Reality Bites Film Review

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The film “Reality Bites” is about the relationships and interactions between a group of friends, including protagonists Troy and Lelaina. Troy could be considered as a down-on-his-luck musician, who is moving from one minimum-wage day job to another. Lelaina on the other hand, is a graduate of a university, a valedictorian who’s looking for a break to become a documentarian. The job that she landed though is quite humbling, as she works as an assistant to a TV host.

Lelaina has a unique set of friends that seems to highlight her personality. Her roommate Vickie could be considered promiscuous, as she goes through a bunch of guys as boyfriends and one-night stands. Vickie works in sales for The Gap, but she’s quite worried about her welfare wen she tested positive for HIV because of her sexual encounters.

Lelaina’s other friend is Zammy, a celibate gay who’s afraid of facing his parents to tell them the truth about his sexuality. He chose to stay celibate because of his fear of the truth. He’s afraid that he needs to inform his parents before engaging in a serious relationship.

Lelaina soon gets acquainted with Michael, an executive for a cable channel that airs shows like that of MTV. Although their first meeting was brought about by a road accident, the two immediately hit off and began dating. He soon learns about Lelaina’s pet project, a documentary that she’s been working on for quite some time already. He expresses his desire to make her “dreams” come true and air the documentary on his TV network. This is a big revelation for Lelaina, considering that she gets axed from her job because of an office dispute.

However, Lelaina and Michael’s relationship fizzle right after she’s able to sell her documentary to the network. Lelaina was quite unhappy when the network decided to “tamper” with her life’s work and turn it into a montage rather than retaining her artistic vision. With these events, Lelaina finds solace with Troy, and they ended up sleeping together confessing their feelings for each other. However, Troy changes his attitude towards Lelaina right the next morning. They had an argument, and Troy decides to move away.

Emotions peak up when Troy’s father dies, forcing him to think about his actions and his priorities. As it turns out, he really has deep feelings for Lelaina, and he has decided to have a relationship with her. Troy returns right after the funeral of his father, and he immediately set things straight with Lelaina. Although not much was revealed about Michael, a tidbit during the credits shows that he has turned Lelaina and Troy’s story into a new show.

Psychological Issues in Reality Bites

One of the main psychological issues shown in the movie is about Personality. Almost all of the main characters suffer from this problem, especially the protagonists, Lelaina and Troy. Personality is a main issue for them probably because they’re bent on doing things that they like. They don’t want to conform to anything that the society dictates. Because of that, they’re finding it difficult to cope with real issues in their lives, such as the poverty and interpersonal relationships.

Lelaini is one of the characters that exhibit personality issues. Her problem is about uniqueness versus universality, which is quite a social issue in the 80’s and 90’s. A good example of Lelaini’s personality issues is her strong adherence to the things that she believe in, especially when it comes to her life’s work which is the documentary. She was distraught when she learned that her video was edited against her will and artistic vision. Because of this, she had a falling out with her relationship with Michael, which would’ve been a great relationship option. She’s stuck with her guns in this issue because she believes that it is her artistic freedom that’s being compromised, and that if her work would just be edited to frame a message that she doesn’t really intend to send, then she’d rather go back to her previous life and ways.

Another good example of her fear/hatred for conformity is when she refused a car, a BMW, that’s offered to her. Her refusal is based on her belief that the BMW is a Yuppie symbol, something that she’s not. For others, this would’ve been an easy choice, but for her, it was something that would’ve compromised her beliefs. She doesn’t want to conform to the norms, and that involves not owning anything that symbolizes such an idea. Considering her efforts and “achievements” in the film, this is quite an admirable trait of Lelaini. But if her character and her backstory is overlooked, it would be quite easy to say that it was very foolish for her to reject such an offer.

But if viewed through the lens of personality, it would be safe to assume that Lelaini values uniqueness over universality. While most people would settle for a stable job just like everyone else, there are those who want to stay unique and make a name for him or herself with that uniqueness. No one really dreamed of sitting in an office desk for the most part of the day for the rest of his or her life. As a kid, I’ve always wanted something unique, even though my aspirations change depending on my mood. At one point I wanted to a famous actor, at another point I wanted to be a famous racecar driver. But in all of those “wild” dreams, I wanted to be different, set a record for something unique, or for an achievement that others can’t duplicate.

