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***Bend It Like Beckham* and *Real Women Have Curves* : Constructing Identity in Multicultural Coming-of-Age Stories**

Linda C. McClain

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***BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM AND REAL WOMEN
HAVE CURVES: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN
MULTICULTURAL COMING-OF-AGE STORIES***

*Linda C. McClain**

Of course, neither the picture in which there is just an authentic nugget of selfhood, the core that is distinctively me, waiting to be dug out, nor the notion that I can simply make up any self I choose, should tempt us. We make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society . . . We do make choices, but we don't determine the options among which we choose.

– K. Anthony Appiah¹

It's just culture, that's all.

– Jess Bamram, to her football teammates
in *Bend It Like Beckham*²

INTRODUCTION

This Article looks at the coming-of-age stories in two recent films, *Bend It Like Beckham*³ and *Real Women Have Curves*,⁴ as an avenue to explore the question of constructing identity. My title also intentionally refers to a second meaning of coming-of-age—coming to helpful understandings of how best to understand questions regarding the interplay between identity and culture and the dynamic between individual and group identity. I focus on multicultural coming-of-age stories involving young women because cultural norms and practices concerning women are often at the core of what a particular commu-

* Rivkin Radler Distinguished Professor of Law, Hofstra University School of Law. This Article grew out of a presentation made at the Symposium: *Privacy and Identity: Constructing, Maintaining, and Protecting Personhood*, held on March 13, 2004 at DePaul University College of Law. Thanks to participants for helpful comments and to Jason Greis and the other editors at the *DePaul Law Review* for their professional editorial work. Thanks also to James Fleming and Tracy Higgins for constructive comments on an earlier draft. Deane Law Library reference librarian Cindie Leigh provided invaluable help with research. A summer research grant from Hofstra University supported this Article.

1. K. Anthony Appiah, *Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections*, in *COLOR CONSCIOUS: THE POLITICAL MORALITY OF RACE* 30, 96 (K. Anthony Appiah & Amy Gutmann eds., 1996).

2. *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* SC. 9 (*Jess' Other Life*) (Fox Searchlight Pictures 2002) (DVD).

3. *See generally id.*

4. *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES* (Newmarket Films 2002) (DVD).

nity deems to be essential components of its culture that must be transmitted from one generation to the next.⁵ Thus, in the ongoing debate over multiculturalism and its implications for women's equality, the "status of women in distinct cultural communities" is often at stake because "[w]omen and their bodies are the symbolic-cultural site upon which human societies inscript their moral order."⁶ I focus on the stories of adolescent females because, as legal scholar Martha Minow suggests, debates about women and culture, and about cultural assimilation versus cultural survival implicate, at their core, the place of children—the "prime targets of socialization" by families and communities.⁷

Studying the coming-of-age stories of adolescents, on the threshold of adulthood, offers a chance to see how they construct a self from, as philosopher K. Anthony Appiah's opening epigraph evokes, the "tool kit of options made available by our culture and society."⁸ In this Article, I draw on an approach to identity that recognizes the tension between freedom and determination and the interplay of choice and constraint in the construction of identity. This tension is captured in Appiah's observation that "[w]e do make choices, but we don't determine the options among which we choose."⁹

Identity, Appiah suggests, has both a collective dimension, reflecting particular group identities (some of which, for example, gender, race, and ethnicity, are ascribed), as well as more personal dimensions.¹⁰ In this Article, I consider the interplay of these dimensions in two multicultural coming-of-age stories. In reflecting upon questions of group identity, exploring the paradoxical nature of such identities is helpful. On the one hand, as Minow observes, sorting people into groups seems inescapable, and social institutions make group identities seem real, as do "long histories of enslavement, subordination, or other sustained maltreatment based on national origin, skin color, religion, and other group traits."¹¹ On the other hand, "[a]ll people are artificially reduced to one feature when typed by race, disability, or any single category," for no single trait can "do justice to an individ-

5. See generally UMA NARAYAN, *DISLOCATING CULTURES: IDENTITIES, TRADITIONS, AND THIRD-WORLD FEMINISM* (1997).

6. SEYLA BENHABIB, *THE CLAIMS OF CULTURE: EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE GLOBAL ERA* 83–84 (2002).

7. Martha Minow, *About Women, About Culture: About Them, About Us*, 129 *DAEDALUS* 125, 137 (2000).

8. Appiah, *supra* note 1, at 96.

9. *Id.*

10. *Id.* at 93.

11. MARTHA MINOW, *NOT ONLY FOR MYSELF: IDENTITY, POLITICS AND THE LAW* 20 (1997).

ual.”¹² Thus, like Appiah, Minow urges an approach to identity that recognizes that identity develops in context, and that even though “none of us have individual identities except by reference to collective social experiences, . . . all of us retain some degrees of freedom for self-invention out of the found materials of biographical and social life.”¹³ Just as Minow finds that literary stories about constructing identity help to illustrate this dynamic, I submit that cinematic renderings of individual stories hold similar potential.

In his famous essay, *The Politics of Recognition*, political philosopher Charles Taylor explains that identity is “dialogical,” that “[w]e become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and . . . of defining our identity, through our acquisition of . . . language” in its broadest sense, through interaction with others.¹⁴ I find Taylor’s notion of the dialogical construction of identity consonant with the idea that autonomy is relational, that is, that persons develop and exercise the capacity for autonomy, and thus the capacity to form and fashion their identities, in the context of relationships. Feminist scholars have been particularly helpful in articulating this notion of autonomy.¹⁵

A final useful orienting idea is that “culture” is not monolithic, homogeneous, and static, but contested, fluid, and in a continual process of reinterpretation.¹⁶ As feminist legal scholar Leti Volpp has cautioned, Western feminists examining women in other countries may assume that their culture is so powerful a force that such women lack any meaningful agency and are shaped by culture in a way that Western women are not.¹⁷ The risk of looking across boundaries and misrecognizing Third World women solely as “Other” and as victims of culture is familiar. Thus, in a famous essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, author Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote about the problem of “benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other,” contending that there was no space from which the “subaltern,” Third-World woman could speak, and be heard, by

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.* at 23.

14. Charles Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, in *MULTICULTURALISM: EXAMINING THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION* 25, 32 (Amy Gutmann ed., 1994) [hereinafter *MULTICULTURALISM*].

15. See generally *RELATIONAL AUTONOMY: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON AUTONOMY, AGENCY, AND THE SOCIAL SELF* (Catriona MacKenzie & Natalie Stoljar eds., 2000).

16. See BENHABIB, *supra* note 6, at 102–03; NARAYAN, *supra* note 5, at 1–40; Madhavi Sunder, *Cultural Dissent*, 54 *STAN. L. REV.* 495, 498 (2001).

17. See generally Leti Volpp, *Feminism Versus Multiculturalism*, 101 *COLUM. L. REV.* 1181 (2001).

Western feminists.¹⁸ Taylor and others speak of the problem of “misrecognition” that arises when dominant groups within a society fail to respect and value minority (or “subaltern”) groups within it.¹⁹

I attempt to situate the two films that I analyze within the context of this problem of misrecognition, suggesting that each film finds a way to allow the “subaltern” to speak and to shed light on the process of constructing identity in context.²⁰ Both films, arising out of the filmmakers’ experiences, aim to offer representations of particular individuals in minority groups that challenge dominant representations. They also offer aspirational visions of how such individuals might find a way to construct a hybrid identity that allows them to negotiate their place within the various groups that claim them and within the broader society. I focus, in particular, on how the heroines in these films find ways to construct their identity in context, and what sort of cultural, social, and institutional arrangements facilitate, on the one hand, and hinder, on the other, their capacity to do so.

In keeping with this Symposium’s topic, “Privacy and Identity,” I should note that, in these two coming-of-age stories, forms of privacy facilitate both heroines’ explorations of identities that depart from the ones urged by their parents. A lack of privacy at times also hinders that exploration. In each film, the heroine conceals some aspect of this alternate identity from her parents rather than face their disapproval.

In Part II, I introduce the two films, *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Real Women Have Curves*, as offering rich portrayals of the process of constructing identity in context. I preview several striking parallels between the films. Part III provides a close examination of *Bend It Like Beckham*, and focuses upon how its heroine negotiates between parental expectations and her own vision of identity while finding a way to redefine, rather than reject, her place in her family and community. I consider how the film illustrates an understanding of culture as a process, rather than simply as a constraint. Part IV offers a detailed exploration of *Real Women Have Curves*. It analyzes how the film’s heroine is able to reach a transformed understanding of herself and her place in her family.

18. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in *MARXISM AND THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURE* 271, 289, 308 (Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg eds., 1988).

19. Taylor, *supra* note 14, at 25–26.

20. On the work of Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*, as an example of “subaltern” filmmaking, see Shoba S. Rajgopal, *The Politics of Location: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Conflict in the Cinema of the South Asian Diaspora*, 27 *J. COMM. INQUIRY* 49, 50–51 (2003).

II. FROM THE PARTICULAR TO THE UNIVERSAL

In this Part, I explore parallels between the coming-of-age stories told in two recent films, *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Real Women Have Curves*. Both of these films offer rich portrayals of the complex process of constructing identity in context. They approach identity less as fixed or controlled by rigid scripts, but instead, to use Minow's helpful formulation, more as "a process of negotiation through social relationships of power and culture."²¹ Drawn from the life experiences of the directors and screenwriters who made them, these two films, under the guise of coming-of-age stories, represent the challenging and delicate negotiation of gender, ethnicity, and cultural and religious traditions. Both films tell stories about young women located in a particular community and in a particular cultural, ethnic, and religious context. In so doing, these films illuminate more universal themes about families, adolescence, self-acceptance, love, and other dimensions of human experience.²²

The location of *Bend It Like Beckham*, the coming-of-age story of Jessminder (Jess) Bamram, a first-generation British-Indian teenage female, is Hounslow, an area of London, near Heathrow airport, where many Asian immigrants settled.²³ Yet, the film is a leading example of a successful "bid[] for the mainstream" by black and Asian filmmakers in Britain. It was heralded, in Britain, as a highly successful *British* film, and its upbeat theme of "girl power" also made it widely appealing in the United States.²⁴ *Real Women Have Curves* is set in Boyle Heights, a Mexican-American neighborhood in Los Angeles, and tells the story of Ana Garcia, a first-generation Mexican-American teenage daughter of immigrant parents.²⁵ Ana is caught in a conflict-filled relationship with her domineering mother and torn between her ambition to go to college and her parents' insistence that she delay college and work in her sister's dress factory. Through examining how Ana negotiates these struggles, the film speaks more universally about the tension between loyalty to self and to family, as well as to the theme its title reflects—learning to accept oneself and be com-

21. MINOW, *supra* note 11, at 31.

22. Minow observes: "One paradox of identity is that individual efforts to express unique experiences, based on membership in oppressed groups, resonate with broad audiences as universal, familiar tales." *Id.* at 23.

23. BARBARA KORTE & CLAUDIA STERNBERG, *BIDDING FOR THE MAINSTREAM?: BLACK AND ASIAN BRITISH FILM SINCE THE 1990s*, at 171 (2004).

24. *See id.* at 8–9, 169–70, 175–77. *See also* Interview by Cynthia Fuchs, PopMatters Film and TV Editor, with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*, PopMatters Film Interview, Apr. 3, 2003, at <http://www.popmatters.com/film/interviews/chadha-gurinder-03403.shtml>.

25. *See generally* REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES.

fortable with one's body despite familial and societal messages that thinness equals beauty.

In both films, billed as comedies and "crowd-pleasers,"²⁶ there are "feel good" or happy endings: The heroines, Jess and Ana, find a way to maintain connections with family and ethnic and/or religious groups and to fashion an identity in keeping with their visions of the good life for them. Gurinder Chadha, director of *Bend It Like Beckham*, explains the double meaning of her film's title:

[A]s an athlete you simply have to admire Beckham's ability to defy gravity and bend the ball in the way that he does. . . . [T]he title also works as an excellent metaphor for the film as the girls 'bend' the rules rather than 'break' them so they can get what they want.²⁷

Each film treats its heroine as an agent actively constructing identity, rather than someone whose identity is easily explained, or rather, misread, by the sum of the characteristics, or social markers, attributed to her. In examining each film, I focus on how these adolescents accomplish the task of constructing identity in context. For example, what personal, familial, cultural, and institutional factors help and hinder this task? How do forms of privacy aid this task?

