

# Real Women Have Curves

(Drama) (2002)

© 2004 by Raymond Weschler

## Major Characters

- Ana.....America Ferrera  
An 18 year old Mexican-American high school student who lives in Los Angeles with her working class family, who must decide between working in her sister's clothing factory or going to study at Columbia University in New York.
- Carmen.....Lupe Ontiveros  
Ana's very conservative mother, who thinks Ana should stay and help the family rather than go to New York.
- Estela.....Ingrid Oliu  
Ana's older sister, who owns a small clothing company that is struggling to survive.
- Mr. Guzman.....George Lopez  
Ana's high school English teacher who tries to convince her she will have a much better future if she goes to college.
- Jimmy.....Brian Sites  
A sweet boy with whom Ana becomes romantically involved.
- Raul.....George Cervera Junior  
Ana's father, who is a gardener.

## Plot Summary

This film is the story of Ana, a smart and pretty but somewhat overweight Mexican-American high school student who lives in Los Angeles with her financially struggling family. Ana dreams of going to college in order to improve her life, but her parents want her to stay home and work in her sister's small clothing factory, which is barely surviving by making very pretty dresses. Ana's teacher, Mr. Guzman, has convinced her that a better life awaits her if she goes to college, and because he is convinced of how smart she is, he even arranges for Ana to be accepted by Columbia University in New York, which is one of the best schools in the country.

Ultimately, Ana must decide between what her very traditional Mexican mother wants her to do, and what she knows would be best for her future. And in facing this dilemma, Ana must deal with a problem that so many first generation Americans must face, which is how to balance the conflicting cultural values of

the American middle class with “the old-world values” that their parents still have. Indeed, from the Hispanic neighborhoods of Los Angeles to the Chinese neighborhoods of New York, this type of conflict can be seen everyday.

A note on the language used in this film: Since the story is about a Mexican-American teenager and her family, some of the dialog is in Spanish. When this happens, I have chosen to explain key words that are printed out in the subtitled English. A “[TS],” which stands for Translated Spanish, is used after those sentences in the word glossary below.

## Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

*As high school ends, Ana agrees to go to work in Estela’s factory in order to help the family make the money they need to survive.*

I woke up in the middle of the night, soaking wet.  
If a person is “soaking wet,” they are totally wet  
(“To soak” in water is to pass time covered by it).

### **Ungrateful!** [TS]

An important word for a person who does not appreciate what they are given.

OK, seven years at MIT.

A common way of referring to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which is one of the best universities in the world.

I’ll backpack through Europe.

“To backpack” through a country is to travel through it while carrying all your possessions in a backpack, which is a container for holding things as you walk.

Ana, hang on a minute.

A common way of telling a person to wait.

What’s happening with the college applications?

“College applications” are forms that are filled out by a person who is hoping to attend a college in the future (They ask for such information as your personal and educational background).

What do you mean, not going to college?! You’re a smart woman, you have something to contribute to this world!

Note that “What do you mean?” is often placed before the exact words of a listener, for the speaker to show they disapprove of what has just been said. “To contribute” is to create or offer something of value.

My family can't afford college. :: There are **scholarships, grants,** financial aid, all that **stuff** we've been talking about all year.

"Scholarships" and "grants" are gifts of money that help students pay for school while doing their studies. "Financial aid" is the same thing, except that it is usually in the form of a loan that eventually needs to be paid back. "Stuff" is a very general word that refers to things in general.

Here's your **uniform.** :: Just give me my check, ok?

A "uniform" is a set of clothes that are worn by people of a particular group, such as those that work at a specific restaurant.

You can always just **kiss my ass** to get your job back.

In this context, "to kiss a person's ass" is a crude way of saying to beg them, or to act in a very subservient or overly nice way, in order to get them to agree to do something.

Papa, I **can't afford any more help.** :: **That takes care of that.**

Here, if Estela "can't afford any more help," she doesn't have the money to pay more workers. "That takes care of that" is an interesting way of saying that given what was just said, there is nothing more to discuss.

**Fine,** I'll pay her. :: She can **iron.**

Here, "fine" means OK. "To iron" clothes means to get rid of the wrinkles by rubbing a hot metal iron over them.

End of discussion, Señor.

This is Carmen's way of saying there is nothing more to talk about since they have already decided (Señor is the Spanish word for Sir).