Perhaps the aspiration to be unique has been ingrained to all of us, and it is only a matter of time before we realize what we really want in life. Even though not a lot of people are lucky to follow the unique dream that they want, everyone still strives to live up to their dreams, just like what Lelaini did in the film.

Other personality issue that’s worth discussing is motivation. Motivation in this exhibited by the main characters of the film, namely, Lelaini and Troy. However, the way they exhibit motivation is quite different, as they’re polar opposites when it comes to this aspect.

Motivation is defined as the driving force humans use to achieve their goals. With this in mind, it is easy to see that Lelaini is quite motivated to see her documentary get featured in a way she wants it to be seen. Her meeting with Michael brings her a step closer to achieving her goals, and this is what motivated her to pursue it further.

Lelaini is blessed with the intelligence to pursue her dreams. In a way, her motivation to make a name for herself as a documentarian has led her to take up a humbling job as an assistant to an obnoxious TV reporter. She is more than willing to endure the hardships of her chosen path because she is really motivated to become the person she wants to be, and to produce the documentary that she’s been longing to showcase. Her motivation and her efforts also influenced her falling out with Michael and his TV network. She was greatly distraught when her life’s work was turned into something that she didn’t really like. It was something that she couldn’t bear, that’s why she took the high road and parted ways with the otherwise lucrative relationship with Michael and the TV network.

As mentioned earlier, Lelaini and Troy are polar opposites when it comes to motivation. It’s because during most parts of the film, Troy seemed to lack the motivation to succeed. But it wasn’t because he lacked the talent or the gifts to succeed. He is a talented person, a musician who’s been playing on local bars frequently. However, he didn’t have the motivation to move up the ladder in his chosen field.

Troy had a lot of work experiences. However, this is something that he can’t be proud of. He’s been moving from one low paying job to another because he isn’t motivated to work. He constantly gets axed, just like what was shown on the early parts of the film when he got fired because of petty theft. He could have achieved something, if only he tried giving it his best.

Troy could easily be considered as the perfect example of a person who lacks motivation. He’s always trying to make ends meet, not because of the lack of opportunities, but because of his lack of effort in making himself a better person. A stable job wouldn’t hurt, but he wanted to pursue his music career, which honestly, is not going anywhere at his current situation. His lack of motivation places his life on a standstill. He’s not gaining anything, yet he’s losing time to make something out of himself.

Despite his obvious interest for his friend Lelaini, he clearly lacks the motivation to pursue a relationship with her. Even a chance, intimate encounter with her didn’t result in a relationship, simply because Troy is not motivated enough to be with the woman he loves. But eventually, he realizes that he needs to toughen up and focus on the things he wanted. When his father died, he had to reevaluate himself and his life. This newfound motivation is what led him to pursue a relationship with Lelaini, and hopefully pursue a better life.

Another psychological issue highlighted in the film is stress. This issue is evident in the supporting characters like Vickie and Zammy. Vickie, because of her promiscuity, somehow tested positive with HIV. This isn’t much of a surprise since she’s been sleeping around with several partners. On the other hand, Zammy is stressed by the fact that he can’t open up to his parents about his sexuality. This affects his relationships with other people, because he’s afraid of the repercussions when he opens up to his super conservative parents.

The stress experienced by these characters manifested in usual arguments and conflicts with their friends. This just shows how hard it is to live with stress, and that it should be managed accordingly. At the end of the film, the characters were able to breathe a sigh of relief when Vickie’s AIDS tests are negative, and Zammy was finally able to open up to his parents, and was able to have a relationship with someone he likes.

The film ended on a positive, with everyone happy and satisfied with the decisions that they made. Although there were a lot of psychological issues shown in the film, it was able to show that these problems could be handled accordingly, and that the results could be positive. In the end, everyone was able to find the peace of mind that they’re looking for, even after the events that unfolded in the film. Even Michael, who was last seen having a falling out with Lelaini, was able to find an opportunity with his current predicament by turning Lelaini and Troy’s story into a TV show.

Overall, the film is offers a good insight for those who are thinking about their future. It is a good film to watch and analyze for people who are looking to find ways of dealing with problems, not only with other people, but also with themselves. Knowing about psychological issues and learning how to deal with them is really helpful, especially for those who are independent or are looking to live independently in the near future.

References:

Stiller, B. (Director). (1994). *Reality Bites*. [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal Studios.