Real Women Have Curves: Communication, Roles, Social Environment And Acculturation and Assimilation

Real Women Have Curves is a film set in East Los Angeles in the year 1987. This film is from the viewpoint of Ana, a recent high school graduate, and her journey as she faces coming of age as a Latina in American society. This story outlines current issues Ana is facing such as wanting to go to college, her body image, self-esteem and gender roles within her family. Raul (father) and Carmen (mother) believe that each family member's role should be defined according to Latino tradition. Although Ana dreams of going away to college, she must battle against the views of her mother and father who believe she should remain home and provide for the family by working in her sister, Estella's, factory. Ana works with her mother and sister in the factory, along with other Latina's, and it is in the factory that she learns lessons about life, ultimately helping her make the decision to attend college in New York. There are several family dynamics observed during this film, but the three that will be addressed below will be communication, roles and social environment.

Communication

According to our textbook Understanding Generalist Practice, how family members communicate with each other relates directly to how effectively the family flourishes as a system (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). Communication between the family members is seen through verbal and nonverbals. We observe non-verbal communication as eye rolling, throwing up of the arms and laughter. Carmen is often speaking to Ana in a condemning way when she talked about her weight, and when Carmen's attempt at manipulating Ana into doing what she wants she calls Ana ungrateful. Estella often feels the need to conform to her family norms and encourages Ana to follow Carmen's demands. Raul is not seen much during the film, but when he speaks every family member is expected to listen and submit to him. He is the head of the household and what he says, goes. We see this when he gives Ana his blessing to attend college and then tells Carmen he is allowing Ana to accept the offer, a decision that Carmen is unhappy with.

Roles

Like most ethnicities, Latinos have strong cultural roots that often come with them when they emigrate from other countries (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Meek, 2006). Such as the Latino culture, gender relations and roles are referred to as machismo and marianismo. Machismo refers to characteristics of the male as being dominant and independent while marianismo depicts female as submissive and dependent. We can see this during the scene when Mr. Guzman, Ana's teacher, comes to the home to inform her she has been accepted into Columbia University. Carmen answers the door and refuses Mr. Guzman to enter the home referring to him as the man who has been following Ana while Raul goes above Carmen and welcomes Mr. Guzman into the home and to have a seat in their living room. As the head of the household, Raul has the final say and other family members are expected to step down, we can see this happen when Carmen must submit to Raul and Mr. Guzman is ultimately allowed into the home. Carmen, as the marianismo, is very involved in her daughter's lives and expects

them to listen to parental authority and put their family above anything else. We can see examples of this throughout the film such as Carmen expecting Ana to care for her instead of attending her last day of high school and working at the family factory instead of attending college. Although these two roles are traditional in Latino families, acculturation forces a change in the gender roles of Latinos, women and men (Miranda, Billot, Peluso, Berman, & Meek, 2006). We can see in this film that Carmen is independent in the sense that she is working to bring in money for the family instead of attending to the primary needs of her family and home, and meeting the needs of her husband, Raul. As new generations come, the more the traditional gender roles are being challenged.

Social Environment

The environment that Ana and her family live in is much different in America. Ana lives in a cross-generations home (sister, parents and grandfather) in a predominately Latino neighborhood. Ana travels across the city to attend an upscale high school. Ana hopes to meet her family's expectations and help provide support as they face economic hardships. Ana is also intrigued by the idea of attending college and giving herself more opportunities outside of her sister's factory. Ana rebels against the stereotypical images of the female body. She is proud of her body which we can see when she is intimate with her classmate and stripping down her undergarments leaving Ana mortified. Ana has a different few of sex while Carmen beliefs are deeply-rooted in her culture and religion. Carmen is unable to derail from her traditional background while Ana embraces American society and her environment. Ana builds her own dream by taking the step to break from family tradition and go to Columbia in New York for college. We see in the last scene that Ana is proud of who she is as she walks the streets of New York.

Acculturation and Assimilation

Ana

Throughout the film, we see constant conflict between Ana and her mother, which can cause great harm to Ana. Acculturation gaps can lead to family stress and problems in adjustment for family members. There is evidence that parent-child conflict is associated with a wide array of adolescent adjustment problems, including substance use, low self-esteem, high-risk sexualized behavior, and emotional, behavioral and academic problems (Pasch et al., 2006). The conflict between Ana and Carmen can be classified as parent-adolescent acculturation conflict. Carmen still holds more of the traditional values of the Latino culture while Ana holds more of the individualistic American values that she has possessed through school. Parent-child conflict can be a risk factor for depression and low self-esteem and can lead to a reduce in the cohesion of the family and higher attempts for a parent to control their child (Dennis, Basañes, & Farahmand, 2009). We see this as Carmen constantly puts Ana down for her weight and Carmen trying to control what Ana does by forcing her to work at the factory and remain close the family. She points this out when she shares that the college subject is a family matter.