We have already discussed that **amongst** our family.

"Amongst," which is more commonly said without the 't' (among), means within the group of, or between the members of.

She got herself into Beverly Hills High School, which is not easy to do, and now she can go even further.

Beverly Hills is one of the richest areas in Los Angeles (and even the entire United States), and thus the local high school is considered one of the best.

Mr. Guzman, tomorrow morning she goes to the **factory** to sew with us.

A place where clothes and other products are assembled or put together.

***With Mr. Guzman pushing her forward, Jimmy talking about Europe and the factory work so hard, Ana reconsiders her future.***

**I told you!**

A widely used way of telling a person that what you had said or predicted earlier is in fact true.

I can teach her to raise her kids and take care of her husband [TS]  
 “To raise” children is to take care of them as they grow older.

You’re so dramatic, just like Ana.  
 If a person is “dramatic,” they are acting in a very emotional and noticeable way, perhaps like an actor on stage in a play.

I’m nothing like mom. :: Whatever you say.  
 When said with a certain tone of voice, this is a skeptical way of saying “I don’t believe you, but I don’t feel like arguing about it.”

You’ll never fit into that one. It’s a size seven.  
 If you “fit into” an article of clothing, it’s the right size.

I only tell you for your own good. Look at you---  
enormous. They must weigh 10 kilos each.  
 To tell a person something “for their own good” is to tell them something they probably need to know even if they don’t want to hear it.  
 “Enormous” means extremely big or huge. A “kilo” is a unit of weight in the metric system which equals a little more than two pounds in the US.

You looked so fancy. I hardly recognized you.  
 In this case, a nice word for pretty and super well dressed.

My fiancée brought over this dress.  
 The person to whom you will soon get married.

There’s no better dressing than meat on bones.  
 This is Estela’s way of saying that girls should not try to be so skinny, even though it is in fashion (Dressing could be like salad dressing, and in this case, meat is fat or muscle).

I had a meeting with a supplier, but that’s **none of your business**.  
 In business, a “supplier” is a person or company that supplies or provides the goods that your company needs to do its business. If something is “none of your business,” the speaker is saying that is personal or private information and they do not want to tell you.

This is an overlock that makes hems. She’s a **pro**.  
 An “overlock” machine is a type of sewing machine and a “hem” is the raised border or edge of a piece of cloth. If a person is a “pro,” they are very good at what they do (This is a short way of saying professional).

She really gets **upset**. You’d think it was her baby.  
 A powerful adjective meaning angry, worried or emotionally troubled.

And this is Rosali, the **troublemaker**.  
 A good word for a person who is always causing problems for others.

Come on, let me show you your job.

The most versatile and widely used phrasal verb in English, in this case meaning “let’s go.”

The fan blows dust on the dresses.

A “fan” is a device that blows air, usually to make a room cooler.

You put it on that rack for me, ok.

A “rack” is a metal frame for holding clothes.

We take the finished dress to the distributor and then we start on size six.

In business, a “distributor” is a person or company that distributes or delivers a product to all the places that it will be sold.

How much do they pay us to make the dresses? :: 18 dollars for assembling each.

“To assemble” a dress is to put it together from different pieces.

I don’t think she’ll make it, and with her mother here! [TS]

In this case, “to make it” means to survive.

She’s so arrogant! [TS]

An important word for a person who is mean and snobby, and more specifically, looks down on others.

Mrs. Carmen has gossip! [TS]

Rumors or loose talk between people about other people, that may or may not be true.

That dirty old man looks like a shriveled up mango! [TS]

A “dirty old man” is, generally speaking, an old man who has a sexual interest in much younger women or girls. If a person is “shriveled up,” they have lots of wrinkles, like someone who is very old. A “mango” is a type of fruit.

He thinks you’re too skinny, but he would like to fatten you up!

If a person is “skinny” they are too thin, and “to fatten up” a person is to make them gain weight.

You little brat, wait! [TS]

A “brat” is a spoiled, obnoxious and disagreeable child.

Don’t knock yourselves out, ladies.

“To knock yourself out” doing something is to exhaust yourself.

Where the hell are you going? [TS]

Added to WH questions to show emotion such as anger or frustration.

I can’t take it anymore. [TS]

If you “can no longer take” a situation, this means that you can no longer accept it.

