

Essay 1

Balance of Values and Independence

A young teenager seeks independence as she applies for her first job. She seeks individuality and an identity as she first steps into her college life. She finds love and decides to take her traditional role as mother and caretaker, conserving her traditional Latina values. But what if she wants to continue studying and pursuing a career? What happens to a Latina who is shunned by her family because she fails to follow in her mother's footsteps?

Many Latinas suffer tremendously by taking on designated roles, and have further progress to make in asserting their independence. The common ideals about women's weaknesses and proper roles must be challenged because we are stronger than society believes us to be. Yet, it is impossible to give up traditional values because they form the respect and close familial ties that are so common and cherished in Hispanic families. Is it possible to balance values with desires? The film, *Real Women Have Curves* is exemplary of the potential that women have and the struggle, along with the sacrifices, that must be overcome to make use of it. America Ferreira's character, Ana, has a pessimistic relationship with her arrogant mother who wants to draw her back from continuing her higher education. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Celia tries to enforce the Cuban revolution upon her daughter, Lourdes, who rejects it and chooses to get away from it. The embracing of Latina women's roles and the rejection of traditional values in *Real Women Have Curves* and *Dreaming in Cuban* serve to show that there can be a balance between the two, but there's always a sacrifice.

Latina women are viewed stereotypically as cooks, as housewives, and as caretakers. Many women, not just Latina Women, do indeed take on these important roles and there is absolutely nothing wrong with staying at home; so long as the woman takes on this home “job” thoroughly, which by many is also described as the most difficult of careers. Latina women in particular feel that taking care of their homes is what every woman should do, instead of going out and being “vagas”, or “street-rollers/wanderers” (with a negative connotation). These values are proclaimed by women and encouraged by men, who of course prefer not to do dishes.

These values are accompanied by other traditions that involve sex and virginity, respect for elders and leaders, submission to men, as well as children. A traditional and widely known Latina women’s value is that involving respect for their body and remaining virgins until marriage. In *Real Women Have Curves*, Ana’s strict mother, Carmen, strongly believes in maintaining all of these stereotypical roles and forcing them upon her daughter. Once she senses that Ana had sex, she calls her a slut and is completely rude to her. Was it really necessary for her mother to be so disrespectful? Does she really believe that in this modern era and after treating her daughter negatively, Ana would remain a virgin until marriage? Ana was making a sacrifice by giving up her higher education and working to stay with her family and help them out. Because of her willingness to help out, anyone can conclude that Ana loves her family and respects them. Any other rebellious teenager would run away.

In contrast, familial values were not so tolerated in Celia’s family in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Celia lay her values and attention upon two main things: her love for her long gone lover Gustavo and her love for her Lider, Fidel Castro, and the revolution. While

her family was not always her first priority, her daughter, Lourdes, seemed to have input in her own family all the traditional values that she never experienced. For example, she was extremely obsessed over her daughter Pilar, commenting on her sex life and making her work to keep her away from the streets. This in fact fueled Pilar's incentive to run away. Lourdes had no respect for the revolution, which drove her away from her country to New York. Still, Lourdes had no respect for her mother's values and did not speak to her, an example of the disadvantage that these values may cause. Lourdes also didn't follow the traditional gender role; she had complete control over her finances and her bakery and had the dedication to reach beyond one simple business. She's the perfect example of how traditional Latina values can be balanced with independence, but with the sacrifice of a mother-daughter relationship.

Similarly, Ana completely gave up on her relationship with her mother. Her dream to attend university was fulfilled by the end of the film, with the loss of her mother's support since she did not approve. Here we have two Latina women with completely different values, one traditional and one independent. Ana is still respectful to her family and that's a value that will probably stay with her as she succeeds, so she does not completely cut off her traditional values. Her mother Carmen holds to her conservative views at the loss of her daughter, but gains nothing out of the situation. With this conclusion, can we assume that if there is no balance between the two, there is no gain?

Ana's older sister, Estela can be proof that the lack of balance reflects on happiness. Estela chooses to work and stay with her mother, but while she continuously asserts her diligent role as a small business owner, she has no husband and no family that

would be traditional by her age. Her mother disapproves but cannot do anything about it. Could it be her independence that has kept her from forming a family, or just lack of initiative with men? Either way, throughout the film we see that she is unhappy.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* we see how Pilar, a rebellious and artistic Latina, questions women's roles and values. As the sanest female in her family, she attends university, travels abroad, and finds freedom from her controlling mother. Yet, she found the time to form a relationship with her elder, her grandmother, even though her mother never approved. Yet again we see how she follows a traditional Latina value, respect for her elder, with the sacrifice of her mother's approval.

This act of sacrifice seems to occur with almost every character both in *Real Women Have Curves* and in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Celia and Lourdes sacrifice their relationship, Pilar and Ana sacrifice their relationship with their mothers, and Estela sacrifices a family of her own. This mixture of traditional roles, values, and rejection of both create different outcomes, with the balance being the better of all of them.

Latinas have become prevalent among colleges and the work industry as more give up or find balance between a job and their traditional roles as mothers and caretakers. While it is highly respected and encouraged in the Hispanic culture for women to take on these traditional roles, after walking through Ana's and Lourdes' shoes, we see that pride can be obtained without necessarily completely filling in these roles. While I'm not demeaning the role of housewife and caretaker, every woman should have the equal opportunity to choose her life and gain her independence the same as any other man. Women have become pilots, engineers, soldiers, among other respected male-biased professions. All this includes women who can continue to be feminine, who

continue to cook and clean, and care for their household. Traditional Hispanic values regarding these roles are slowly changing as more women are finding this balance, and this will hopefully be a notion that's accepted by all the Carmens that exist today.

Works Consulted

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Real Women Have Curves. Dir. Patricia Cardoso. Perf. America Ferreira, Lupe

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