

Review of “Bend It Like Beckham” Movie

Bent it like Beckham is a comedy that premiered in the United Kingdom in the year 2002. The movie was directed and produced by Gurinder Chadha. The movie title, *Bend It Like Beckham*, was derived from an international soccer star David Beckham and his meticulous ball-bending skills. *Bend It Like Beckham* is a British drama comedy that details the escapades of a young girl who defies her Punjab traditions to pursue her football dreams. Jess Bhamra, officially known as Parminder Nagra, is a young girl who loves football and dreams of becoming a successful soccer star. This is in absolute contrast of her Punjabi culture. According to the traditions of her culture, Jess’s role as a woman in the society is clearly defined. Jess, like any other Indian woman, should learn how to cook for and please her husband. Her older sister Pinky is well aware of her place as woman in the Indian society. She adores men, attends to her household chores and dons like ordinary Indian women (Chadha, 2002). The film juxtaposes the lives and aspirations of the two sisters and the feelings of the society about Jess’s football endeavors. This paper uses the scenario in the movie to explain and show why Jess, Jules and her mother appear to be in different stages or crossing between stages of Racial/Cultural Identity Development Theory.

Cultural identity is the influence that a person attains by associating with a certain group. According to Sue & Sue (2008), there are five stages of racial/cultural identity. These include conformity stage, dissonance stage, resistance and immersion stage, introspection stage, and integrative stage. A strict analysis of the movie reveals that Jess, Jules and her mother are undergoing different stages of cultural identity. Jess is under the tutelage of strict Indian parents. They have always carried themselves with decorum, as dictated by their Indian tradition. They have always believed that their children should do everything as dictated by their customs. On the other, Jess does not appreciate her Indian roots. Instead, she appreciates

western thinking and even admires David Beckham's magical ball kicking skills. According to the theory of racial Jess undergoing a stage called conformity.

According to Sue & Sue (2008), individuals at this stage of cultural identity tend to like the popular culture. In this case, Jess prefers the popular English culture as opposite to her own minority Indian culture. This has been exemplified through numerous episodes in the movie. Having been brought in a western setup in London, Jess has a dream of becoming a football star and adores the magical free kick skills of a renowned football star David Beckham. Jess hardly finds time to train and harness her skills because her parents are extremely opposed to her football dream. Even though Jess's parents were apprehensive about her football endeavors, she occasionally skipped her normal chores and trained with her friends. Her determination to succeed in the soccer world led her to secretly join a women soccer team. Things were not easy for Jess because she had to strike a balance between her dream as a footballer and her roles as defined by the Indian tradition. Jess and her British friend Jules started putting their football skills to a test by participating in the pick-up football tournaments.

Her counterpart Jules, on the other hand, is undergoing a stage known as resistance and immersion in cultural/racial development. According to Sue & Sue (2008), individuals at this stage resist their dominant cultures in pursuit of their own racial attitudes that distinguish them from the rest of the members. Jules situation is clearly demystified when she begins associating with Jess innocently believes that Jules is in a perfect situation regarding her football dreams, because her parents are Britons. On the contrary, Jules's situation is not different from Jess's, because her parents believe that football is a preserve for men. Jules's parents believed that their daughter should focus on education and career. According to Jules's parents, football was a preserve for men as opposite to women. Irrespective of the

challenges, the two women pursued their dreams relentlessly by participating in various tournaments.

According to the movie, both Jess and Jules parents were raised in totally different cultural setups. Jess's parents are of typical Indian of Punjabi origin. They were nurtured in strict Punjabi culture that defined men and women's roles differently. According to them, their daughter should grow up to be a good woman to her husband and children. Although Jess was born and raised in Great Britain, her parents took her to law school hoping that she would get a good career, learn how to prepare Punjab delicacies and look after her husband and children. Jess hails from a strict Indian family where gender roles are clearly defined. Jess's parents expected her to tore the line and follow her traditions religiously. Soccer or any other sport was not part of her culture, and the parents expected Jess to follow suit. According to the theory of locus of control, both Jess and Jules believes that they have the capacity to control issues that affect them. The two girls have high internal locus, meaning that they are able to control their actions.