At the outset, several striking parallels between the films warrant mention. First, both films touch upon the universal theme of a conflict between parents' expectations of their children, rooted in cultural definitions, and childrens' own desires.²⁸ But, in both films, it is the heroines' mothers, more strongly than their fathers, who resist their daughters' visions for their futures because it conflicts with their mothers' notions of a young woman's proper role as wife and mother. Ultimately, in each case, it is the father who comes to accept and give his blessing to his daughter's choice. Moreover, other men in the her-

26. *Id.* (the front cover of the DVD version quotes a *New York Times*' blurb: "A crowd-pleaser."). See also *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* (the back cover of the DVD version describes the film as "[h]ailed as the year's must-see crowd pleaser"). As indicated on the DVD cover, *Real Women Have Curves* also won the Dramatic Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2002. See *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES*.

27. Interview by Anupama Gopalakrishnan, with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*, "A British Indian Filmmaker Scores a Goal!," (interview date not given), at <http://www.viaindia.com/articles/archives/chadha.htm> (last visited Jan. 3, 2005).

28. As Chadha comments on this theme in *Bend It Like Beckham*:

It's a family film, and most families have some kind of cultural definition whereby parents have certain expectations of their children, and children want to do things that are perhaps not what their parents expect them to do. This is not an exclusively Indian phenomenon, it can be found in every culture—black, white, brown, whatever.

KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 245 (interview with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*).

oines' families—and some outside their immediate communities—help them find and follow this alternative path.²⁹

Second, in each film, the heroine has an older sister whose view about a good life is consistent with parental expectations and cultural traditions. These older sisters serve as a foil for the heroine's own, different vision of her life. In each case, the younger sister's loyalty to her family is put to the test when the older sister's needs trigger a conflict between family demands and the younger daughter's desired path for herself. In the case of Jess, helping to prepare for her sister Pinky's wedding conflicts with football (that is, soccer) practice and tournaments.³⁰ For Ana, working in her sister's dress factory takes time away from Ana writing her college application and, in her parents' view, working for her sister should delay Ana from going to college.³¹ The combination of these mother-daughter and sister-sister conflicts, and the supportive role played by the men in these films, usefully illustrate that speaking of men oppressing women and denying their equality by passing down patriarchal culture may obscure the ways in which women themselves invest in and seek to pass on such traditions. Further, it may illustrate that, in fact, some men may be able to accept their daughters' departure from tradition.

Third, in each film, the heroine explores a romantic attachment to a young man that crosses ethnic and cultural lines and contributes to her revised self-understanding.³² However, these relationships are not the central plot of the films. Indeed, both films offer examples of what feminist literary scholars call "writing beyond the ending," that is, imagining a trajectory for young women other than the triumph of making a good match by marrying well.³³ A useful contrast in this regard is another "feel good" movie about culture and identity, the enormously popular *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.³⁴ The central story, as the title suggests, is about how a Greek-American woman, witty, but a bit dowdy, transforms herself, asserts some independence from her parents, and finds a husband.³⁵ Concededly, along the way, she takes steps to leave the family restaurant and educate herself for a different

29. See discussion *infra* Parts III.D, IV.A & D (analyzing the roles of parents and other family members).

30. See discussion *infra* Part III.D.

31. See discussion *infra* Part IV.A.

32. See discussion *infra* Parts III.D, IV.A & D.

33. See generally RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS, *WRITING BEYOND THE ENDING: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS* (Susan Gubar & Joan Hoff-Wilson eds., 1985).

34. See generally *MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING* (Playtone 2002) (DVD).

35. *Id.*

job.³⁶ Moreover, in contrast to the films under study here, she does so with the support, rather than the opposition, of her mother.³⁷ The father is the family patriarch, the head, softened, in the end, by his wife's exercise of the power behind the throne. As she explains to her daughter: "[T]he husband is the head of the family, but the wife is the neck,"—the one who moves the head.³⁸ Rather than rejecting cultural tradition, the movie celebrates it. True, the heroine's intended is not Greek, but he happily immerses himself in her family's cultural traditions (his affluent Anglican parents are featured as pallid and bland compared to her vibrant family) and converts to the Greek Orthodox religion, allowing them to marry in a Greek Orthodox church.³⁹ In the end, the heroine, her husband, and their child live next door to her parents in a home that is her parents' wedding gift—in contrast to Ana and Jess separating from their parents to go away to college.⁴⁰

A fourth parallel between Ana's and Jess's stories is that people outside of their families and immediate communities are catalysts to each of them for expanding their vision of what is possible for themselves by bringing them into contact with institutional resources that can help them achieve their goals. However, the heroines also receive support for these visions from some people within their own families and communities. Finally, what takes each heroine away from her family and sets her on an alternative path is a full scholarship at a university in the United States: Jess will travel from London to the University of Santa Clara, in California; Ana will leave Los Angeles for Columbia University, in New York.⁴¹ But, in the end, the heroines' demonstrated loyalty to their families—even when it seems to be at the expense of their own dreams—helps their family members to support them in this journey away from their parents to pursue their own dreams.⁴²

Finally, in both films, important forms of personal privacy facilitate the process of negotiating identity. In *Bend It Like Beckham*, spatial privacy, in the sense of a bedroom of one's own, affords Jess a place to daydream about achieving fame as a football player. Privacy, in the

36. *Id.*

37. *Id.*

38. *Id.* sc. 3 (*Your Own Private Greek Statue*).

39. *Id.* sc. 10 (*Becoming Greek*).

40. Compare MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING sc. 17 (*The Wedding Reception*), with BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 31 (*Off to America*), and REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 12 (*All the Way to New York*).

41. See discussion *infra* Parts III.D and IV.C.

42. See discussion *infra* Parts III.D and IV.E.

form of concealment, also plays a role: Jess keeps her football playing a secret from her family and, after her parents voice their disapproval, she continues to play but attempts to conceal this from them.⁴³ Privacy as concealment or secrecy also plays a role in *Real Women Have Curves*. When Ana pursues a romantic relationship with a white, non-Hispanic high school classmate, she conceals it from her parents with the cooperation of her loving grandfather. In contrast, Ana's mother's constant insults about Ana's weight, her condemnations of Ana's exploration of her sexuality, and her demands for Ana's attention intrude on Ana's privacy, both spatially and metaphorically.⁴⁴

III. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM

Bend It Like Beckham playfully shows how people expect to be able to judge each other's identity based on certain social markers, such as gender and ethnicity, and also how such judgments lead to misreadings. What does it mean, for example, to be an Indian girl, a "good girl," as Jess's mother puts it,⁴⁵ or, as her father puts it, to behave "like a proper woman?"⁴⁶ The film explores how others misread of Jess, as well as how Jess resists efforts by her parents, especially her mother, and her sister to mold her to fit their expectations of a good Indian girl, respectful daughter, and loyal sister. Given these expectations, how will Jess bend, rather than break, traditions and hold fast to her own vision while keeping—redefining, rather than rejecting—her place in her family and community?

Director Gurinder Chadha explains that Jess's coming-of-age story represents "the nuts and bolts of integration" and the experience of being part of a "diasporic culture."⁴⁷ One aspect of such integration is the process of being a second or third-generation Indian in London and the sort of journey that persons in diasporic cultures make. The proximity of the Bamram's neighborhood to Heathrow airport, the fact that Jess's father and sister work at Heathrow, and the role of the airport in taking Jess away from her family, reinforce this journey.⁴⁸ In capturing aspects of the Indian diasporic experience, Chadha believes that this experience also can represent the increasingly common

43. See discussion *infra* Part III.B.

44. See discussion *infra* Part IV.A and IV.D.

45. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 10 (*A Good Girl*).

46. *Id.* sc. 8 (*No More Football*).

47. Fuchs, *supra* note 24.

48. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 171 n.53. "Heathrow is more than a location. It suggests Britain's connection to the world outside: the places where migrants have come from, but also a places [sic] where one might go to fulfill dreams that cannot be realized in Britain." *Id.*

experience of diaspora—living in large, diverse cities, in which groups, who have moved from place to place, learn to coexist.⁴⁹ Another aspect of integration explored in the film is how South Asian women balance or juggle culture, gender, parental expectations, and sexuality all at once.⁵⁰ Chadha sought to record her own community's history from her perspective—"Asian, British, Punjabi, Londoner, female, daughter"—and was shocked, when the film was finished, at how "English" it was.⁵¹

Bend It Like Beckham begins by taking viewers into Jess's private world—her daydream of becoming a famous football player.⁵² Sportscasters on a British television program praise David Beckham for dominating the game of football and ponder the "big question" of which of his teammates will provide the support he needs.⁵³ A scene from the football match fills the screen: Beckham passes to the film's heroine, Jess Bamram, who scores the winning goal and exults in the praise of Beckham and her teammates. The sportscasters declare that Jess is the "answer to England's prayers," the "missing piece of the jigsaw" to return England to its past glory.⁵⁴ They turn to Jess's mother, a guest on the show, ask her if she is proud of her daughter. Jess's mother answers in the negative, criticizing Jess for "running around" with all the male football players, "showing her bare legs" to viewers, and "bringing shame on the family."⁵⁵ She tells the sportscasters that they should not be encouraging her, and then, turning to the camera, says: "Jessminder, you get back home now."⁵⁶ With this comment, Jess's daydream in front of the television abruptly ends as her mother enters Jess's bedroom, which is dominated by a huge poster of Beckham (to which Jess frequently speaks) and other football memorabilia. Her mother scolds her that her sister, Pinky, is get-

49. *Id.* at 247. See also Fuchs, *supra* note 24.

50. See Fuchs, *supra* note 24. See also Interview by Soha Irani & Rajasree Das, Bibi Magazine, with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*, "Gurinder Chadha" (interview date not given), at http://www.bibimagazine.com/MAR_MM_Gurinder%20Chadha.asp (last visited Jan. 3, 2005).

51. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 250 (Interview with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*).

52. The description of the scenes from *Bend It Like Beckham* in the text that follows comes, unless otherwise indicated, from my own viewings of the film in the theater and on DVD. I refer to specific scenes by the "Scene Selection" numbers and titles used in the DVD version. In general, except when quoting dialogue, I provide an initial citation, at the beginning of a paragraph, to the scene described in the rest of the paragraph. A good synopsis of the film's plot appears in KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 169–77.

53. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 1 (*Dreams of Glory*).

54. *Id.*

55. *Id.*

56. *Id.*

ting married, but Jess, instead of helping, is watching “this skinhead boy” (Beckham) on television.⁵⁷ When her mother leaves, Jess mutters that she is “sick of this wedding and it hasn’t even started.”⁵⁸

This first scene of Jess’s daydream, and her mother’s imagined and real disapproval of her passion for football, foreshadows that Jess’s mother may pose a formidable obstacle to Jess achieving her daydream in real life. It also distances Jess from her parents’ expectations of her. Jess’s room bears her own stamp. In contrast to the family’s living room, which is dominated by a large picture of a Sikh religious figure, a large poster of Beckham’s face dominates Jess’s room. An important form of privacy—having personal space, a room of one’s own—helps Jess to nurture aspects of her identity—her desires and dreams—that set her apart from her parents. As philosopher Iris Marion Young comments on the value of privacy as personal space: “My things and my dwelling space support and display *who I am*.”⁵⁹

As the film unfolds, it also establishes the differences between Jess’s and her older sister’s respective visions of the good life. Jess and Pinky shop for a dress for Pinky’s engagement party, but it is clear that Jess does not share her sister’s interest in make-up, clothes, and fashion, or her enthusiasm for her upcoming wedding.⁶⁰ After they shop, Jess plays football in the park with her male friend Tony and other Indian teenage boys.⁶¹

The contrasts drawn between Jess and her older sister reinforce the point that cultural location or social markers, such as ethnicity, migration, or religion—collective dimensions of identity—do not wholly determine identity or “life-scripts,” but that identity includes room for more personal dimensions.⁶² Neither daughter is a carbon copy of her parents. Indeed, up to this point, their parents seem to have been relatively lenient in allowing both Pinky and Jess the freedom to develop their interests and talents. Because the film begins with Jess as an adolescent, it does not explain the origins of her passion for football. But one facilitating factor may have been her freedom, as a child, to play football in the park with her male friends. It is on the threshold of her transition to young adulthood that Jess’s unconven-

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.*

59. Iris Marion Young, *A Room of One’s Own: Old Age, Extended Care, and Privacy*, in *PRIVACIES: PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATIONS* 168, 170 (Beate Rossler ed., 2004).