My hands have arthritis. [TS]

A disease that is common among old people, which makes it difficult to bend one's hands, arms and legs.

So much effort, so much sacrifice. [TS]

"Sacrifice" is the act of giving up something that you want.

You only think I'm a beast of burden. [TS]

An old expression for an animal that is used to do hard work, such as a horse that pulls a tractor on a farm.

How cute. Look at yourself in the mirror [TS]

In this context, a key word for a person who is pretty in a childlike way.

It's too late for Estela to get married. Now I have to concentrate on Ana.

"To concentrate on" a person is to focus, or spend one's mental energy and thoughts on them.

You're a treasure. :: Grandpa! [TS]

A "treasure" is any object that is very valuable, and if used to describe a person, it means much loved.

Papa, those are only legends. [TS]

A "legend" is a popular myth, or a story that has been passed down from generation to generation that often is not actually true.

After the revolution, there was a rumor that there was a cave full of gold. [TS]

An important word for a piece of news that has not been verified and may not be true.

Hey Jimmy! :: What's up?

A common and colloquial way to greet a person if you have not seen them for a while, and more specifically, an alternative way of saying "What's new?"

Mr. Guzman, I filled out the applications. :: Look at that, Ana. Way to go!

"College applications" are forms that are filled out by a person who is hoping to attend a college in the future (They ask for such information as a person's personal and educational background). "Way to go" is a way of telling a person that you highly approve of what they have done.

Where's the personal statement?

In this context, an essay written for a college application in which the students personally describes why they deserve to go to that college, and why they would like to study there.

I'm friendly with the dean of admissions at Columbia.

At a university, the "dean of admissions" is the person who decides which students will be accepted to study there.

Write the essay and I can get it to him and get you in for the September semester.

An “essay” is a piece of writing on one particular subject, usually from a personal point of view. A “semester” is a period of time over which classes are taught (The Fall semester lasts from September to December).

I’ll hang on to this until you bring me the essay.

To “hang on” to something is to keep it.

My sister needs to stay and help her with her fashion boutique.

A “fashion boutique” is a small shop where clothes are sold (although here Ana is talking about more of a factory or assembly shop than a boutique).

Europe is so cool. You’ll get a whole new perspective.

“Cool” is still the most common slang word for excellent, fine or perhaps very fun. “Perspective” is a key word that means point of view, or a way of looking at things.

Things are too easy here. Like you’re handed everything from school to a car.

This is Jimmy’s way of saying that life in the United States is too easy for kids (although he doesn’t seem to realize this isn’t the case for Ana!)

*Ana gets closer to Jimmy and tries to help Estela save her clothing business as it struggles to pay its bills.*

Mom, I don’t watch Spanish soap operas.

Daytime drama shows on television that generally follow the lives of the rich and miserable (They’re named soap operas because companies sell lots of soap to the housewives that watch them).

It’s not a regular novella. It’s a Brazilian.

A “novella” is a short story, which is smaller than a novel.

You remember Juanita, the cross-eyed daughter?

If a person is “cross-eyed,” their eyes look into each other.

Let me guess, she gets pregnant? :: Ana, don’t spoil the story!

In this case, “to spoil” a story is to tell a person what happens at the end, before they have a chance to see or read it for themselves.

He asks her to run away with him. Of course that means he has to betray her mother’s wishes.

If a person “runs away *from home*,” they leave out of frustration, against the wishes of their parents. “To betray” a person’s wishes is do something which that person does not want them to do.

It's curse words in Spanish.

"Curse words" are dirty or cuss words, such as fuck, shit, etc.

Jerk. Goddamn it. :: OK, Jimmy, I get it.

A "jerk" is an idiot, stupid person, asshole, etc. "Goddamn it" is a somewhat vulgar and common way of expressing anger or frustration. In this case, to "get it" means to understand.

Do you think I'm your maid?! You left the dishes in the sink.

A "maid" is a person who is paid to do housework, such as cleaning the house and washing the clothes.

We almost finished pinning the pattern.

In a clothing context, "to pin a pattern" is to arrange various pieces of cloth in a way that looks like the finished clothes will look like when sewn (A pin is a tiny needle, and a pattern is a design or model).

Just a few little adjustments here and we can get started.

An "adjustment" is a small change in pattern or plan.

