

# Ethnic identity and socialization: 'bend it like beckham'



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In April 1992, when a mostly white jury acquitted four police officers accused in the videotaped beating of a black motorist, thousands of people in Los Angeles, mainly young black and Latino males, joined in what has often been characterized as a race riot. In the summer of 2001, ethnic riots occurred on the streets of towns and cities in the north of England (Oldham, Leeds, Burnley, Bradford), involving young British Asian men and young White British men. More recently, in November 2005, riots emerged in Paris' suburbs, sparked by the accidental deaths of two Muslim teenagers, and then spread to 300 French towns and cities. Most of the rioters were the French-born children of immigrants from Arab and African countries, a large percentage being Muslim. These race and ethnic riots have all recently placed the issue of racial and ethnic identity at the forefront of political debate in the United States and in Europe. In this paper, we endeavour to discuss many issues especially on gender issues, relationship issues, family issues, notion of beauty, women in sports and migration issues. The way the characters behaved and how the other characters behaved towards them portrays the theme and the issues involved.

Gender issue is portrayed through Indian beliefs as well as Western beliefs. The traditional notion that girls should not be involved in sports existed in both the Indian family as well as the England family. This can be seen in both Jesminder's family as well as Catherine's family where their mother's strongly discouraged them from playing soccer as soccer is meant only for the boys. Both mothers cannot tolerate the idea that their daughters are playing and enjoying soccer thus all kinds of comedies ensued because of the differing ideas mothers and daughters have. Through gender issues, the

traditional notion of beauty is also depicted. Anything that is ugly has to be hidden while things that are not of social norms are frowned upon. For example, in the Indian family, Jesminder's mother was shocked that her daughter would reveal her scars just to wear shorts to play soccer. Indian girls are supposed to cover up their bodies and must not dress up like the boys.

Jesminder's mother also does not want Jesminder to play soccer because it causes her to become dark and thus she is not beautiful. These perceptions cause Jesminder to put on a façade. In front of her family members, she dressed up like a dutiful Indian daughter. Behind them, she strips to her jersey and shorts in order to pursue her passion. Hilarity is created through such perceptions and the things done by Jesminder to 'bend' the rules and yet appear to be a dutiful daughter in her parent's eyes. As for the England family, Catherine's mother wants her daughter to be ladylike. It is highly comical when mother and daughter went shopping and the mother insists that her daughter wears a push-up bra. This typical notion on how girls should doll up is highly comical as the mother is enforcing her daughter something that she is not. This shows that the traditional notion of beauty not only exist amongst the Indians but the England people as well.

Issues on gays and lesbianism have also been touched on in this movie.

Gays and lesbianism is not accepted in both societies. For example,

Jesminder's male best friend confesses to her that he likes David Beckham.

The issue on him being gay is kept hushed amongst them as being Indians;

they are not supposed to go against social and traditional norms by

becoming gay. Lesbianism is touched upon when Catherine's mother  
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assumed that Catherine and Jesminder are lesbian couples. Due to her overreactions, hilarity was created. This shows that Indians still stick to their traditional culture whilst England people are not that advanced in their thinking either.

The traditional issue on marriage still exists amongst the Indian characters in this movie. Pinky's boyfriend broke up their engagement just because Jesminder, Pinky's sister, was seen hugging an England boy. This shows the unfairness that befalls on Pinky for something she has not done. To heighten the comic effect, the 'boy' Jesminder was hugging is actually a girl.

Catherine was mistaken to be a boy just because she has short hair. Once again, the traditional notion of beauty on how girls' hair length should be creeps in. Jesminder also refuses to inform her family that her England coach is her boyfriend for fearing that her parents could not accept the idea. Thus this shows that they are still traditional. Apart from gender issues, family issues and relationship issues, migration issues also play a large role in this movie. Their house is a symbol to show how the Indian family has assimilated to the England society. The semi-detached house is a reflection of how the family has blended into England while at the same time preserving their cultural roots and background. The occasional lights displayed on the house show the difference of the family compared to the rest of the neighbourhood. However, this difference has also been accepted by the society there as the lights gave out a beautiful effect.

This film also examines women who must explain their choice to participate in a sport, which traditionally men only competed in. It was noted that how a woman who plays soccer and enjoyed it immensely and even dreamt of <https://assignbuster.com/ethnic-identity-and-socialization-bend-it-like-beckham/>

playing professionally, had to overcome the traditional ideas of her family in order to achieve what she wanted the most. It presents a myriad of complex issues and presents them in a way that is appealing and stimulating. In this film, women in sport is an issue, but one that has come far in the history of women and sport-now, at least in soccer, women can and do play professionally and that is not an odd or remarkable thing. Women are now able to play sports; however, there are still obstacles and stereotypes which the characters still come into contact with and deal with on a daily basis. Jules, one of the main characters, has to live with her mother who tries so hard to make her more feminine; while Jess, the main character, must live with the traditional notions and experiences of her family.

It can be said that “ Bend It Like Beckham” really presented a more realistic example of the obstacles that women face, by looking specifically at one individual and her specific circumstances. It allows for a situation in which Jess must fight for what she believes in and try to move her own family forward. This film also brought in questions of not only femininity but also gender issues and gender relations, and what it means to be a woman playing sports today. There are still stereotypes and ideals about women that are not necessarily written in stone any longer, and it appears that we can look forward to a future where those stereotypes may no longer be so deeply imbedded.

The families learnt to assimilate into England’s culture through their children’s experience. Pinky’s ability to find an Indian husband and moving on with her life creates satisfaction amongst her family members. This shows that they belong in the society. Jesminder’s achievements in her A Levels  
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examinations and her ability to qualify in an England soccer team for girls also show that assimilation and acceptance has taken place. The comic effect that was produced in this movie reflects the things that occur in the society and shows how the society adapts to it. The Indian family managed to preserve their traditional and cultural roots despite being far away from India. Westerners are also not spared from traditional thinking.

We conclude that intense forms of ethnic identity and socialization appear to be formed in social contexts in which the minority ethnic trait is mostly “threatened” either directly by the actions of the majority group or indirectly simply by being exposed to the interaction with the majority norm of behaviour in a mixed neighbourhood. Bend It Like Beckham’ is all about a young girl’s search for cultural identity in the 21st Century England.

### **Referencing**

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