

Intersectional analysis of bend it like beckham

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Intersectional analysis of Bend it Like Beckham. For this assignment, to make an intersectional analysis I decided to watch a movie. After searching and thinking for a while I picked the movie Bend it Like Beckham, since a lot of elements in this movie are applicable on my own life and I really could relate to one of the characters in the movie. As the title of the movie already implies, it is about football and takes place in England. Jesminder is a Sikh, Indian girl from a very traditional Indian family. She is not interested in fashion, boys and her looks; the only thing she is interested in is football.

One time when she is playing in the park with her friends, who are all boys, Jules sees Jesminder play. Jules is an English, white girl who plays football. Jules asks if Jesminder wants to join the team, but Jesminder's parents do not agree. She joins the team anyways and this causes a lot of friction in her own family. Parminder Nagra, who is in her real life also a member of the Sikh religion, plays Jesminder. She grew up in England and from an early age on she wanted to become an actress. Her parents wanted her to finish her education first before she was allowed to start acting.

Bend it Like Beckham was her breakthrough film and got her a role in the popular TV-show ER. Keira Knightley is the actress who plays Jules in the movie. She is a white woman, born and raised in England. She started acting at a very young age. Bend it Like Beckham was also her breakthrough movie and she has played in countless of popular movies since, for example Pirates of the Caribbean, Love Actually, Pride and Prejudice. The director of the movie, Gurinder Chadha, is a woman from Indian decent, who is also a member of the Sikh religion, was born in Kenya but grew up in London.

She studied journalism and ended up working as a reporter for the BBC and quickly realized she wanted to direct movies and documentaries. Most of her films focus on the differences between Indian and English families and the inequality between them, mostly in a negative way for the Indians. Bend it Like Beckham is one of her most famous works. After describing the movie contents, the main actors and the director, I am going to apply intersectional analysis to this movie. Before starting the intersectional analysis the term intersectionality needs to be explained.

Kimberle Crenshaw was the first person that mentioned the theory of intersectionality. This theory is a study that focuses on the different biological, social and cultural categories that define someone's identity and place in society. All these categories are in relation with each other, for instance gender, class, race and sexual orientation combined define your place in society and sadly also the way people treat you. These so called axes all influence each other, there is not just one aspect that defines our place in society.

Combinations of all the axes, the starting point of intersectionality, contribute to social inequality, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, but also religion-based discrimination. According to this theory the person who would be the most accepted is a white, straight male from a higher class. A black, gay woman from a lower class would take the lowest position in society, while a white, gay woman from lower class would stand above her, and a white, straight woman from lower class would even take a higher position in society.

Now that I explained the theory of intersectionality I can apply it to the movie, but before I do that, I would like to make a point about football-movies in general, and also a point about the lead actresses of the movie. After watching this movie I decided to search for other movies about football. There are over hundreds of movies that focus on men's football in one way or another, a team, the fans, a coach, but only a few movies, a total of seven, focus on girls that play football, and Bend it Like Beckham is the only one with the focus on a girl who is not white.

This shows that football is a sport that is still very gender-based, despite the fact that in the Netherlands alone already 120. 000 girls play football. Also race plays an important part, because all the other movies about girl's football focus on white girls, while I know from my own experience there are a lot of girls from different races who play football. I myself played football for seven years, and I played in a team where half of the girls were non-whites. I will focus on this later on.

The second point I would like to make is that despite this movie is the breakthrough for both main characters, Keira Knightley and Parminder Nagra, Keira is way more successful than Parminder. I researched both their filmographies, and Keira got a lot of movie offers after this movie, while Parminder's only offer was a role, not even a leading role, in the TV-show ER. Parminder played in a few small movies, and in every single one of them the focus was on her racial background, while Keira Knightley got very divers movie offers, from playing a pirate to an historical person. The fact that the role offers for both women depend on their race shows that in this case Parminder has a lower position in the society. She has very limited choices to

pick from, while Keira has, because of her white skin-color, more choices. With that being said I can focus myself on the movie itself. This movie really focuses on gender and ethnicity, but sexual orientation is also a big part of it. Football is still seen as a men's sport, and these girls in the movies are automatically a minority because they play football. I myself have encountered the same problems as these girls.