It's always been my mother's dream to go back to the village in Mexico.

A "village" is a nice word for a small town.

We need those four seamstresses to finish this work.

A "seamstress" is a woman who sews for a living.

I'll charge you interest.

In this context, "interest" is the money a bank charges for making a loan.

It's because I love you that I make your life so **miserable**.

An excellent and powerful word for very unhappy.

This is a sweat shop! Don't you get it? You're all cheap labor for Bloomindales.

"Sweat shop" is a common expression for a factory or other work place where the workers are very poorly paid and badly treated. Bloomindales is a well known and generally expensive department store.

All you've done is flip burgers.

"To flip burgers" is a way of referring to what workers at fast food restaurant do, which is to throw hamburgers into the air (or flip them) so that they land on their uncooked side, on the grill.

I'm proud of what I do. You little **brat**. [TS]

A useful word for a misbehaved or disrespectful little kid.

I never wanted to work here in the first place, much less for nothing.

An interesting grammatical construction which is used for emphasis and basically means "especially."

If it doesn't heal now, it will heal tomorrow. [TS]

For an injury or wound "to heal" means to get better.

It's probably just gas.

The polite way of referring to stomach upset when you eat too much. If you can't hold it inside, this is called *passing* gas, or more crudely, farting.

It's break time. :: Then you take a break, because I can't afford one.

"To take a break" is to stop and rest for a while after working a lot.

100 people at the church, the priest waiting, and he never **showed up** for the ceremony.

A "priest" is a religious leader in the Catholic Church. "To show up" is a common way of saying to arrive. A "ceremony" is a series of official acts that is passed down over the generations, such as a wedding or funeral.

God damn him.

Note that "god damn *It*" is used to express frustration or anger, but 'it' can be replaced by a pronoun to express anger at a specific person.

Mom, you're so old-fashioned. :: Girls nowadays think they know so much.

"Nowadays" is away of referring to the present day when comparing things to times in the past.

No, mom. The reason they **end up** pregnant is because they don't know how to use contraceptives.

"To end up" is to finish. "Contraceptives" is another word for birth control methods, such as a condom or birth control pill.

Look at here, the Mrs. Know-it-all.

A sarcastic way of referring to a person who thinks they know everything.

Why is a woman's virginity the only thing that matters?

A person's "virginity" is the state of being a virgin, or of never having had sex.

She's the owner of a manufacturing company.

A "manufacturing company" produces physical products, such as cars or furniture (As opposed to services, such as banks or restaurants).

Yeah, I'm asking for an advance on the dress order.

In business, an "advance" is a payment of cash for a product or service that has not yet been produced or delivered.

I'm a contractor for Mrs. Glass. My name is Estela Garcia.

In this context, a "contractor" is a person who pays another person to do certain jobs, such as building the various parts of a house, or producing a type of clothes.

You need an **appointment**.

An important word for a planned meeting between two or more people.

I'm Estela's business partner, Ana.

A useful term for a person who helps another with their business affairs.

I went out on a limb to hire you in the first place because I believe a woman like me should help a woman like you.

"To go out on a limb" for somebody is to do something very difficult or risky, in order to help them.

You have to help yourself and meet your **deadlines**.

A "deadline" is the final day or time to finish or accomplish something before it is considered too late.

Your mother is a little crazy. :: You're just **figuring that out**?

In this context, "to figure out" something is to understand it.

I have morning sickness.

An interesting expression for the upset stomach or nauseous feeling that pregnant women get for the first few months of their pregnancy.

A woman knows. I haven't had my period for three months.

The word for the time that a woman bleeds during her menstrual cycle.

Are you starring at my boobs?

A good slang word for a woman's breasts (Much less vulgar than 'tits!').

I made this list of topics to talk about so we wouldn't run out of things to talk about.

A "topic" is a subject, and if you "run out of" something, there is no longer any of it left.

You don't take compliments well?

A "compliment" is a nice or positive statement that is made about a person (Some people get embarrassed when they are complimented).

I guess this is good night.

A sweet way for a boy to tell a girl that they're date is over, perhaps just before he tries to kiss her.

He was a very elegant man.

If a person is "elegant," they are usually well dressed and behave in an educated and very refined or graceful manner.

I pretended he was still alive and I put him in a wheel chair and took him home in a taxi.