60. *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* sc. 2 (*Shopping with Pinky*).

61. *Id.* sc. 3 (*A Female Beckham*).

62. K. Anthony Appiah, *Identity, Authenticity, Survival*, in *MULTICULTURALISM*, *supra* note 14, at 149, 159–60.

tional passion will pose a sharper conflict with her parents and call for tighter policing of gender conventions.⁶³

Pinky is not easily labeled as a “good Indian girl,” but constructs an identity that incorporates, yet also resists, religious and cultural traditions, as well as gender conventions. She will have a traditional Sikh wedding ceremony and reception and her family will throw large pre-wedding parties.⁶⁴ But she will marry the man *she* has chosen—a “love match”—rather than have an arranged marriage.⁶⁵ She has some independence from her parents; she works at Heathrow Airport, wears western-style clothing, has a car, and sneaks away during work to have premarital sex with her fiancé in a car.⁶⁶ And Pinky tartly, but out of earshot, criticizes the appearance and piety of various Indian women of her parents’ generation.⁶⁷

Even the older, more traditional Indian women depicted in the film blend personal and collective dimensions of identity. They find ways to appropriate select aspects of Western culture, especially technology.⁶⁸ Chadha humorously illustrates this phenomenon. At Pinky’s engagement party in the Bamram home, a row of elderly Indian women in saris sit together; when a cell phone rings, all the women whip out their cell phones from their purses.⁶⁹

In the film, food, and particularly women preparing traditional Punjabi dishes, is a primary symbol of continuity of culture. Both Pinky and Jess groan when their mother announces that she will prepare certain Punjabi dishes for the party.⁷⁰ Teaching Jess how to cook is a central way that her mother asserts her own vision of what Jess should learn in order to prepare her to be a good Indian girl and a good wife. Cooking is a vital form of cultural reproduction that she, as a mother, feels is imperative to undertake. Thus, feminist philosopher Uma Narayan observes that, “both in Indian communities in India and in Indian diasporic communities,” certain norms and practices, such as cooking specific dishes, “get singled out as emblematic of ‘our culture and way of life,’” and that many of these practices, such as cooking,

63. A conversation with Professor Tracy Higgins, Fordham University School of Law, on February 10, 2005, helped focus my attention on this point.

64. See, e.g., BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 4 (*The Engagement Party*), sc. 26 (*Wedding Day*).

65. *Id.* sc. 9 (*Jess’ Other Life*).

66. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 172.

67. For example, when Jess and Pinky see Jess’s best friend Tony and his mother, an older Indian woman, approaching them on the street, Pinky, out of earshot, insults Tony’s mother’s appearance, but politely returns her pious greeting and best wishes when they meet. See BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 2 (*Shopping with Pinky*).

68. For more information on selective appropriation, see NARAYAN, *supra* note 5, at 21–31.

69. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 4 (*The Engagement Party*).

70. *Id.* sc. 2 (*Shopping with Pinky*).

have to do with women.⁷¹ Later, when her mom opposes Jess playing on a girls' football team, her ground for opposition reveals this link: "What family will want a daughter-in-law who can run around kicking football all day but can't make round chapatis?"⁷²

The marketing strategy of *Bend It Like Beckham* played on this conflict between cooking, as a primary signifier of conforming with cultural tradition and parental expectations, and playing football, as evidenced by the film poster's query: "Who wants to cook Aloo Gobi when you can bend a ball like Beckham?"⁷³ But this query also highlights the film's specific location as a coming-of-age story of an Indian girl. In this poster, "it is not cooking as a universally 'feminine' occupation which is subordinated to playing football like the star of the English national team, but cooking as part of a specific *Asian* cultural context."⁷⁴ The poster does not simply flag a conflict between football and femininity, but a conflict "between playing football and an *Asian* notion of traditional femininity."⁷⁵

The film's use of cooking as a focal point for tension between Jess's passion for football and her mother's conception of femininity also derives from Chadha's own childhood experiences and incipient feminism. As stated in interviews, Chadha, as a girl, refused to learn to cook and resented the pattern that women cooked and served the men who sat at the table.⁷⁶ She told her own mother that cooking was oppressive and sexist.⁷⁷ At the same time, in promoting the film, Chadha plays with this resistance by including on the DVD version a recipe for aloo gobi and a special feature of her cooking it with her female relatives.⁷⁸

A. *Jess's Struggles Against Gender Conventions as Universal:
Her Friendship with Jules*

Notwithstanding the poster's query, the broad appeal of *Bend It Like Beckham* as a "girl power" movie relates to its ability to make the struggle between football and femininity one that not only has a

71. NARAYAN, *supra* note 5, at 175.

72. *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* sc. 8 (*No More Football*).

73. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 170.

74. *Id.*

75. *Id.* at 170–71.

76. Paul Fischer, *Gurinder Chadha—Success at Last as Beckham Finally Hits U.S.*, *FILM MONTHLY* (posted Mar. 13, 2003), at <http://www.filmmonthly.com/Profiles/Articles/GChadha/GChadha.html>.

77. *Id.*

78. *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* (the DVD version included the following "Bonus Features": "Aloo Gobi Recipe" and "Who Wants to Cook Aloo Gobi?", hosted by Director Chadha and "The Aunties").

specific cultural location, but also has a more universal referent. The film accomplishes this through exploring the parallels in and differences between the lives of Jess and her friend Jules, a white, tall, slender, blonde Anglo girl who plays football and idolizes Mia Hamm, and will be a catalyst in helping Jess realize her daydream. Both Jess and Jules have mothers who have been overdrawn for comic effect to the point of caricature, and whose conventional notions of femininity drive their opposition to their daughters' playing football.⁷⁹ And they both have fathers who are more supportive than their mothers (in Jess's case, ultimately, not initially) of their playing football.⁸⁰ Through the friendship off and on the field between Jess and Jules, the film "bids for the mainstream" by making diversity a part of mainstream cultural representation; it integrates "white and Asian characters" who interact extensively and share "interests and desires."⁸¹ Further, "[b]oth leading female characters have the same dream [of playing football professionally] and manage to realise this dream against reservations based on gender; it is only tougher for the Asian girl."⁸²

Jess's relationship with Jules is a catalyst that will convert Jess's fantasy into an actual possible life path. When they meet, Jess is playing football in the park with Tony, her closest friend, and a group of other boys.⁸³ The only girl in the group, she is also a standout player. Complimenting Jess on her skill, Jules, who has watched her play in the park on prior occasions, invites her to join a team of female players, the Hounslow Harriers. This encounter in a public park with a stranger, someone outside of her immediate community, brings Jess into contact with an opportunity she never knew existed—a chance to play football on a team. The film, however, clarifies that this opportunity for girls is of recent vintage. Jess learns that "there was nothing here for us girls" until Joe, the Harriers's coach, injured his knee and Jules pestered him to start a girls' team.⁸⁴

The film highlights how Jess and Jules, despite their different backgrounds, share a passion for football and have more in common with each other than with other girls in their respective peer groups. Thus,

79. See KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 172.

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.* at 171.

82. *Id.* In this respect, the film's feminist stance might appear to be similar to Susan Moller Okin's argument that the condition of Third-World women is similar to that of Western women, but only more so. See generally, e.g., Susan Moller Okin, *Gender Inequality and Cultural Differences*, 22 POL. THEORY 5 (1994).

83. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 5 (*Jules' Offer*).

84. *Id.* sc. 6 (*The Tryout*).

a group of Indian girls who watch Jess and her male friends play soccer admire the friends' bodies and discuss them with a frank sexual interest that makes Jess uncomfortable.⁸⁵ Similarly, at one of Jess's and Jules's games, Tony's willingness to take female athletes seriously, viewing them as football players rather than as sexual objects, sets him apart from his male Indian peers and allies him more with the Harriers' white, Irish coach, Joe.⁸⁶

Joe is initially skeptical about Jess but soon sees her talent and invites her to join the team.⁸⁷ After the successful tryout, he tells her that he never met an Indian girl who liked football. He is another catalyst who helps Jess turn her daydream into a viable life path. From Jules, who wants to play football professionally, Jess learns that there are professional womens' teams in America. Prior to this point in the film, despite Jess's daydreams, her actual goal, like Tony's, was to get high enough grades to attend university.⁸⁸ Joe spends extra time coaching both Jess and Jules, apparently his most talented players.⁸⁹ Later, he brings an American scout to watch them play—an event that could open the door to both Jules and Jess obtaining college scholarships and playing professionally.⁹⁰

Family, for both Jess and (to a lesser extent) Jules, initially poses an obstacle to their dreams. After her successful tryout, Jess tells her Beckham poster about the excitement of playing on a real field and how lucky Jules is to have parents who “must really support” her to let her go to America to play—when she cannot even tell her parents about the Harriers.⁹¹ She does not know that Jules also struggles against her mother's view that femininity and football do not mix. Jules's mother warns her that “no boy's going to want to go out with a girl that has bigger muscles than him” and that “there is a reason why Sporty Spice is the only one of them without a fellow.”⁹² Her mother's notions of femininity intrude on Jules's physical privacy. For example, in the mother's clothing shop, she touches Jules's breasts to show her how various frilly and inflatable bras will give her more of a shape, and groans when Jules favors the sports bra.⁹³ By contrast, her father, athletic and a sports fan, supports Jules, telling his wife that he

85. *Id.* sc. 5 (*Jules' Offer*).

86. *Id.* sc. 21 (*Out of Order*).

87. *Id.* sc. 6 (*The Tryout*).

88. *Id.* sc. 2 (*Shopping with Pinky*).

89. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 7 (*Welcome to the Harriers*), sc. 9 (*Jess' Other Life*).

90. *Id.* sc. 28 (*The Winning Goal*).

91. *Id.* sc. 6 (*The Tryout*).

92. *Id.*

93. *Id.* sc. 2 (*Shopping with Pinky*).

is “over the moon” if Jules prefers playing football to “chasing boys.”⁹⁴ Thus, Jess and Jules are similarly, but also differently, situated. Jules plays with her father’s active support and despite her mother’s disapproval. Jess fears that both her parents will disapprove, and thus conceals her playing from them as long as she can. Notably, whatever the constraints of culture on Jess, they do not keep her from asserting her agency by secretly defying her parents’ expectations of her.

The developing professional and personal relationship between Jess and her coach, Joe, also allows Chadha to explore similarities and differences between Jess, an Indian girl, and Joe, who is Irish, and how each shapes the other’s sense of identity. To play with the Harriers, for example, Jess must wear a uniform with shorts that reveals her legs.⁹⁵ Given Jess’s daydream, in which her mother scolds her for shaming the family by showing her legs to strangers, the viewer might imagine that Jess’s reluctance to wear shorts stems from cultural norms of female modesty. But when Joe learns that the cause is not wanting to show a large burn scar on her leg, he overcomes Jess’s reluctance by showing his own scar from his knee injuries and surgeries and admonishes her that at least her scar does not affect (as his does) her game. Later in the film, Joe’s experience with anti-Irish prejudice allows him to relate to Jess’s outrage when an opponent utters a racial epithet.⁹⁶ Joe also reveals to Jess his own parental conflict; his own physical injuries, he believes, resulted from his father having high expectations and pushing him too hard, leading him to play injured.⁹⁷ They are now estranged, and Joe assumes his father would be ashamed to learn he was coaching a girls’ team.⁹⁸ Jess challenges his assumption, and urges him to see his father, who she claims should be proud of Joe’s coaching and what he has given the players. Just as Joe comes to appreciate that Jess’s ties to her family are valuable and that she cannot just sever them, like he has, her challenge is the catalyst that leads him to seek reconciliation with his father.⁹⁹

B. *Jess’s Secret Life*

How does Jess reconcile her desire to play football and her parents’ expectations? For much of the film, her strategy is to keep football

94. *Id.* sc. 6 (*The Tryout*).

95. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 7 (*Welcome to the Harriers*).

96. *Id.* sc. 21 (*Out of Order*).

97. *Id.* sc. 11 (*Two Pairs of Shoes*).

98. *Id.* sc. 18 (*Unhappy Homecoming*).