I am a white, straight girl living in a western country, but when I told people, that I played football, their reaction was always: ' a girl who plays football? That is so weird! ' And without their knowledge of my sexuality, quite often people assumed I was a lesbian because I played football. Without knowing any axes of my life, I was automatically put in a lower position, just because I am a girl who played football. This also is seen in the movie. Jules has short hair, wears baggy clothes and plays football, and her mother overhears a conversation between Jules and Jess about love, but she misinterprets it and thinks Jules is gay.

The mother is very upset about her daughter being gay and when Jules tells she is not gay, the mother is very relieved and then says there is nothing wrong with being gay. Even though she says that, she is still happy her own daughter is in fact not a lesbian. This shows certain stereotypes towards girls that play football, have short hair and wear baggy clothes. Football is such a gendered sport that it automatically leads to sexism, thinking girls who play football must be lesbian because they play a men's sport.

Lesbianism is also seen as something less good than being straight, seeing the mother is relieved her daughter is not a lesbian. The coach of the team, a young, straight white man is ashamed to be the coach of a girl's team. He

had to stop playing football due to an injury, and he wanted to do something with football. He ended up coaching the girls team, but he has never told this to his father because he is afraid his father will get angry because 'they're just girls'. This also shows the gender-based thinking towards girls, but intersectionality becomes even clearer when race gets involved. When Jesminder first joins the team, the reaction of the coach is that he has never seen an Indian girl play football, and he is angry with Jules for bringing her to the team because he expects her to not be able to play football, because she is an Indian girl. He says this without even seeing her play. She turns out to be the best of the team. Without knowing anything about her he places her in a lower social position than white girls, just because of her race, and he already places himself above girls. During a match a girl from the opponent calls Jesminder names, a specific word being used is 'Paki', which is a swearword used towards people from Indian descent.

Even though it's a girl who calls Jesminder this and probably has experienced the same gender and sexism problems as the other girls in this movie, she still places herself above Jesminder in the social hierarchy, only because Jesminder is from a different race. A different scene that shows the lower position of Jesminder is when her parents want her to focus on school instead of football. They literally say she needs the highest grades possible for a good future because her chances for a good job are smaller than the chances of an average white girl, whose chances are again smaller than those of a white boy.

This sentence alone shows her chances of a good future are gender and racial based. The class she will belong to when she's an adult depends on

how good her job is, which again depends on her gender and race. This thus shows that women who are not white almost automatically end up in the lower classes of the society. A white woman has more chances to end up in a higher class, but still has fewer chances than a white man. Jesminder would make more chances for a good job if she were an Indian boy, because then only race would be a problem, while in her case it's race and gender.

As I said, in my own football team were a lot of non-white girls, and all of them, at least their parents did, belonged to the lower class, while the white girls in my team, including myself, were from a higher class than they are. There is one point in the movie where the lower position of the male is seen. Her best friend, a boy named Tony, confesses to her he is gay, but she must promise him she will not tell anyone about this. In the Indian religion it is not acceptable to be gay, that is his reason not to tell anyone. But if he would be openly gay, his position on the social ladder would get lower, because he would be gay, Indian man. If Jesminder would be from a different ethnicity I do not think it would have made any changes for the movie. The main point is that a white skin colour in the western world means a higher place in society than any other skin colour. If Jesminder had been a lesbian it would have placed her even lower on the social ladder. This also applies for Jules, she is a white, straight female, so she is quite privileged in general, but I think if the director had made her a lesbian, the stereotypes towards girls that play football would be even clearer and also show more struggles of women in a society.

Sexuality does play a part in the movie, since Jules' mother thinks she is a lesbian, but yet she turns out to be straight. I think this movie really shows

the importance of using intersectionality when it comes to determining someone's position in the society. The struggles of girls that play football to be accepted playing a men's sport and overcoming typical stereotypes are shown, just as well the struggles of an Indian football-playing girl being accepted in the western society. This movie shows that football is still a very gendered sport and that a girl's choice to play football influences her position.

Gender, race and sexuality play an important part in this movie and combinations of these axes are shown really well.

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