A "wheel chair" is a mechanical chair that people who cannot walk use to get around.

I like having you as a tenant and I'd hate to have to **kick you out**.

A "tenant" is a person who rents a house or building from the owner or landlord. "To kick a person out" of a place is to force them to leave.

I told Estela many times, "If you do not have the cash up front, do not do it."

"Cash" is another word for money, and to have it "up front" is to have it already, before starting a particular project, so you will not have to borrow money later to complete it.

She's working hard and it's just not working out.

If a situation isn't "working out," it is going poorly.

I'm working on my own line. Would you buy a dress like this?

In this case, a "line" of clothes is a style that is produced for sale, often consisting of shirts, pants and other pieces that go together.

I need help with the hems or we're not gonna make the deadline.

A "hem" is the raised border or edge of a piece of cloth.

"To make a deadline" is to finish on time.

I remind myself it's not for me, so I put a plastic bag over it and stick it on the rack.

Note that in this case, "to stick" is to put, and a "rack" is a metal hanger for hanging or storing clothes.

She's **got a point**.

In a conversation or debate, if somebody "has a good point," they have said something that is important or worth considering.

*Ana's takes charge of her relationship with Jimmy, life, and Mr. Guzman announces that Columbia University wants her as a student.*

She thinks I'm ugly and fat and God knows what.

When said in this context at the end of a sentence, "God knows what" is a cynical way of saying "and perhaps a lot of other things."

She thinks I'm at mass again. :: So is this a sin?

"Mass" is the act of people in a Christian Church celebrating their relationship with God (Well, that's the theory). A "sin" is a religious word for an immoral act in the eyes of God.

Pretty dresses aren't just for skinny girls.

Here, Estela uses "skinny" as a positive word, but in fact, it generally means *too* thin.

I spent a lot of money on this material.

In this case, "material" is another word for cloth.

**Your turn.**

The two words you say when playing card games such as poker, when you want the next person to make a move.

You got in! The dean called me personally with the news.

A “dean” in a university is a high level person who is responsible for a certain part of how the university is run (In this case, the dean of school admissions. *The dean* is head of the entire school).

Your daughter’s been accepted to Columbia University with a full scholarship.

“Columbia” is an excellent university in New York City. If a student receives a “full scholarship,” the entire cost of going to that school, often including food and rent, is paid for.

There must be wonderful colleges in this area.

A “college” is a university, though some do not have programs that are as advanced (i.e....they often don’t offer Ph.D. degrees).

We’re a family and we intend to stay that way.

“To intend to” do something is to plan to do it.

I didn’t come this far to see my family break apart.

In this case, “to break apart” means to physically go off in different directions (LA and New York), though more often, if a family breaks apart, what is being discussed is the psychological or emotional stability of the family relationships.

You want to abandon him?

“To abandon” a person is to leave them, often to take care of themselves even when they really don’t have the ability to do so.

Thank you very much, Senor Guzman, but this is a family matter.

In this context, when Carmen says it is “a family matter,” she means it is a personal problem that should only be discussed within her family.

Can I get some condoms too?

The most common form of birth control, worn by men during sex (They are also called *rubbers*, though this is not as common as before).

These are kind of fun. :: **All right.**

A good alternative to OK.

Damn this shirt.

Note that “damn” is used to express anger, and that it can be followed by any direct object, including an object such as a shirt!

You tramp! You lost your virginity, didn’t you?!

A woman who has sex with lots of men, or perhaps a prostitute.

Mom, you're imagining things. :: I can tell.

Note that in this context, "to tell" means to know what is happening, even if it can't be seen or is not obvious.

You're not only fat, now you're a puta.

A Spanish word for a prostitute, which is sometimes used by English speakers that are familiar with Spanish or other related languages.

Why don't you value yourself? :: Because there's more to me than just what's in between my legs.

An interesting exchange between Ana and her mom in which Ana is telling her that just because she has sex with someone she likes, this does not mean that she does not respect herself.

Don't you think I know a thing or two about this?

"To know a thing or two" about something means to know or understand it well.

I think it's about time that you and I had a little conversation about menopause.

"Menopause" is the time in a woman's life, about age 50, when she stops having menstrual cycles and periods.

The doctor said no sugar. Why are you eating flan?

A delicious custard desert made with eggs and sugar.