99. *Id.* sc. 31 (*Off to America*).

private, but such concealment continually fails. First, on her way home from practice, and still in uniform, she plays in the park with her male friends, and is observed by her mother, just as one of her friends puts Jess over his shoulder.¹⁰⁰ This leads to the first family confrontation over football. Her mother scolds Jess for showing her scar and having a boy's hands on her body. When Jess explains that she is on a team, is "really good" at football, and her coach thinks she can "go far," her mother tells her she has played enough.¹⁰¹ Playing football, rather than learning how to cook, will harm Jess's chance of a successful marriage. Her mother protests that while she was married at Jess's age, Jess does not even know how to cook and must learn how to make a full Punjabi dinner. In Jess's mother's view, football is bound to bring shame upon the family. Jess's father, at this stage, supports her mother, stating: "You must start behaving like a proper woman."¹⁰² But even as her mother teaches her to cook, Jess is distracted, playing with the cabbage as though it is a football.¹⁰³

Jess will not let go of the chance to play on the team, and thus continues her double life, using the alibi of a summer job (Jules's suggestion) or other ruses to explain her absences from home for practices and meets.¹⁰⁴ To Tony, Jess protests this need for secrecy: "Why should I have to lie? It's not like I'm sleeping around with anyone."¹⁰⁵ She also resists her mother's priorities, telling Tony that while anyone can cook aloo gobi, "not every one can bend a ball like Beckham."¹⁰⁶ Jules tells Jess that her mother never wanted her to play, but she does anyway, and counsels Jess not to take "no" for an answer, especially because an American scout is coming.¹⁰⁷ But Jules fails to see that Jess's situation is different, since Jules's father supports her playing.

When Jess's sister Pinky discovers that Jess has a secret life, her reactions to Jess's playing football sharpen the differences between them.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, their conversation highlights that each, in her own way, is constructing an identity at odds with parental ideals. Aghast that Jess is merely sneaking off to play football, rather than lying to their parents to do "something good," like have premarital sex, Pinky calls Jess "quite pretty," and urges her to use make-up and

100. *Id.* sc. 8 (*No More Football*).

101. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 8 (*No More Football*).

102. *Id.*

103. *Id.* sc. 9 (*Jess' Other Life*).

104. *Id.*

105. *Id.* sc. 8 (*No More Football*).

106. *Id.*

107. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 8 (*No More Football*).

108. *Id.* sc. 10 (*A Good Girl*).

fix her hair.¹⁰⁹ Overhearing Pinky's beauty tips, their mother defends Jess, telling Pinky that she never wore make-up until she was married, and that Jess is a "good girl now" because she helps her mother with domestic tasks and has cooked a "lovely aloo gobi."¹¹⁰ Here, it is Jess, rather than Pinky (who cultivates sexiness), who is cast in the role of the good girl, the one most like her mother.

C. *Cultural Miscues: Misreading Identities*

Through Jess's encounters with her teammates and with other persons outside her immediate community, *Bend It Like Beckham* illustrates that Jess is misread by others based on her social marker as an Indian girl. These encounters also reveal how Jess locates herself in her own culture and among those around her. For example, when Jess explains to her teammates that she conceals her football playing from her parents because "Indian girls aren't supposed to play football," one teammate comments, "It's a bit backward, isn't it?"¹¹¹ But Jules counters: "It [isn't] just an Indian thing, is it? How many people come out to support us?"¹¹² With this comment, Jules makes a more general point about the lack of support, regardless of ethnicity or culture, that she and the rest of her teammates face because they play on a girls team. When Jess discovers their assumption that Indian girls must have arranged marriages, she explains that, like her sister Pinky, Indian girls have the freedom to marry who they choose, but admits that freedom is limited. For example, Jess cannot marry a white, black, or Muslim man, and will probably have to marry an Indian. "I don't know how you Indian girls put up with it," declares a teammate.¹¹³ Jess replies: "It's just culture, that's all," and claims that this approach to marriage is better than sleeping around with boys one does not end up marrying.¹¹⁴ In this exchange, Jess seems to reduce culture's power as a determining force, while also voicing a view that her own community's sexual norms may be superior to those she assumes her Western teammates follow. However, that some Indian girls also may follow the very sexual norms Jess condemns is intimated in her critical reaction to the sexual banter of Pinky's friends as they ogle Jess's male friends who play football with bare chests.¹¹⁵

109. *Id.*

110. *Id.*

111. *Id.* sc. 9 (*Jess' Other Life*).

112. *Id.*

113. *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* sc. 9 (*Jess' Other Life*).

114. *Id.*

115. *Id.* sc. 5 (*Jules' Offer*).

The most comical misreadings of what it means to be an “Indian girl” are offered by Jules’s mother. Upon meeting Jess, she immediately focuses on her name not sounding “Indian.”¹¹⁶ When Jess explains that her full name is Jessminder, Jules’s mother engages in several misreadings based on Jess being Indian: “Well, Jessminder,” she begins, “I’ll bet your room at home doesn’t look like this,” that is, filled with pictures of big, “butch women” like Mia Hamm and the other female football stars Jules idolizes.¹¹⁷ She calls Jess lucky because her parents will soon fix her up with a handsome young doctor—reflecting her associations of being Indian both with arranged marriages and with the profession of doctor. Finally, oblivious to these misreadings, she expresses the hope that Jess can teach Jules “a bit about your culture, including respect for elders and the like.”¹¹⁸ Of course, Jess’s secret life, in defiance of her parents’ wishes, seems in flat contradiction to such “respect.”

An embarrassed Jules quashes her mother’s hopes by announcing that Jess is “a footballer . . . on the team with me.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, that day, Jules loaned Jess one of her mother’s frilly pairs of shoes to wear at Pinky’s wedding so Jess could use the money she has been given for dress shoes to buy proper football shoes instead. As they admire Jess’s new football shoes, Jules shows Jess a video of women’s professional soccer on Women’s United Soccer Association (WUSA) soccer, sighing, “we don’t have anything like that over here.”¹²⁰

Misreadings by Indian characters in the film also occur. Pinky’s future in-laws call off their son’s engagement to Pinky after they misinterpret Jules and Jess hugging at a bus stop, which they mistakenly believe is Jess kissing a white boy on a public street corner; they tell the Bamrams that “children are a map of their parents.”¹²¹ Jess’s parents believe it is just a pretext because the future in-laws feel superior to the Bamrams. Nonetheless, when Jess explains to her parents that it was Jules, her mother laments: “Sometimes these English girls have such short hair, you just can’t tell.”¹²²

This misreading has dramatic consequences for Jess as well as for Pinky. Angry that Jess is the cause or the end of her engagement, Pinky reveals to their parents that Jess is still sneaking off to play foot-

116. *Id.* sc. 12 (*In Jules’ Room*).

117. *Id.*

118. *Id.* In a later meeting, Jules’s mother tells Jess: “Do you know, I cooked a lovely curry the other day.” *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* sc. 19 (*Betrayed*).

119. *Id.* sc. 12 (*In Jules’ Room*).

120. *Id.*

121. *Id.* sc. 13 (*The Wedding’s Off*).

122. *Id.*

ball.¹²³ Sitting in their living room, their mother asks their father why God has given them two deceitful daughters (it turns out that the mother has known about Pinky's secret sexual encounters with her fiancé). Here, as in a later scene in which the parents discover Jess is still playing football, her parents seem to ponder whether their prior leniency was a mistake.¹²⁴ This scene highlights that they, as well as their daughters, have had to negotiate their own stance with respect to cultural preservation versus assimilation.

When Jess stops going to practice, and Joe learns that Jess did not tell her parents she was playing football, he visits the Bamram home and apologizes for letting her play without their consent.¹²⁵ When he tells them Jess has "tremendous potential," and urges them to let her play, her father asserts his authority, responding: "I think we know better our daughter's potential."¹²⁶ When Jess protests that it is an honor to play on the team, her mother counters with the honor of showing respect for elders. Significantly, her father reveals a reason, other than the conflict between football and femininity, for his disapproval—his own experience of discrimination. Although he was a highly skilled athlete as a teenager in Nairobi, playing on a team that won a championship, when he came to Britain he was not allowed to play on teams and lamented that "those bloody Gaudis [Anglos] in their clubhouses made fun of my turban and sent me off packing."¹²⁷ He observes, "none of our boys are in any of the football leagues. You think they will let our girls?"¹²⁸ Over Jess's protests that "[i]t's all changing now," he tells Joe that he does not want to raise Jess's hopes, only to have her disappointed like he was.¹²⁹ After this encounter, Joe shows sympathy for what Jess is up against, but counsels her: "Your parents don't always know what's best for you."¹³⁰

Jess's and her father's different experiences with sports teams in Britain suggest progress toward a more integrated society and less prejudice against members of groups based on characteristics like immigration status and ethnicity. Through Jess's father, Chadha "depicts the bitter memories of the older generation of South Asian immigrants who had suffered from the impact of an overt racism."¹³¹ Jess's

123. *Id.*

124. For the later scene, see BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 18 (*Unhappy Homecoming*).

125. *Id.* sc. 14 (*Joe's Visit*).

126. *Id.*

127. *Id.*

128. *Id.*

129. *Id.*

130. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 14 (*Joe's Visit*).

131. Rajgopal, *supra* note 20, at 53.

father's experience, which shapes how he interprets the world, seems representative of the "Paki-bashing" and discrimination experienced by many Indian immigrants who came to England from former British East African colonies, after postcolonial political upheavals.¹³² Jess, by contrast, plays on an integrated team with whites, blacks (a black girl is the team's captain), and Asians, and is warmly accepted by her teammates.

The problem of racism and "Paki-bashing," however, proves not to be a thing of the past, as Jess learns in a match.¹³³ As fate would have it, unbeknownst to Jess, this is the first match her father attends. As he watches her, he is filled with pride and joins the fans in clapping for her team. But Jess is fouled by a white player from the opposing team who rips Jess's shirt and calls her a "Paki."¹³⁴ When Jess angrily starts to fight with the player, the referee removes Jess, but not the other player, from the game.¹³⁵ Her father shakes his head, presumably because this incident confirms his fears that things have not changed. When Joe, after the game, reprimands Jess for overreacting, Jess retorts: "She called me a 'Paki,' but I guess you wouldn't understand what that feels like, would you?"¹³⁶ Joe replies, "Jess, I'm Irish. Of course I understand what that feels like," and comforts her as her father finds them hugging.¹³⁷

Through this exchange between Jess and Joe, the filmmaker brings together persons from different ethnic groups who share an experience of being subjected to ethnic slurs and prejudice. Moreover, Jess's reaction on the field to the racial epithet suggests that her approach to such prejudice is to challenge it, fight against it, and reject the negative identity that ethnic slurs proffer. Unlike her father's experience of pervasive discrimination, that led him to stop playing, Jess does not let this incident stop her.

D. Conflicting Loyalties, Transgressive Desires, and Jess's "Happy Ending(s)"

Two crises intensify Jess's struggles to reconcile her two lives, either by abandoning football and her new friends or integrating this new part of her self into her identity within her family. The first crisis

132. NARAYAN, *supra* note 5, at 173.

133. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 21 (*Out of Order*).

134. *Id.* "Paki" is an insulting term used for British nationals of Indian origin. See NARAYAN, *supra* note 5, at 173.

135. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 21 (*Out of Order*).

136. *Id.*

137. *Id.*

stems from a conflict between Jules and Jess over their attraction to their coach. Jess asks Jules if she “fancies” Joe.¹³⁸ Jules denies it—Joe is off limits romantically because of his role as coach. But she would like to find a man just like him—a man not threatened by their football playing. Jess agrees that she would like an Indian version of Joe. Earlier in the film, Jess asks her Beckham poster whether her husband would let her play football if she had an arranged marriage.¹³⁹

Their shared, but sublimated, erotic interest in Joe threatens their friendship—especially when Jess, on the verge of kissing Joe, is observed by Jules.¹⁴⁰ The context of this near-kiss is significant. Jess is displaced from her usual location in more than one way. In Germany with her team, after a loss in which she failed to score a crucial goal, Jess goes nightclubbing with her teammates, leaving her hair loose and wearing make-up and sexy black clothes they loan to her.¹⁴¹ By putting Jess in these clothes, Chadha resorts to a surprising, but familiar, romantic convention: When the hero sees the heroine with her hair down, his reaction, Joe’s subtle double take and the slow twitch in his facial muscle, reveals his desire for her to the audience. In a crowded, smoke-filled club, dizzy and disoriented, Jess expresses her admiration to Joe for his bravery at coming to her house and standing up to her parents, and leans in to kiss him.¹⁴² Just as he leans in to kiss her, they are interrupted by Jules, who shouts at Jess: “You bitch!”¹⁴³ Jules’s reaction clarifies what has been obvious to the viewer, but not to Jess—that she is possessive of Joe, even if he is off limits.

