

Real women have curves: a chicano film

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According to historian Arnolfo de León, Mexican Americans have used the word “ Chicano” to describe people of Mexican origin living in the United States since the early twentieth century. In the same period Latinos started to showing their own identity through filmmaking. Latino feature films are having their roots in political activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s ‘... by neglecting the causes of gang violence as well as the work of community agencies and groups in ending barrio warfare, the viewer is bombarded with another stereotype of the Chicano experience.’(Cavanagh, 2007). The first wave of Latin and Chicano cinema was characterised by its anti-Hollywood and pro-movement ideals of promoting ethnic political consciousness and pride. It has become a kind of an antidote to how Latinos historically had been represented in film. And according to Dr Magdalena de la Teja Mexican Americans comprise about two-third of the U. S. Latinos and will continue to be a significant portion of the Latinos. ‘ Real Women have Curves’ differs from the other films as it is focusing on cultural stereotypes and issues that modern Chicana woman has to face. The following essay is going to examine on what extent can ‘ Real Women have Curves’ be considered a Chicano film.

The film ‘ Real women have curves’ challenges the cultural stereotypes which are trust upon a generation of young Chicanos growing up in America but still living in the shadow of Mexican tradition. The film highlight the differences between Mexican and American culture and how Chicanos in particular deal with this daily disparity. The film uses Carmen’s character traits of her importance of traditional values and her own insecurities to demonstrate the differences between the Latino and American cultures when

discussing the role of women within the society. Even though film shows a positive image of young Latina women, portrays religious and traditional beliefs within the Latino culture as negative and limiting in terms of achieving life goals in American world. It also portrays full assimilation to the American culture as a positive for a Latina woman to achieve success and leaving her traditions. Ana has learned different values than her mother holds. The example of this is with Jimmy, who becomes Ana's boyfriend. Because her mother holds very traditional Catholic values, she won't let Ana date, and Ana has to sneak out of the house in order to go on a date with Jimmy, showing how Ana's values are completely different than her mother's. By living in America, Ana has learned to be outspoken and frank about her opinions. This is unlike Estela and her mother, who take the inequality as a part of everyday life. It is because the Mexican culture has taught them to respect those in power – their employers. One of the companies she works for sells the dresses for six hundred dollars and pays Estela a mere eighteen dollars for making them. Ana sees this unfairness and knows that she can't live like that. Estela has a big order to finish and knows that she won't make it in time to pay the bills for her workshop. She plans to send an email to Mrs. Glass in order to ask for an advance so that she can pay the bills and keep her workshop running. Ana sees this and tells Estela that she can't just send an email; she needs to go in person to ask for an advance. Ana accompanies Estela to Mrs. Glass' office and when Estela can't confront her, Ana does it for her. Ana has been trained in a different way than her sister. She is able to confront Mrs. Glass because she has learned from the American culture that it is okay to confront somebody when

being faced with unfairness. Estela's behaviour in this situation might be considered as having Marxist overtones of repression of lower classes. According to the book 'Race and Classification' in Real Women Have Curves the sexism comes from the women, while Mexican men are seen as allies. Also, the film presents contemporary times in which women are considered equal to men (even if often only nominally), and where they no longer have to fit under prescribed roles for them as it was before the Chicano Movement.

They do not meet the role of typical 'familia' described by Richard Rodriguez where women are excluded and where the patriarchal, heteronormative nationalism is supported 'The consequence of machismo for women are more implicate. Females are said to be submissive but there is an underlying theme of conflict between sexes, and of suffering wives who become manipulative mothers and maternal fixations in her sons.' (Zinn, 1975) The filmmakers comment that Ana's travel between these two worlds, her Mexican-American neighbourhood and Beverly Hills, represents the way in which Latinas and Latinos often serve as 'bridge[s]' between worlds. Another example of these hierarchies is seeing Jimmy's Volvo parked in el barrio. This vehicle is in stark contrast to Ana's family's old truck and the condition of Estela's car. The main character in the film Real Women Have Curves, Ana Garcia, played by America Ferrera is an embodiment of Gloria Anzaldua's "mestiza consciousness". Throughout the film, Ana struggles with the bicultural life and as Anzaldua wrote '...the mestiza faces the

dilemma of the mixed breed' (2017). The key element that shows the mestiza consciousness is that Ana is a feminist.