I'm having a craving. :: But you're not pregnant!

If you have a "craving" for a particular food, you strongly desire it (Pregnant women often have cravings for foods such as pickles).

I'm going through the change of life.

A gentle way for some doctors and women to refer to menopause.

You know, Ana, you're not bad looking.

If a person is "not bad looking," they probably aren't gorgeous, but may in fact be pretty attractive or *good looking* .

I stink. Who farted?

"To stink" is to smell very bad, and "to fart" is a crude but common way of saying to pass (stomach) gas.

Please don't waste the distilled water. It's expensive.

If water is "distilled," it has been made as pure as possible by being heated into steam and then turned back into water. It is used for cleaning clothes.

What a relief that we're almost done with this.

A "relief" is a feeling of great relaxation after a period of worry or nervousness.

*Ana gives a lesson to Estela and the seamstresses, and then struggles with her mom before making her most important decision.*

All the steam has me sweating like a pig.

“Steam” is the vapor that water turns into when boiling.

Look at you. :: You look **awful**.

A powerful adjective meaning extremely bad or horrible.

Mama, I happen to like myself. :: Right on, sister!

In this context, “happen to” is used as emphasis to say something that is unexpected or the listener does not agree with. “Right on, sister” is a silly and old-fashioned (1960s) way of showing a person you strongly agree with what they just said.

Oh, that’s it. Make myself attractive, so I can catch a man.

“Attractive” is a very general word for pretty or appealing, and “to catch” a man is a colloquial way of saying to attract him so that he becomes romantically interested.

My weight says to everybody, “fuck you.”

This is Ana’s way of saying she has a lot of self-confidence and she doesn’t care if people thinks she is overweight or fat. “Fuck you,” of course, is a very vulgar and common insult.

Hail Mary! What are you trying to do?! [TS]

An old expression used by religious people to express shock or anger.

**How dare** anybody tell me what I should look like or what I should be when there’s so much more to me than just my weight!

“How dare...” is an interesting term to express anger or outrage at the statements and thoughts of others.

What’s wrong with me wanting to be **thin** and sexy?

A positive adjective for a person who is the perfect weight or just below what they should be (*Slender* is also positive, but *skinny* is negative).

If you’re a cow, then I’m a hippo.

A very large animal that is found in Africa and in zoos.

You want to see cellulite?!

Fat that is common around some people’s thighs, hips and ass.

I got all these stretch marks on my arms and chi chis.

“Stretch marks” are the scars or markings on the skin from injuries to the body, including from giving birth (“Chi chis” is a slang term for breasts in Spanish, but it’s not used in English).

Jesus, she wins.

A common way to express surprise or other emotion, and unlike “Hail Mary,” it’s used by all types of people, including those who are not religious.

Have you all gone **mad**?! [TS]

In the right context, an excellent word for crazy or insane.

To be rid of all these clothes and to just let it all hang out.

“To be rid of” something is to escape or get away from it.

If a person “lets it all hang out,” they let down their hair and adjust their clothes so that they are totally comfortable and relaxed, without concern what others think.

Who cares what we look like when no one is watching us?

A very common way of saying “Nobody cares that...”

What’s that scar? :: This one is you.

A permanent mark that is left on the skin after a wound or injury begins to heal.

You have no **shame**.

An important word for the guilt one often feels after doing something immoral, wrong or harmful to others.

You have my blessing.

A somewhat religious but common word for a person’s official approval.

You’ll always be in my heart. [TS]

A sweet way of telling a person that they will always be emotionally close to them.

## **Real Women have curves**

### **Some Possible ESL Questions for Class Discussion**

1. Have you had your own difficult experiences trying to balance the values of your own culture and the one of your adopted country?
2. In Los Angeles, the biggest subculture is Mexican, or more generally, Latin-American. What are the biggest ethnic minorities where you live? Do you think there are similar issues between the older and younger generations in those subcultures?
3. Do you think Ana is a strong person? Why or why not?
4. Are Americans too obsessed with being thin? Or, in fact, are Americans actually too fat? Is Ana too fat, or as Jimmy said, is she beautiful?
5. Is Estela's little factory really a sweat shop? Do you agree that selling a dress for \$18 which later sells at Bloomingdales for \$600 is "just not right"?
6. What did you like and not like about this movie?