When Jess attempts to apologize and reconcile with Jules, a new misreading ensues: Jules’s mother overhears Jules accusing Jess of betraying and hurting her, and misreads the conversation as a lover’s quarrel.¹⁴⁴ This feeds into her stereotypical view that female athletes are lesbians, and she now frets to Jules’s father about her daughter’s ostracism by a homophobic society. Jules’s father takes it more in stride. Eventually, Jules’s mother decides to learn about football, explaining to Jules that she is doing so, lest she lose her.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, without revealing to Jules that she knows of her (imagined) transgressive desire, she tries to inspire Jules with examples, in sports magazines, of happy heterosexual female athletes.

138. *Id.* sc.13 (*The Wedding’s Off*).

139. *Id.* sc. 3 (*A Female Beckham*).

140. *Id.* sc. 17 (*Jules’ Jealousy*).

141. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 16 (*Clubbing*).

142. *Id.* sc. 17 (*Jules’ Jealousy*).

143. *Id.*

144. *Id.* sc. 19 (*Betrayed*).

145. *Id.* sc. 23 (*Worried About Jess*).

How does Jess deal with her own transgressive desire for Joe? In addition to her deviation from her parents' wishes by playing football, Jess must cope with her growing—but forbidden—feelings for a white man. To Pinky, she ponders whether her parents would speak to her if she “brought home a Gaudi.”¹⁴⁶ Her sister warns her that every one would stare at her if she married an “English bloke,” and urges her that Indian girls have lots of freedom to marry, because Indian men are now less traditional, wear Western clothes, and even help clean up around the house.¹⁴⁷ Pinky recommends to Jess that she should consider dating Tony, whose friendship with Jess she (mis)reads as a romantic interest (as do Jess's and Tony's friends). Spurred on by Pinky, Jess startles Tony by asking him whether he wants to be her Indian boyfriend.¹⁴⁸ When she tells him about almost kissing her coach, she learns to her astonishment that Tony is gay: He “really like[s]” Beckham.¹⁴⁹ Here, Jess herself misreads identity based on a social marker by responding, “But you're Indian!”¹⁵⁰ They accept each other's transgressive desires, and agree to keep them a secret from others. Thus, while Chadha, through Jules's mother's misreading, pokes fun at the stereotype that female athletes are all lesbians, she shows, through Tony, that “homosexuality does exist in Asian communities,” even though the film does not develop this part of Tony's story.¹⁵¹

The second crisis Jess faces is a direct conflict between her responsibility to her team and her chance to be seen by an American scout, and her obligations as Pinky's sister, once Pinky's wedding is “on” again.¹⁵² Now Jess has a seemingly irresolvable conflict: The new date for the wedding is the date of her team's final match, to which an American scout is coming to watch Jules and Jess. When Jess shows her distress, her father (angry that Jess had continued her double life) insists: “Your sister needs you.”¹⁵³

Wedding preparations ensue and Jess stops going to practice.¹⁵⁴ Visiting her at Joe's request, to let her know about the American scout, Jules confronts Jess: “If you give up football now, what are you going to give up next?”¹⁵⁵ Here, Jules echoes Joe's earlier challenge

146. *Id.* sc. 18 (*Unhappy Homecoming*).

147. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 18 (*Unhappy Homecoming*).

148. *Id.* sc. 20 (*Tony's Secret*).

149. *Id.*

150. *Id.*

151. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 175.

152. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 22 (*The Wedding's On*). The parents of Pinky's fiancé decide they can no longer stand to see their child so miserable. *Id.*

153. *Id.*

154. *Id.* sc. 23 (*Worried About Jess*).

155. *Id.*

to Jess. When Jess explains to Joe after the trip to Germany that her parents, by forbidding her to play, are trying to protect her because “[t]his is taking me away from everything they know,” he asks: “Whose life are you living?”¹⁵⁶

This time, it seems that Jess will not return to practice. Preparing for wedding guests, she removes the football posters from her room—a step that seems to symbolize her resignation.¹⁵⁷ She gets her grades, which ensure her admission to university, but shows little enthusiasm over it. Joe takes her out of the line-up. Not wanting to give up on her, however, he makes another trip to her home, where a lively pre-wedding party is in full swing.¹⁵⁸ He tells her father about the American scout: “It’s the opportunity of a lifetime for Jess. Please . . . don’t let her talent go to waste.”¹⁵⁹ But Jess’s father merely thanks Joe, and tells Jess, “[d]on’t play with your future, daughter.”¹⁶⁰ When her father returns to the party, Jess tells Joe she will be starting university soon and will not have time for football. Joe shakes her resolve when he explains that he asked the scout to come see *her* play, as well as Jules, and that the scout is interested in both of them. Jess exclaims: “Why are you doing this to me, Joe? Every time I talk myself out of it, you come around and make it sound so easy!”¹⁶¹ Joe answers that he does not want to give up on her. Acknowledging that he can understand why she would not want to mess it up when she has a family who cares so much for her, he wishes her luck in her studies.¹⁶²

What will Jess do? Will she let go of her dream of playing football and forego a chance at a college scholarship in America, or will she reject her family obligations and choose the game over her sister’s wedding? Or will she find a way to honor her obligations to her family and play the final match in front of the scout? This is a self-described “girl power” film and so, of course, Jess does find a way to bend the rules to have it all. However, she is not the catalyst for the resolution. Resigned to missing the match, she goes through the motions at her sister’s wedding and reception.¹⁶³ Her friend Tony, instead, is the source of her solution. She can slip away from the

156. *Id.* sc. 18 (*Unhappy Homecoming*).

157. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM SC. 24 (*Off the Team*).

158. *Id.* sc. 25 (*Joe’s Plea*).

159. *Id.*

160. *Id.*

161. *Id.*

162. Falling into his own cultural miscue, he asks if she is “promised to one of those blokes in there.” *Id.*

163. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM SC. 26 (*Wedding Day*).

reception, pick up her gear, and still make the second half of the championship match and be back before her absence is noticed.¹⁶⁴ But Jess refuses to do this: “Look at how happy they are. I’m not going to ruin it for them.”¹⁶⁵ When her father intercepts them, Tony repeats the proposal, but Jess cuts him off: “Dad, it doesn’t matter. This is much more important.”¹⁶⁶ Jess chooses her family’s happiness over her own. But her father, out of concern for Jess’s unhappiness on her sister’s wedding day, agrees with Tony’s plan on the condition that, when she returns, she is smiling. He gives her his blessing: “Play well and make me proud.”¹⁶⁷

The next several minutes of *Bend It Like Beckham* are exhilarating. Chadha skillfully cross-cuts between the exuberance and jubilation of family and friends at the wedding reception and that of Jess and her teammates in the final half of the football match.¹⁶⁸ Indian music plays as the reception guests dance joyously and the teammates score a goal and leap for joy. In the climactic scene, when the game is tied, Jess is fouled and gets to take the foul shot.¹⁶⁹ In contrast to the previous game in which she was fouled, there is no racial epithet and thus, no reaction by Jess. As she prepares for what could be the game-winning kick, the music changes from Indian music to opera. As Jess looks at the football players in front of her, jostling to block her kick, she suddenly sees her sister, mother, and other female relatives, all in traditional dress, gesturing to her in disapproval. But she shakes her head, clears away the image, kicks the ball, and scores the winning goal. As her teammates lift Jess up in the air, Pinky’s groom lifts her up. As one commentary on the film interprets this scene, scoring the winning goal reprises Jess’s daydream at the film’s beginning.¹⁷⁰ But this time, Jess does it in real life, and when she kicks the ball, fighting off the image of her female relatives’ disapproval, “her kick is . . . made to appear as a liberation from traditional Asian notions of female life.”¹⁷¹ And the successful goal also helps Jess turn her daydream of playing professional football into a reality. After Jess’s teammates help her to get back into her sari, a comical way to show their willingness to help her negotiate her two worlds, the talent scout offers Jules and Jess full scholarships to the University of Santa

164. *Id.* sc. 27 (*Make Me Proud*).

165. *Id.*

166. *Id.*

167. *Id.*

168. *Id.*

169. *BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM* sc. 28 (*The Winning Goal*).

170. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 174.

171. *Id.*

Clara.¹⁷² Excited about going to school together, they embrace, much to Jules's mother's dismay. Jess returns to the reception and happily dances with her family.

The juxtaposition of the joy of the football match and of the Punjabi wedding reception beautifully suggests tolerance and pluralism: There is more than one path to a happy life and each is worthy of respect. The path each sister chooses fits the identity she constructs—to return to Appiah's notion of a “tool kit of options”—out of the various cultural and social resources available to her.¹⁷³ And each sister exults along with a community: Pinky's family and friends; Jess's teammates, Joe, Tony, and the fans. The cinematic cross-cutting between the match and the reception also suggests “that a relationship between different cultures and inclinations *can* be negotiated.”¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Jess can rejoin her family and participate happily in the reception after playing in the match. This suggests an important integration, within her identity, of a place for family ties and cultural traditions alongside her less traditional path.

Chadha also acknowledges that some forms of tolerance are not as readily achieved. When she brings Jules to the wedding reception, Jules's mother bursts out and calls Jess a “hypocrite” and demands: “Get your lesbian feet out of my shoes!”¹⁷⁵ Only after Jules has explained that she is not a lesbian—and that it is not that big a deal anyway—can her mother readily agree and state that she has “nothing against it.”¹⁷⁶

An obstacle to Jess's path remains. Pinky advises her that their father will not let Jess go away to college unless she is married first.¹⁷⁷ Without consulting Jess, Tony comes up with a solution. He tells Jess's parents that they plan to marry, but only on the condition that Jess is allowed to go to college anywhere she wants.¹⁷⁸ Her parents, though surprised, seem prepared to agree. But Jess asserts her agency, reveals Tony's ruse, and makes her own appeal to her parents in a way that holds on to, rather than rejects, her place in her family and their values. She declares that she is through with lying, and that when she played in the final, with her father's knowledge, she played her “best

172. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 28 (*The Winning Goal*).

173. Appiah, *supra* note 1, at 96. Pinky, declaring her wedding day the happiest in her life, still seems incredulous that Jess does not want what Pinky has. But Jess says she wants more, telling Pinky about the offered scholarship. See BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 29 (*Lesbians?*).

174. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 20, at 173.

175. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 29 (*Lesbians?*).

176. *Id.*

177. *Id.*

178. *Id.* sc. 30 (*No More Lies*).

ever,” happy because she was not sneaking around.¹⁷⁹ She then declares that she “did not ask to be good at football,” suggesting her talent is God-given.¹⁸⁰ Telling them about the college scholarship and the chance to play professionally, she asserts: “I really want to go and if I can’t tell you what I want now, then I’ll never be happy, whatever I do.”¹⁸¹ Here, she seems ready to assert the sort of claims about directing her own life that Tony, Jess, and Joe have urged her to make earlier in the film. But she wants her parents to support her choice.

Jess receives that support. Her father, once again, refers to the discrimination he suffered in his past, but this time he draws a different conclusion about its import for Jess’s life: “Those bloody English cricket players threw me out of their club like a dog,” leading him to vow he never would play again.¹⁸² But *he* suffered from not doing so, and explains: “I don’t want Jessie to suffer. I don’t want her to make the same mistakes her father made of accepting life, accepting situations. I want her to fight and I want her to win.”¹⁸³ Indeed, Jess’s angry reaction to the racial epithet in an earlier match implies that she will stand up for herself, as her father hopes. He also recognizes the moral claim that her talent places upon him, as a parent: “She’s brilliant. I don’t think anybody has the right of stopping her.”¹⁸⁴

In the face of Jess’s joy, her father philosophizes: “Two daughters made happy on one day. What else can a father ask for?”¹⁸⁵ Even more intriguing is how Jess’s mother makes her peace with this turn of events. She philosophizes, “At least I taught her [how to make a] full Indian dinner. The rest is up to her.”¹⁸⁶ This statement offers a humorous, but very rich touch to the film’s treatment of integration and social reproduction. Jess’s mother can take pride that she has done her part to pass on cultural traditions about proper gender and family roles—teaching Jess to cook traditional Punjabi dishes. In saying “the rest is up to her,” she recognizes there are limits to what she can control in Jess’s life and limits to her own parental responsibility for how Jess develops. At the same time, her personal efforts to help Jess to remain connected to family and tradition in her new life are evident when, at the airport while seeing Jess off, she gives Jess a small picture

179. *Id.*

180. *Id.*

181. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 30 (*No More Lies*).