Jules's mother is undergoing a cultural identity stage called conformity. She means quite comfortable in her English roots and wants her daughter to grow up just like any other ordinary English woman. Jules's mother disapproves of their daughter's dreams of becoming a professional soccer player. According to her, Jules needs to focus on education and pursue endeavors that are dominated by women. Jules's mother is still embroiled in the traditions and customs that underpin the English society. This was clearly demonstrated when Jess went into Jules's room to reconcile their differences after differing over their Irish coach. Jules's mother became suspicious when she found the two girls in the room. She bitterly confronted Jules because she believed that her daughter was having a lesbian affair with Jess. Jules's mother believes that individuals have no control of their actions. She believes that the environment plays a crucial role in shaping a person's character.

A careful review of the movie reveals that Jess, Jules and her mother are in a conflict with their traditions and cultural constructs that bind their societies. Indian culture prescribes how men and women should conduct themselves in the society. Her parents expect Jess to grow and behave like her older sister. Football is regarded as a male and Western sport. Jesse's passion for football came as a surprise. In most Indian societies, women are supposed to master how to do household chores and look after their husbands. Furthermore, women are not supposed to mingle with men, unless in some special circumstances, as provided by their traditions. Jess's venturing into a male-dominated sport meant that she had to interact with men mostly. Based on the movie, Jess overstretched and absolutely went against her family and society's expectations.

Contrary to her Indian culture, Jess believed that as a human being, she had the right to pursue what interests her. Chadha, (2002) indicates that unlike her elder sister Pinky, Jess believed that people had the right to pursue their ambitions irrespective of their society's expectations. Having lived in cosmopolitan London, Jess could not understand why her parents did not want her to pursue her ambitions and become a soccer star like David Beckham. Jess was surprised to realize that even though her parents knew about David Beckham and his successful football career, still they could not bless her football dreams. To some extent, Jess understood and appreciated her parents. She knew that her parents were raised in environments that were replete of myths and misconceptions about the roles of men and women in the society. Her parents were raised in strict Punjabi families where the roles of men and women were outlined in their traditions and were religiously adhered to by every individual. It is obvious that parents raised in such social and cultural environments would expect their children to strictly observe their customs and traditions.

This was perfectly fine with Jess's older sister Pinky, but Jess was absolutely different and had a totally different view of her own future. She did not thrasher in cooking and she

envisioned herself as a female version of an English soccer star David Beckham. The above scenario clearly explains how Jess struggled to balance between her cultural expectations and her passion. Similarly, Jules opts to pursue a male-dominated career contrary to her parent's expectations. Jules's parents are apprehensive of their daughter's football endeavors because of other reasons that are not similar to those of Jess's parents.

Balcazar (2010) states that cultural identity and human development permeates almost every aspect of learning and personality development. For instance, in the movie, cultural identity has been clearly highlighted through the behaviors and actions of Jess and Jules's parents. The response that Jess got from her parents when she revealed to them that she was interested in playing professional soccer clearly indicates that cultural identity is of paramount importance to human beings. Cultural identity is an important aspect in a person's personality that has a profound impact on an individual's relationship with other cultures. According to Ortnier, (1996), the theory of identity development suggests that individuals in the minority group have a tendency of either liking or hating the dominant group. In this movie, Jess preferred English culture to her native Indian culture. She idolized an English football star, and not Indian stars. Her parents did not like their daughter's football dreams and wanted her to respect her culture and mould herself into a responsible Indian woman with great cooking and husband-caring abilities.

As suggested in the theory of cultural identity and human development, individuals who hail from a minority ethnic group are normally disturbed about their incongruity in the society. For instance, in the movie, Jess was disturbed by the fact that her society was still entangled in old traditions where gender roles are defined and governed by Indian culture. She was disturbed by the fact that her parents did not appreciate other cultures, despite the fact that their family had live in cosmopolitan London for many years. Jess admired David Beckham because she regarded herself as part of the larger English society, and not just the Indian community. It

must be noted that cultural identity is an intermittent process. Therefore, it means that individuals in a particular group will change views about their culture and other cultures from time to time.

Conclusion

The movie *Bend it like Beckham* elucidates the racial and cultural aspects of the English and Indian societies. The movie narrates the experiences of teenage girls Jess and Jules as they stray passed their cultural expectations and venture into the unique field of professional football. Just as explained in the theory of cultural identity development, teenagers are undergoing various stages of cultural development and personal identity. Once they attain full maturity, teenagers will come to appreciate their diversity, just like their parents.