

Real Women Have Curves Movie Character Analysis

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“Real Women Have Curves”, the 2002 American comedy-drama film displays the representation of body image through beliefs, attitudes and social roles. The film pursues the story of American Ferrara, playing Ana Garcia, a young woman dealing with self image issues and she ultimately accepts herself for who she is. The Mexican American teenager faces opposition as she chooses to pursue a college degree or stay with the family to work in the East L.A. dress factory run by her sister older, Estela. Ana is torn between her life ambitions and her Mexican cultural heritage, but along the way she becomes appreciative of hard working women and obtains more value of her Latina image (Rooney, 2002). Throughout the film, Ana’s mother Carmen consistently troubles her about her weight, which ultimately liberates her emotionally, physically and psychologically to take her future into her own hands. The film promotes body positivity as in the film Ana describes that “a woman has thoughts, ideas, and a mind of her own” (Real Women Have Curves, 2002). This essay will discuss the social roles of Ana, the context to which she plays, cultural ideals for beauty and other influences that shaped Ana’s appearance.

Following cultural ideals for beauty can help to determine other factors that shaped the appearance of the main character of the film, Ana. Carmen continuously tried to instill the idea into Ana that she had to look slim, and be “attractive” to get married, have children, and care for her future family. The cultural ideology is prevalent here that the woman in the household has to look a certain way to be deemed acceptable by a male. In the beginning of the film, Ana was self-conscious about her body and felt bad about how she looked, primarily due to her mother's harsh words. As time goes on Ana changes her own personal standard of beauty as she justifies how her mother is wrong about her self image. In an inspirational scene, Ana spreads

body-positivity amongst her co-workers at the factory as they compare stretch marks, body shapes and cellulite, as this creates confidence in each of their bodies. Ana developed a secret relationship and had her first sexual encounter, also playing a role in how she recognized her beauty. In the film she explains that she is female far beyond her genitalia, declaring that she is defined by her own aesthetic and knowledge.

The costume designer of the film uses Ana's appearance to communicate information about her. Typically, costumes can change the characters development, objects of beauty, suggest social status, gender, and the personality of a character (Design & Production, 2019).

Psychological and social psychological perspectives on dress play a role in Anas personality and character development. In the beginning, Ana dressed comfortable, in t-shirts, denim overalls, loose fitting jeans which covered her body. Her appearance might have been an indication that her mother's overweight stigma bothered her, consequently causing her to dress as she did. As the film develops, her appearance slightly begins to change. She meets her significant other, spends time with him and ultimately becomes liberated and moves to New York City on her own. At this point, Ana no longer feels ashamed of her body, as she acknowledges and shows appreciation for its beauty. She begins to dress in clothing that represents more of who she is, with more style and making more of a personal statement. The clothing she takes on conforms to her body type and she begins to take pride in how she walks.

Social roles, age, group memberships and social groups were influenced and signified by Anna's dress. "Dress of an individual is an assemblage of the modifications of the body and or supplement to the body" (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). The main character, Ana takes on various social roles throughout the film and her behavior changes as she fits the expectations of

such roles. Throughout the film we have seen a take on the role of a high school student, dress factory worker, girlfriend, aspiring college student all while being a daughter to her parents. Ana's social roles consisted of multiple expectations as she played a member of her family's social group. Her body modifications and supplements remained the same across her social roles until she began to take more appreciation in her body image. The main physical change that Ana made to herself was the clothing she wore. Her age was signified of her dress as she dressed modestly, concealing chosen parts of her body. Ana and the workers of the dress factory are vindictive of an ingroup membership because they all share a connection as they make dresses for Bloomingdales. Although each worker in the factory takes on a different position, they come together to complete one job.

Ana undergoes status change as she takes a step towards independence. She left her family in East L.A to attend school at Columbia University, with a scholarship opportunity. Ana

was the first of her family to go to college and this was a huge breakthrough for her. She notifies her family about her decision to leave and this time around, her father Raul supports her, but her mother Carmen continues to



disagree with the idea of her leaving. Ana decides to leave without her mother's blessing, consequently making the decision that she must break away from her. Evident in the last scene of

the film, Ana displays body satisfaction as she confidently walks down the streets of New York City.

In conclusion, the film “Real Women Have Curves”, takes the message that there is beauty prevalent in all shapes and sizes. A representation of body positivity was prevalent throughout the film, particularly in Ana’s character played by American Ferrara. The cultural ideology was presented by her mother that the woman in the household has to look a certain way to be deemed “acceptable” by a male. In the beginning of the film, Ana was self-conscious about her body and felt bad about how she looked, primarily due to her mother's words about her weight. As time goes on Ana changes her own personal standard of beauty as she justifies how her mother is wrong about her self image. Ana realizes that her body is nothing to be ashamed of, but she should appreciate her body’s natural beauty. She begins to dress in clothing that represents more of who she is, with more style and making more of a personal statement. Psychological and social psychological perspectives on dress continue to impact personality and human development through the analysis of movie characters.

References

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