182. *Id.*

183. *Id.*

184. *Id.*

185. *Id.*

186. *Id.*

of a Sikh religious leader to keep by her bedside and reminds her to contact their relatives in Canada.¹⁸⁷

Jess, thus, bends the rules by remaining in a relationship with her parents while also obtaining their blessing to pursue a path that she chooses. Jess's secure place in the family, despite her journey away from it, is evident at the movie's end, when a very pregnant Pinky (implicitly, the fruit of a premarital car tryst) proudly places the photograph of Jess and her teammates at Santa Clara on the mantle with the other family pictures.¹⁸⁸

And what of Jess's and Joe's transgressive attraction? When Jess runs into Joe's arms and tells him the good news, she starts to pull away, but he reassures her that they can do what they want because he is no longer her coach.¹⁸⁹ But Jess feels she cannot pursue the relationship because it would be too much to expect her parents to let her go away to college *and* to accept her relationship with this non-Indian man. However, Chadha gives Jess a second happy ending. At the airport, as Jess's and Jules's two families, side by side, prepare to say goodbye to them, Joe comes to see them off.¹⁹⁰ Away from the others, he tells Jess that despite the distance and her family's objections he still thinks they might have something. He also has achieved integration in his own life. Next year, with him as coach, the girls' team will turn professional, and, as Jess predicted, his father is proud of him for his work as a coach. As the others are distracted by a sighting of Beckham and his wife, Jess and Joe kiss for the first time and she promises him that they will talk to her parents about their relationship when she returns home for Christmas.

As the credits roll, the film ends on another generous, integrating note: Jess's father plays cricket with Joe, and the two of them have fun together.¹⁹¹ Perhaps in this encounter, between the physically injured football coach and the emotionally scarred immigrant, lies some healing. This encounter also may symbolize a more integrated and diverse conception of British identity. The foreshadowing of Joe's integration into Jess's family, along with Jess's team portrait on the mantle, implies that Jess can, indeed, have it all.

187. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 31 (*Off to America*).

188. *Id.*

189. *Id.* sc. 30 (*No More Lies*).

190. *Id.* sc.31 (*Off to America*).

191. *Id.*

*E. Diaspora and "Hybridized Identity:"*¹⁹²
How Can the Subaltern Speak?

If the metaphor of diaspora aptly captures the journey that Jess undertakes in constructing a new identity, then where does her journey end? It seems that Jess constructs a "new hybridized identity"—a new identity for immigrants who perceive themselves more as "citizens of the world, belonging neither to the old world nor to the new but a combination of both."¹⁹³ Both Jess's departure from Britain, to pursue an opportunity that does not exist in Britain, and her willingness to pursue an inter-ethnic romance with Joe represent how she positions herself within and without her immediate community. Significantly, films like *Bend It Like Beckham*, along with others by Chadha, illustrate filmmaking by black and Asian British directors that remove "subaltern women from the shadows," as rendered in the imaginings of Western feminists, and present them as agents, "boldly attempting to find themselves in their new adopted land."¹⁹⁴ Chadha herself states that her initial foray into filmmaking (for example, as in her earlier film, *Bhaji on the Beach*)¹⁹⁵ grew out of her passion to "challenge the representation of women and people of color in the media" by offering richer portrayals.¹⁹⁶

What conditions shape and facilitate this journey toward a new, hybridized identity?¹⁹⁷ Notably, *Bend It Like Beckham* escapes being didactic about "girl power" and in its portrayal of how its heroine rejects traditional gender roles by so deftly and richly developing its multidimensional characters and revealing the various social positions that shape and constrain them. Along the way, not only Jess, but also other characters come to new understandings of their own locations and those of others. This is consonant with Chadha's own view of culture as a process and of how people, in constructing identity, learn to make sense of themselves and others in a diverse environment.¹⁹⁸ Jules's mother, for example, relinquishes her hopes of molding Jules in her image as she comes to accept her daughter's passion for football.

192. Rajgopal, *supra* note 20, at 57 (using the term "hybridized identity" to describe new generations of South Asians).

193. *Id.*

194. *Id.* at 56 (also including Mira Nair's films in this category). On the "subaltern," Rajgopal cites Spivak's influential essay. *See id.* at 50–51 (discussing Spivak, *supra* note 18).

195. *BHAJI ON THE BEACH* (Channel Four Films 1993).

196. Fuchs, *supra* note 24 (interview with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*).

197. Rajgopal, *supra* note 20, at 55 ("What socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions mark the trajectories of these journeys?").

198. Fischer, *supra* note 76.

She also learns that being an athlete does not equate with being a lesbian, even as she confronts the limits of her own tolerance. This journey is shown in a small gesture; she gives Jules an athletic jersey, rather than something frilly, as a going-away present.¹⁹⁹ Jess's father revises his views of how his own experience with discrimination should shape Jess's life chances, realizing that "for his British-born daughter things might indeed be different than for her migrant father."²⁰⁰ Through his relationship with Jess, Joe reflects on his own relationship with his father and learns his assumptions about his father's view of him are not correct. Jess's journey leads her to two things that were unimaginable at the film's beginning—playing football at a United States university, away from her family, and pursuing an inter-ethnic/interracial relationship.

What fosters Jess's own journey and what hinders it? Not the docile Indian girl of Jules's mother's imagination, Jess already positions herself at a critical distance both from her mother's and her sister's ideas of feminine identity. Initially she can only reconcile her position in her family and the expectations they have of her with her position on the team by concealing the latter from her family. Her friend, Tony, and outsiders, Jules and Joe, continually challenge her to stay on the team, tell her parents, and then keep playing even though her parents disapprove. Notably, when football and her family obligations seem to conflict irreconcilably she is willing to forego the final match and the chance of a scholarship to honor her family obligation. But Tony and her father save her from this sacrifice. What if Tony had not made his proposal? What if her father had not agreed? Leaving so much of her fate to the intervention of others reveals the precariousness of the happy ending.

For both Jess and Jules, family is initially a constraint on their dreams, but is ultimately a support: "The girls have been able to realise their dreams with and not against their parents."²⁰¹ Even the mothers, if overdrawn, eventually accept their daughters' paths. Each girl is aided by supportive men: Their fathers, their coach, and, for Jess, Tony. Jess's father's important speech, after her declaration of her desire to accept the scholarship, facilitates her constructing her identity as a good daughter and a "brilliant" football player.²⁰² Notably, Chadha based the character of Jess's father on her own father, who "hated the way Indian women were treated," and wanted his

199. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 31 (*Off to America*).

200. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 174.

201. *Id.* at 175.

202. BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM sc. 30 (*No More Lies*).

daughters to have education and careers,²⁰³ just as her conflict with her own mother over cooking for and serving men inspired the portrayal of Jess's disinterest in traditional cooking and marriage.²⁰⁴ It was important to Chadha to demonstrate that this sort of father, one who can support his daughters and adapt, exists in the British-Asian community. Indeed, the supportive role of Jess's and Jules's father—and of other men in the film—may be part of its appeal among “soccer dads.”²⁰⁵

Finally, private associations and public institutions are resources that support Jess's and Jules's athletic passions. These resources expanded their “tool kit of options.”²⁰⁶ A girls' football team, formed after agitation from Jules and with Joe's support, affords girls the opportunity to play. Athletic scholarships at good universities in the United States also afford opportunities for promising female athletes, like Jess and Jules, to mature as athletes and pave the way for them to play professionally. This opportunity, of course, contrasts with the historical discrimination that spurred federal civil rights legislation to afford girls and women equal opportunities in athletics—a goal still imperfectly realized.²⁰⁷

In conclusion, it is fitting to consider how Chadha situates herself as she understands her own hybridized identity. In the following interview, she resists labels that seem too narrow:

Q. Do you see yourself mainly as a British film-maker, an Asian filmmaker or a woman director?

[A.] G[urinder] Chadha: British filmmaker. . . . In my films, the women are always very strong characters, and female spectators appreciate the films a lot because they are often starved of these three-dimensional characters. So that's where the woman's gaze comes out. But I find the term woman director too constricting; I find Asian director too constricting. But because I have redefined what British means in my work, I'm comfortable with British, because I know British also includes me.²⁰⁸

Chadha's successful attempt to redefine “British” so that it includes her is evident in the fact that *Bend It Like Beckham* is the most suc-

203. See generally Irani & Das, *supra* note 50.

204. See generally Fischer, *supra* note 76.

205. See Anemona Hartocollis, *Surprise Goal for “Beckham” on New York Soccer Fields*, N.Y. TIMES, May 25, 2003, § 14, at 1.

206. Appiah, *supra* note 1, at 96.

207. See generally, e.g., NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR., THE BATTLE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN ATHLETICS: TITLE IX AT THIRTY (2002); NAT'L WOMEN'S LAW CTR., TITLE IX AND WOMEN'S ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITY: A NATION'S PROMISE YET TO BE FULFILLED (2002).

208. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 249 (interview with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*).

cessful British-financed British film and is a powerful example of a film by a black and Asian director who is ‘bidding for the mainstream.’²⁰⁹ In effect, rather than submitting or adapting to existing cultural structures in which participants are largely white, Chadha and other black and Asian directors “actively participate in and change a predominant cultural stream,” a stream already in the process of re-definition in Britain because of “an enhanced awareness and positive evaluation of cultural diversity and facilitating minority access to its main sites of cultural mediation.”²¹⁰ Indeed, institutional support of efforts to construct more diverse, and complex, pictures of personal and national identity was vital to Chadha’s efforts. She received funding through a lottery run by Britain’s recently formed Film Council, whose mandate includes the goal of supporting and encouraging “cultural diversity and social inclusiveness.”²¹¹

Chadha set out to tell a highly specific cultural story growing out of her community’s history, but she also aimed to make this story a widely appealing *British* story.²¹² The commercial success of *Bend It Like Beckham*, thus, may illustrate a seeming paradox about identity: That individual expressions of “unique experiences” based on membership in minority groups, which challenge misrepresentations of such experience by the broader society, may resonate more broadly for the directors’ audience.²¹³ As she reports, “the film has basically been *owned* by all different groups of the community” who see it as, for example, a “British-Asian movie,” a “girl power movie,” a “British success story,” and even, as one Sikh academic argued, a film upholding “Sikh values” by encouraging women to play soccer.²¹⁴ In Chadha’s view, the very degree of the film’s commercial success only increases its radical and subversive nature.²¹⁵ Thus, on the one hand, it “can be seen as a very light movie,” a “tabloid movie.”²¹⁶ But on the other hand, Chadha concludes that by making such a successful film out of the story of an Indian family, with an unknown Indian actress in the lead she has succeeded in showing the world that “[t]his is England. . . . my England. This is how England works for me . . .

209. *See id.* at 169–70.

210. *Id.* at 9.

211. *Id.* at 16.

212. *Id.* at 249–50.

213. *Cf. MINOW, supra* note 11, at 23.

214. KORTE & STERNBERG, *supra* note 23, at 246 (interview with Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham*).

215. *Id.* at 252.