Carmen

We see during the movie that Carmen expects Ana to continue to follow the established rules and traditions that are seen in the Latino family structure. Families of Latino immigrants tend to

foster close, loving relationships with their children and expect their children to consider the family as the central source of support and loyalty. Children are expected to obey their parents and conform to established rules. Ana is much more advanced when it comes to acculturation and this is causing Carmen to be upset about this. Ana wants to go to college, not be living at home and not work in her sister's factory. Significant tensions between Latino parents who adhere to traditional values and their children who are rapidly exposed to social norms of the majority culture through school and television (Dettlaff, 2008). In the end, when Ana leaves for college, we see that Carmen won't get out of bed to tell Ana goodbye, it seems that Carmen is very sad and upset about Ana leaving the family.

Estella

Estella owns her own factory where she makes dresses. In the film, we see labor exploitation of immigrants at Estella's factory. This is occurring because Estella and her business gets paid $18.00 for every dress that they create, but these dresses are then sold at Bloomingdales for $600.00. Ana makes comments in regard to the fact that the dresses are being made for such a cheap amount in relation to how much they are being sold for in the store. Estella, with the support of her sister, attempts to go to her superior to ask for an extension and is sternly shot down. Ana refers to Estella's factory as a sweat shop as they are working under severe conditions, understaffed on an unbearably hot summer day.

Raul

Raul is not seen much throughout the film and little is known about him. From the times that we do see Raul, we see that he supports Ana with her wanting to further her education by giving her his blessing with attending college and even taking her to the airport. Of course, Raul wants to keep his family together as he is the head of the household, but he accepts Ana's views. At times, we see Carmen reinforce the traditional views upon him such as when Mr. Guzman comes to the home. He initially let's Mr. Guzman in and is excited hearing that Ana was accepted into Columbia but then back tracks when Carmen begins talking about this decision being a family matter and keeping the family together as a unit. In the end, Raul shares with Mr. Guzman that Ana shouldn't be attending school at this time and needs to remain home to assit with providing for the family.

Evidence-Based Family Therapy Model

Carmen and Ana would benefit from an intervention that addressed the communication conflict between them. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) would be a beneficial intervention to utilize when addressing Carmen's relationship and communication towards Ana. Two specific components of the parent-child relationship that have been found to be particularly important in child and adolescent well-being are parent-child communication and parental involvement (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009). The therapist would utilize sessions, initially, to observe Carmen and Ana interact with each other. As seen in the film, Ana reacts angrily towards Carmen's responses/words to her, using the ABC model of CBT. Using the ABC model, activating events would be identified – Carmen's negative/insulting words to Ana) and how Ana feels when her mother tells her these words (anger, sadness). Being able to explore why Ana feels the way she does when it comes to her reactions to what her mother says to her. Ana could believe that her mother does not like her or that Carmen is a spiteful person. On the other side, Carmen may be

saying these things to Ana as she is fearful of losing her daughter since Ana has expressed interest in college. Along with CBT, Carmen and Ana would benefit from having individual therapy sessions. Carmen would benefit from focusing on more positive parenting practices while Ana would benefit from discussing her feelings in regard to her and her mother's relationship and how her views/beliefs are different than her mother's and how that affects their relationship.

Multidimensional family therapy would also be beneficial to incorporate with this family. Within this therapy there is a parent-adolescent interaction module. Shaping changes in parent-adolescent interaction are made in sessions through variations in the structural family therapy method of enactment ( ). Upon discussions, relationship strengths and problems become apparent and the therapist then assists the family members to discuss and to solve problems in new ways. During sessions, the therapist actively guides, coaches and shapes increasingly positive and constructive family interactions. With this module, parents and teens are guided to pull back from extreme, inflexible stances as these create poor problem solving, hurt feelings and no motivation and hope for change. This could begin as individual sessions with Ana and Carmen and then move towards family sessions. Throughout the film, we observe Carmen's hurtful words towards Ana and Ana becoming upset and struggling with her relationship with her mother. Focusing on the family's strengths and then working towards solving their problems (communication, relationship, difference of views/beliefs), Carmen and Ana could have more constructive and positive conversation's moving forward.