded in the early years of the twenty-first century. But tackling neo-liberalism ethnographically presents challenges (if very productive ones) in maintaining the micro-scale with which many anthropologists work, against the apparently all-encompassing scale at which neo-liberalism as a hegemonic project seems to operate (Hoffman, DeHart, and Collier 2006, 9–10; see also Richland 2009). The conceptual utility of neo-liberalism has been questioned in the face of such an explosion, with a concern that ‘in using a single, politically and emotionally loaded term to refer to such diverse phenomena, anthropological analyses of neoliberalism risk a reification that occludes more than it reveals’ (Kipnis 2007, 384). Neo-liberalism, then, has its limits, both in geographic scope and in intellectual utility: sometimes things might look neo-liberal, but can equally or better be explained through other prisms. Cuba is an obvious case study for such limits, but there are many others, both within and beyond the Anglophone capitalist world (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Powell 2008).

In emphasizing the limits of neo-liberalism, I do not mean to suggest that it is unimportant or unproblematic. Similarly, considering the limits of post-feminism is not to suggest that there are no places or moments in which post-feminism is a dominant cultural trope, or alternatively a relevant historical and political condition. Although the limits of post-feminism as an emancipatory doctrine have been considered very productively within feminist media studies (cf. Taylor 2012, 6–19), the ‘limits’ I am considering here are somewhat simpler, and echo earlier debates among anthropologists (and others) regarding the utility of feminist theory across and beyond the very specific spaces and moments in which they were most productively developed. Feminism has never been a fully adequate lens through which to understand Cuban women’s gender and sexualities – *even when* many seemingly feminist goals have been pursued and achieved. Similarly, post-feminist frameworks are insufficient to understand the emerging conditions through which Cuban girls are increasingly involved in global networks of consumption and production *even when* those networks and products of consumption and production are the consequences of neo-liberal and/or post-feminist dynamics elsewhere. The goals and achievements of the Cuban revolution in terms of women’s equality have been well documented, and while uneven, in several respects (such as the politics of reproduction and gender equity in education and workplaces), more has been achieved than in many of the world’s liberal democracies. But such gains have been made with reference to socialist rather than feminist ideology and policy; organisations such as the Federation of Cuban Women and the female national leaders who head such organisations disavow most versions of feminism as the guiding mechanism through which the cultural and political experiences of Cuban womanhood can or should be understood¹.

It is hard, then, if there never was a ‘feminist moment’ in Cuba, to imagine the prevalence of what Gill (2007) has powerfully described as a ‘post-feminist sensibility’ there today. The post-feminist sensibility is specific to some of the variable cultural conditions that sit within the networks of the Anglophone West, and feminist media scholars, including in this volume, are the first to acknowledge the need for more complex approaches to understanding the role of neo-liberalism in new social and political practices around the globe (Gonick et al. 2009, 2). But grappling with the closely related concepts of post-feminism and neo-liberalism, and their problematic articulation to ‘feminist-inspired discourses of autonomy, freedom, and choice for women’ (Taylor 2012, 16) also requires the exploration of how such ideologies, even in their seeming global hegemony, have their limits, conceptually and culturally.

Conclusion

As a place in which the effects of global neo-liberalism remain buffered, and sharply contested by the prevailing tenets of socialism, Cuba offers an interesting context for understanding how girls in the contemporary world are (often enthusiastically) subject to the forces of global media and popular culture, without their identities or practices being at all reducible to such forces. As this article has outlined, despite many suggestions over the past 20 years that neo-liberalism is on the doorstep, Cuban society remains considerably resistant to such encroachment, both at the level of national policy and at that of everyday experience. Despite these apparently serious cultural and political differences, Cuban girls engage in many of the same mediated practices and rituals as their counterparts across the Americas. Cuban girls’ lives are relatively rich in the products of globalized consumer culture, and such engagement is nowhere made clearer than in their production of *quinceañera* visual media. But such incorporation of cultural products that flow (mostly)

from the capitalist Americas by no means negates the lived experience of Cuban girls as subjects in a socialist society, whose rights and responsibilities impact in very direct ways upon how they manage their emerging womanly bodies.

Is it possible, then, that Cuban girls use visual media in order to become ‘self-actualized’ consumers, without also becoming neo-liberal subjects? The experiences of Carmen, Tania and other girls interviewed in this research suggest just such a possibility: deeply invested in the expanded opportunities for consumption and self-presentation that digital technologies and economic reforms have afforded their generation, such girls also remain deeply immersed in the expectations of family and community with regards to their acquisition and display of desirably feminine sexuality. The convergence of these things – of globalized media, digital technologies and Cuban conceptions of adolescent girlhood – are by no means in conflict with, and have in many ways been precisely enabled by, the effects of socialism among other more longstanding historical conditions that have shaped what it means to become a woman in Cuba.

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Note

1. Scholars international and local have considered this uneasy relationship between global (or more precisely Anglo-American) feminism and Cuban socialism at length. See, for example, Espin and Schnookal (1991), Molyneux (2000), and Bengelsdorf (1997).

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