216. *Id.*

this is England how I see it.”²¹⁷ And Chadha’s latest project suggests an even bigger bid to redefine the mainstream. Her new film, *Bride and Prejudice*, is a multicultural, multiracial version of the much-loved English novel, and Western classic, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.²¹⁸

IV. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES

Like *Bend It Like Beckham*, the film *Real Women Have Curves*, employs the vehicle of a coming-of-age story to grapple with significant issues about identity. It is an autobiographical film for the people who made it, as well as for some of the actresses featured in it. Before it became a film, *Real Women Have Curves* was a stage play written by Josefina Lopez, who drew on her experiences as an undocumented worker in her sister’s East Los Angeles sewing factory, in which Lopez’s mother and an older sister also worked.²¹⁹ Lopez has commented on the success of the play: “I think audiences were disarmed because it talks about many different issues under the guise of being a comedy about a girl coming-of-age.”²²⁰ These issues include being a first-generation immigrant, family expectations for girls, loyalty between sisters, and, as the title suggests, accepting one’s physical appearance. In setting her play in a sewing factory, Lopez wanted to tell the stories and affirm the dignity and contributions of Latinas and Latinos in the United States engaged in service jobs like that of seamstress and gardener.²²¹ The play also grew out of Lopez’s outrage at “constantly being told that if I lost weight I would be beautiful” and her experience, while studying acting, of being told that, although she was very talented, she would never be cast as a lead because of her weight.²²² She wanted to write a play in which women like herself—real women, women who did not fit the mold of thinness—could star.²²³ Indeed, the issue of appearance attracted the film’s producer and co-screenwriter, George LaVoo, a white, non-Hispanic man, who

217. *Id.*

218. *Vision Mixing: Cultural Barometer Bollywood*, TIME OUT, Jan. 21, 2004, at 14–15. For information on the film, see <http://www.miramax.com/bride> (last visited Feb. 13, 2005).

219. Real Women Have Curves, Home Page, About the Filmmakers: Josefina Lopez, at http://www.realwomenhavecurves.com/about_josefa.html (last visited Mar. 17, 2005). Josefina Lopez was a Co-Screenwriter of *Real Women Have Curves*. See *id.*

220. *Id.*

221. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 1 (*Last Day*) (Newmarket Films 2002) (DVD) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo) [hereinafter commentary, sc. 1 (*Last Day*)].

222. *Id.*

223. *Id.*

could relate to prejudice about weight based on his own high school experience as an overweight child.²²⁴

To transform the play into a film, co-screenwriters Lopez and LaVoo shifted the focus from Estela, the older sister who runs the factory, to Ana the younger daughter. They also turned Ana's and Estela's mother, Carmen, into a more antagonistic figure.²²⁵ In doing so, both Lopez and director Patricia Cardoso drew on, but intensified, their conflicts with their own mothers.²²⁶ Cardoso has related the antagonism between Ana and her mother to her own family experience of moving away from her "difficult" and "domineering" mother: Ana is pulled by her mother "who wants her to be a more traditional girl, a Mexican girl, and to stay at the same house and [not] move away," but also is pulled by "her own needs to grow and be her own person and go to college in New York and move away from her domineering mother."²²⁷ A major source of the antagonism is Ana's mother's constant nagging of Ana about her weight.

The film's creators aimed to show Carmen as a complex character, whose treatment of Ana is a mixture of love and cruelty. As actress Lupe Ontiveros portrays the character, the viewer might conclude that even what seems cruel may be motivated by Carmen's love for Ana and her convictions about what is best for her.²²⁸ It was also important to Ontiveros, who played Ana's mother in the play and film, to portray the mother's perspective about Ana's leaving home. A lengthy and expensive college education sounds remote, "not a reality," while "the immediate reality is, '[l]et's take care of business now,' and that is to survive."²²⁹

Others involved in making the film also found links between its story and aspects of their own life. America Ferrera, the actress who plays Ana in the film, is also a first-generation American, and reported: "I was immediately attracted to the character because I've

224. Real Women Have Curves, Home Page, About the Filmmakers: George LaVoo, at http://www.realwomenhavecurves.com/about_geo.html (last visited Mar. 17, 2005).

225. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 1 (*Last Day*), *supra* note 221.

226. *Id.*

227. Interview by Karen Grigsby Bates, Radio Host of *The Tavis Smiley Show* on National Public Radio, with Patricia Cardoso, Director of *Real Women Have Curves* (Oct. 18, 2002), *audio interview available at* <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1151842>.

228. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 7 (*What I Do Best*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

229. Interview by Terry Gross, Radio Host of Morning Edition on National Public Radio, with Lupe Ontiveros, the actress portraying Carmen in *Real Women Have Curves* (Oct. 29, 2002), *audio interview available at* <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1151781>.

been experiencing similar things in my own life. As a first-generation Latina, the constant question is: ‘Are you Latin or are you American?’²³⁰ Similar to Ana, Ferrera was an excellent high school student and is attending college on a scholarship.²³¹

In their commentary on the film, Cardoso, LaVoo, and Lopez stress the experience of making the film as an integrative one; the three closely collaborated, drawing on pieces of their own different life experiences in fashioning the characters and their interactions.²³² Moreover, the cast and crew also contributed. As Lopez observes, the film was a “very personal story and it was done with a lot of love,”²³³ for everyone involved “wanted to tell the story, because in many ways it was their story.”²³⁴ LaVoo also comments on the paradox that the particularity of the story may help it resonate more broadly: “The closer that we go to the truth, to all of our truths, the more universal it is,” as evidenced by audiences seeing themselves, and their families, in the film’s portrayal of Ana’s family.²³⁵

A. *Ana: At the Crossroads*

The film, *Real Women Have Curves*, begins with an image of an elderly Hispanic woman, beatific in the sunlight and dressed in white, singing a Spanish song, and then pans to a scene of Ana, outdoors, washing the windows of her home.²³⁶ The scene that unfolds sets up the close, but antagonistic, relationship between Carmen and Ana. Estela, Ana’s older sister, summons her, telling her that something has happened to their mother. Ana protests that she always has to go,

230. Real Women Have Curves, Home Page, About the Filmmakers: America Ferrera, at http://www.realwomenhavecurves.com/about_america.html (last visited Mar. 17, 2005).

231. *Id.*

232. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 5 (*Novelas*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

233. *See id.* commentary, sc. 16 (*Blessings*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo) [hereinafter commentary, sc. 16 (*Blessings*)]; commentary, sc. 17 (*Credits*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

234. *Id.* sc. 17 (*Credits*) (crediting HBO for wanting to make the film “real” by allowing, for example, mixed use of English and Spanish and the cast of Latinas, instead of white actresses portraying Latinas).

235. *Id.* commentary, sc. 16 (*Blessings*), *supra* note 223.

236. *Id.* sc. 1 (*Last Day*). The following detailed synopsis of the film comes from my own initial viewing of the film in the theatre and subsequent viewings of the DVD version. For specific scenes, I refer to the number and title given on the DVD. Occasionally, I augment my synopsis with commentary by the director and screenwriters, available in the audio version of the DVDs. Generally, except when quoting dialogue, I provide an initial citation, at the beginning of a paragraph, to the scene described in the rest of the paragraph. When the original dialogue is in Spanish, I use the English subtitles.

telling Estela to go instead; but Estela insists that their mother wants Ana. When Ana bluntly asks her mother what is wrong, she responds: “I’m really sick. You’ll have to make breakfast for the men [Ana’s father and grandfather].”²³⁷ Skeptical, Ana questions her about her symptoms and the scene ends by Ana asking: “How’s your hearing?”²³⁸ She then tells her mother: “Today’s my last day of high school mama. I’m not going to miss that.”²³⁹ Her mother sits up in bed and declares Ana (in Spanish) “ungrateful,” asking Estela: “What is wrong with your sister?”²⁴⁰

This first scene in Ana’s home also sets Ana apart from other members of her family through her use of English, instead of Spanish.²⁴¹ Within her home, her parents alternate between Spanish and English. Ana speaks Spanish only with her beloved grandfather, who speaks in Spanish.²⁴² Estela’s resigned reaction to her mother’s insistence that Estela help her foreshadows Estela’s position in the family: More dutiful and submissive to her mother than Ana, but silently resentful—in contrast to Ana’s outspoken defiance—of her mother’s control.

Ana’s distance from her family and how her family’s needs constrain her own options for the future unfold as Ana goes through her last day of school.²⁴³ She takes two buses to get from her working-class neighborhood, Boyle Heights, to her high school in affluent Beverly Hills. The filmmakers comment that Ana’s travel between these two worlds, her Mexican-American neighborhood and Beverly Hills represents the way in which Latinas and Latinos often serve as a “bridge” between worlds.²⁴⁴ Traveling between worlds, or weaving one’s way in and out of different places is, as legal scholar Berta Esperanza-Hernandez-Truyol suggests, a “common daily experience” for Latinas and Latinos in the United States and thus, a helpful metaphor for the “multidimensionality” of Latino and Latina identity.²⁴⁵

On her final day of class, Ana’s peers recount what lies ahead for them—years of higher education at MIT, Stanford, and Teacher’s Col-

237. *Id.*

238. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 1 (*Last Day*).

239. *Id.*

240. *Id.*

241. *Id.* This later sets her apart from the other workers in Estela’s factory. *Id.* commentary, sc. 8 (*Help Yourself*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

242. *Id.* sc. 4 (*Find Your Gold*).

243. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 1 (*Last Day*).

244. *Id.* commentary, sc. 1 (*Last Day*), *supra* note 221.

245. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, Essay, *Borders (En)gendered: Normativities, Latinas, and a LatCrit Paradigm*, 72 N.Y.U. L. REV. 882, 882–84 (1997).

lege.²⁴⁶ Caught off guard, Ana fabricates her own plans that she is going to go backpacking through Europe and then continue her education. After class, her English teacher, Mr. Guzman (a non-white Hispanic), asks her about the status of her college applications. She tells him that she is not going to college because her family cannot afford it. Her teacher is alarmed, telling her she is a smart woman with “something to contribute,” and that the scholarships, grants, and financial aid they have discussed during the year could help her.²⁴⁷ She thanks him, but suggests he not waste his time on her.

Her teacher persists, however, visiting the family’s home as they are celebrating Ana’s graduation.²⁴⁸ Before his arrival, Ana’s mother scolds her for quitting her fast food job on the way home from school, and tells her she must come to work with Carmen in Estela’s factory. Carmen exaggerates Estela’s need for Ana’s help, since Estela would not be able to pay her, and Estela and Ana both resist the plan. When her mother asks how Estela can get her work done without Ana’s help, Ana responds that she does not know and really does not care. Here, Ana bluntly expresses not only a lack of loyalty to her sister—if, in fact, her sister really does need her—but also disavows any identification with the factory as a *family* project and denies that she has any responsibility for that project.

Ana’s blunt defiance—and lack of family loyalty—is startling given her positioning as a daughter in an immigrant, Hispanic family. Hispanic families are diverse, and “it is a mistake to overgeneralize about cultural values.”²⁴⁹ At the same time, “[f]amilialism has been found to be one of the most important values in Hispanic cultures,” a value that includes “a strong identification with and attachment to the nuclear and extended families, strong feelings of loyalty, and mutual respect, support, and solidarity among members of the same family.”²⁵⁰ This scene reveals how the personal aspects of Ana’s identity, her sense of independence and rebellion, defy easy labelling of her based on her social marker as part of a Hispanic family. However, Ana reluctantly agrees to work in the factory and the experience of doing so will help her reach a transformed understanding of it, of family loyalty, and of her own place in her family.

246. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 1 (*Last Day*).

247. *Id.*

248. *Id.*

249. Brunilda De León, *Career Development of Hispanic Adolescent Girls*, in *URBAN GIRLS: RESISTING STEREOTYPES, CREATING IDENTITIES* 380, 390 (Bonnie J. Ross Leadbeater & Niobe Way eds., 1996) [hereinafter *URBAN GIRLS*].

250. *Id.* at 394 (citations omitted).

When Mr. Guzman arrives, he tells Ana's parents she is an "excellent student" and that she might be able to get a scholarship at Columbia, where he knows an admissions officer.²⁵¹ He states that Ana is special and points out that she got herself into Beverly Hills High School, which was not an easy feat. Her father tells him that they certainly want Ana to get an education, but that they need her to work now and go to college later. Mr. Guzman leaves, asking her parents at least to think about college, which her father agrees to do.

In this scene, *Real Women Have Curves* represents a real constraint on the educational opportunities of many children of working-class, immigrant Hispanic parents. "[M]ost parents hope that their children will excel in school; yet Latino families' economic and social contexts often preclude the realization of those dreams."²⁵² Families may believe that a child's academic achievement can better the entire family, as well.²⁵³ In Ana's case, her family, through her father, tells Mr. Guzman that Ana needs to work now and go to college later. For children in poor Hispanic families, for example, the conflict between parents' high educational goals and their need for their children's contribution of labor (including child care for younger siblings) and economic support "often results in poor attendance at all levels of the schooling process," which contributes to elevated high school dropout rates.²⁵⁴ By contrast, although Ana has worked at a fast food job while in school, her family has not made demands upon her that prevented her from achieving a significant milestone—graduating as an excellent student from a strong school.