By the end of the story, Ana chooses to pursue higher education although it would separate her from her family. This part of the movie shows that Ana is finally somewhat comfortable in both cultures. She may never fit into the box that her mother or society wants to put her in, but Ana does not want to be put in a box. She is her own person; she is a mestiza. However as is shown in the film, in order to be successful in America, immigrants have to be able to assimilate into the society that they're living in. At face value, this is a tale of female empowerment through personal ability and hard work. In fact, the very last scene shows Ana going up the stairs from a New York Subway, physically and symbolically rising to her newly found status as a successful student whose effort has been rewarded with a fully funded elite education. Ana's family is a working-class family. Also in Chicano culture, they believe in a collectivist family relationship and not in an individualistic society which means that every person must support whole family. Everybody have family obligations. Family is a priority and individuals have to downplay their own needs and desires. Ana wants to study to have better future. Degree from University will give her opportunity to get better jobs and have middle-class lifestyle. Ana grown up in US and US emphasize personal achievement rather than cultivation of family bonds. Latina has to balance between her Hispanic family and become individualist within her American society. She has to assist her family and also look for her own success.

Ana doesn't fit the Latina body image which are 'feminine curves': thin waist, big breast and hips. At the beginning of the film Ana is not confident in her body but not because what her mother says but because she compares her body to the American perfect body image which is tall, blonde, blue eyed, successful woman. Mother represents traditional way of thinking. Also her opinion shows strong connection to religion. Chicanos never rejected Catholic religion which says that people should stay virgin till their marriage and that the pleasure is not a goal, goal is to have children. Carmen advices and way of thinking only support patriarchy and discrimination that Ana wants to escape from. Ana represents modern way of thinking. She lives in a society where sex is not a taboo and people are pressured to be sexually active, but also young people in American society are taught about healthy sex and birth control options. Thanks to this Ana has her own opinion about virginity and she knows that she is more than just a body. Ana is acting against her mother. She feels more confident but on the other hand she is still insecure about her weight that's why she tells Jimmy to look at her. 'younger women insisted that... liberating themselves sexually was their generation's way of resisting patriarchal culture' (Siegel, 192) She is reclaiming her power through sex. Carmen like every mother has sixth sense, she knew straightaway that Ana lost her virginity which leads to a sharp conversation between mother and daughter. For Carmen, there is no compromises in case of virginity, somebody can be completely pure or disgraced. This once again shows us Carmen's connection to religion and highlights that losing virginity is a sin. Ana doesn't agree with her mom. By saying 'Man should appreciate a woman for what's in her mind and not

what's between her legs' she means that there is something more behind the body, that women are intelligent and can achieve a lot. Many Mexican women regard their body size as an expression of maternity, and that saves them from being discontent with their bodies (World Trade Press 2010: 1-2), which probably was the case of Carmen. According to Bojorquez-Chapela (2014). " Mexico's idealization of women in the image of the Madonna, sometimes called marianismo, on the one hand involves the worship of the Virgin Mary as the ultimate example of selfless feminine devotion, but on the other asserts female moral superiority."

This is openly portrayed across the movie, where Carmen is an ultimate decision maker, when it comes to for example, Ana's university. Her husband is trying to be more flexible, but he still complies with his wife's will at the end, he says: " I will think about it. I will talk to my wife", indicating that he respects her more, whole family respects her decisions.

Overall ' Real Women have Curves' can be consider as a Chicano film because it shows problems with assimilation and dual-identity. Ana finds herself in the clash of two cultural patterns: the one implied by Mexican culture, and the American one. She is the one that identity isn't established and is constantly changing during the film. As a conclusion, the movie shows Chicano women and Chicano society is multidimensional way, analysing different aspects of it. There is a large distinction between the world of Chicanos and Americans, however the figure of Ana is the link between two cultures and shows the possible outcome of assimilating of these two worlds. The film, however, differs from such films as ' Zoot Suit' that focused on

political issues and was based on real events. Also, 'Real Women have Curves' is more critical in relation to the older generation and states that assimilation does not always mean forgetting about roots.