Through taking the initiative to gain admission to such a school and her teacher's strong belief that she should go to college, Ana's high school experience also differs from the problems some Latinas encounter in public school. Teachers have stereotyped views of "Latinas' educational possibilities," for example, assuming that they will follow the path of early pregnancy and marriage, rather than college, and therefore may not encourage them to consider college.²⁵⁵ In contrast to Ana, who is fluent in English and grew up in the United States, many immigrants attending public schools in a state like California are subject to a process of sorting "that consigns students by skin color, class, and English fluency into positions of very unequal

251. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 1 (*Last Day*).

252. ANGELA GINORIO & MICHELLE HUSTON, AM. ASSOC. OF UNIV. WOMEN EDUC. FOUND., *¡SÍ PUEDE! YES, WE CAN: LATINAS IN SCHOOL* 18 (2001).

253. *Id.* at 22.

254. *Id.* at 19.

255. *Id.* at 30–31.

access to resources, opportunities, and education.”²⁵⁶ Moreover, unlike adolescents in immigrant families who aspire to careers as a path to independence but lack access to sources of knowledge that might help them attain it,²⁵⁷ Ana has the support of her teacher, who has a helpful connection at an elite university.

Ana, nonetheless, faces a real constraint: Her family’s support for her high school success, evidenced by her graduation party, does not translate into immediate support for her higher education goals. Ana’s father, however, impressed by Mr. Guzman’s belief in her abilities, privately tells his wife that if they make an effort, they can give her an education.²⁵⁸ She, however, declares that Ana needs a different sort of education, which she—and not college—can provide. She can teach Ana to sew, cook, and take care of her children. But Ana’s mother’s resistance is more complex and appeals to what she calls a matter of principle: “It’s not fair. I worked since I was thirteen-years old. . . . Ana is eighteen-years-old. Now it’s her turn.”²⁵⁹

Like the mother in *Bend It Like Beckham*, Ana’s mother believes she has special knowledge to pass on to Ana about a woman’s proper role. However, unlike Jess’s mother, Ana’s mother also resents the possibility of Ana going to college. Carmen’s own feelings about the work she has done for her family are ambivalent. She takes pride in her work in Estela’s sewing factory, and delights in the daily gossip and story telling,²⁶⁰ yet she complains of the toll her hard work has taken upon her. Carmen accuses Ana of viewing her as a beast of burden and that she does not appreciate how Carmen has sacrificed for her.²⁶¹ In this respect, Carmen uneasily fits the model of *marianismo*, a term often used to capture an ideal of proper gender role behavior for Hispanic women (modeled on the Virgin Mary) that stresses duty and self-sacrifice, and pairs wifely deference with husbandly authority in the home.²⁶² To be sure, Carmen views her life as that of self-sacrifice for her children. Far from suffering in silence, however, she questions why she has sacrificed as she has. Moreover, she is assertive, rather than meek and deferential, with her husband. In crucial conversations about Ana’s future, when her husband seems

256. LAURIE OLSEN, *MADE IN AMERICA: IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS* 11 (1997).

257. *Id.*

258. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 2 (*Like Mother . . .*).

259. *Id.*

260. *Id.* sc. 7 (*What I Do Best*).

261. *Id.* sc. 3 (*All For You*).

262. ROSA MARIA GIL & CARMEN INOA VAZQUEZ, *THE MARIA PARADOX: HOW LATINAS CAN MERGE OLD WORLD TRADITIONS WITH NEW WORLD SELF-ESTEEM* 5–8 (1996).

inclined to support Ana's going to college, rather than working in the factory, she forcefully asserts her opposition.

A central conflict between Carmen and Ana is over Ana's weight. Overweight herself, which she distinguishes because she, unlike her daughters, is married, Carmen continually calls Ana insulting names and criticizes her eating habits. For example, at Ana's graduation party, when her grandfather tells her to look at her big cake, her mother rushes up, exclaiming: "Cake? Oh, my God. Can't you see she's bigger than the cake?"²⁶³ When Ana on her first day of work at the dress factory admires one of the dresses on a mannequin, Carmen tells her, "Don't even think about it. You'll never fit into them."²⁶⁴ When Ana asks her why she says such things, Carmen claims it is for Ana's own good. Violating Ana's own bodily privacy and physical boundaries, she touches Ana's breasts and exclaims, "enormous!"²⁶⁵ Carmen's motivation seems to be her view that Ana's weight will be an obstacle to her marrying. She has given up on Estela marrying, and decides she must concentrate her attention on Ana,²⁶⁶ Carmen proceeds to put up a statue of the appropriate saint in her kitchen hutch.

Ana and her mother's conflict-filled relationship also stems from her mother's desire to hold on to Ana, her younger child, as her baby. Her tenderness toward Ana appears only in rare moments. For example, when Ana burns herself using the iron in the dress factory, Carmen exclaims: "You burned yourself, dear!" and sings a traditional Spanish rhyme to make the burn feel better.²⁶⁷ On a daily basis, however, Carmen saves her tenderness for her pet birds who, in contrast to Ana, she addresses in loving terms.²⁶⁸ Carmen also holds on to Ana through turning her into a confidant when she misinterprets early symptoms of menopause as evidence that she is pregnant.²⁶⁹ Thus, she not only turns to Ana but also turns on her when Ana fails to meet her expectations.

In contrast, Ana's father is openly fond of her. Even more of a catalyst to Ana believing in herself is her grandfather, with whom she has a close and loving relationship. In one pivotal scene, at her request, he retells her a legend from Mexico about the search for hidden gold.²⁷⁰ He concludes by telling her that "you are my gold" and that

263. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 1 (*Last Day*).

264. *Id.* sc. 2 (*Like Mother . . .*).

265. *Id.*

266. *Id.* sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*).

267. *Id.* sc. 6 (*I Need You More Than Ever*).

268. *Id.* sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*).

269. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 7 (*What I Do Best*).

270. *Id.* sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*).

“now I want you to find yours.”²⁷¹ Ana, soon after, takes her completed college application to Mr. Guzman. However, she has failed to write a personal statement. When she seems stumped about what to write, he tells her to write about herself. In ensuing scenes, Ana struggles to write her essay.²⁷² But the viewer must speculate, rather than be shown, what she eventually writes as she negotiates the demands of her work in the factory, her family relationships, and her own desires for her future.

Into the mix of what Ana must negotiate enters a budding relationship with one of her classmates, Jimmy, a white teenage boy. They run into each other at school after her visit to her teacher.²⁷³ Disappointed she is not going to Europe, since he wanted to go with her, he assures her that going to Europe offers a different perspective because “things are too easy here. . . . you’re handed everything.”²⁷⁴ Such a comment is wildly inappropriate as a commentary on Ana’s life, however apt it may be for his. However, she is intrigued or flattered enough by his interest in her that she takes him up on his suggestion that they “hang out” sometime.²⁷⁵ Ana also finds amusing Jimmy’s interest in Spanish and his attempts to speak in Spanish on their dates.²⁷⁶

As her relationship with Jimmy develops, it offers Ana tenderness and positive views of her appearance that her mother does not provide.²⁷⁷ Ana conceals her evenings with Jimmy with the help of her grandfather, who pretends to go with her to the movies. In this respect, privacy—in the sense of secrecy—facilitates Ana’s exploration of romantic attraction. When they meet in a Mexican restaurant, Ana bluntly asks Jimmy whether he is staring at her breasts, flustering him to reply: “I’m a guy, I guess I kind of have to.”²⁷⁸ When she insults her own appearance, he calls her beautiful. Jimmy’s view of Ana offers an important contrast to her mother’s, and helps her eventually to explore sexual intimacy with him in an accepting, safe, and responsible setting. This tender relationship and sexual exploration help her to

271. *Id.*

272. *Id.* sc. 7 (*What I Do Best*), sc. 10 (*Whatever It Takes*).

273. *Id.* sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*).

274. *Id.*

275. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*).

276. *Id.* sc. 9 (*Night Out*). Jimmy also shares with Ana curse words he learned from an internet program. *Id.* sc. 5 (*Novelas*).

277. *Id.* sc. 9 (*Night Out*). This is a point on which the filmmakers comment, noting the use of a gentle Spanish lullaby as background music during their first date. *Id.* commentary, sc. 9 (*Night Out*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

278. *Id.* sc. 9 (*Night Out*).

discover her own power as a woman and reject her mother's negative assessment of her.

B. Ana's Transformation in the Factory

If Ana's story begins with her clear disassociation of herself from Estela's factory and from the work of the family as a family project, it ends with a personal transformation in Ana's attitude about the factory. She gains a growing appreciation of the skill reflected in the work that Estela, her mother, and the other workers do. Initially, Ana balks at her mother's insistence that she must work in her sister's factory—for no money.²⁷⁹ When she learns that Estela is paid \$18 for a dress that stores like Bloomingdales then sell for \$600, she asks: "Does this seem right to you, Estela?"²⁸⁰ She critiques the factory and the place of immigrant workers in the broader economy: "You expect me to do this dirty work for nothing. This is a sweat shop. . . . You're all cheap labor for Bloomingdales."²⁸¹ In response to Ana's tirade, her sister argues that "[w]e're not cheap labor," and that she is proud of what their mother has taught her.²⁸² In contrast to Ana's relationship, this mother-daughter relationship involves successfully passing along important skills as a seamstress.

Initially, Ana is aloof from the daily gossip and pleasantries in the factory, and the other female workers in the shop do not bond with her. Ana complains about the heat in the shop (no fans are allowed because they will blow dust on the dresses) and approaches her work with resentment, even deliberately burning a dress.²⁸³ But eventually, when she sees how skilled a designer her sister is and how important it is to her to meet her deadlines, she becomes more invested in her work and in the daily social life of the factory.²⁸⁴ Out of the factory, and in the family, Estela seems subdued and repressed, functioning as a "shadow" for Ana and what Ana might become if she were not stubborn and defiant.²⁸⁵ But in the factory, Estela comes alive, approaching her work with pride and constantly exhorting her employees to

279. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 1 (*Last Day*).

280. *Id.* sc. 3 (*All For You*).

281. *Id.* sc. 6 (*I Need You More Than Ever*).

282. *Id.*

283. *Id.* sc. 3 (*All For You*).

284. *Id.* sc. 15 (*Real Women*).

285. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 5 (*Novelas*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

meet their deadlines and make dresses of better quality than anyone else's.²⁸⁶

Evidence of the significant change in Ana's view of the factory and in her relationship with her sister comes when Estela, short-staffed because three workers have quit to return to Mexico, admonishes Ana for taking too long to iron the dresses.²⁸⁷ In a scene drawn from Lopez's own experience, Ana explains that the delay is because she stops to look at each dress after she irons it to appreciate what has gone into it, then reminds herself that it is not for her, and finally pushes it away.²⁸⁸ Moved, Estela later surprises Ana by giving her a beautiful red dress that she has cut to fit Ana's body. Unlike Ana's mother, her sister affirms Ana's appearance, telling her that "[p]retty dresses aren't just for skinny girls."²⁸⁹

Ana also demonstrates her loyalty to Estela—and to the survival of the factory—by helping her resolve a financial crisis.²⁹⁰ First, Ana persuades Estela to go see, rather than write to, Mrs. Glass, her dress buyer, to ask for an advance in order to pay the rent and the bills and keep the factory open to complete the order. When Estela speaks to the buyer in a humble and hesitant tone, Ana states Estela's request more forcefully. Mrs. Glass, a more affluent Latina, tells Estela that she "went out on a limb" to hire her because she believes that "a woman like me should help a woman like you," but that Estela has to help herself.²⁹¹ To Ana, she says that Estela knows the rules and must get the order in on time. Notably, as Mrs. Glass turns away, Ana makes a rare resort to Spanish to criticize her under her breath, not realizing that Mrs. Glass also understands Spanish.

Ana alleviates Estela's crisis by approaching their father for a short-term loan.²⁹² At first, her father resists, telling Ana he has told Estela that she must operate on a cash up front basis. However, he seems moved both by Ana's insistence that the situation is not Estela's fault and her comment that she never realized how hard Estela works. In this scene, Ana demonstrates her growing loyalty to her sister, and to the factory as a family project, and that she now takes seriously her sister's work. Estela, in fact, is quite a talented dress designer and

286. See *id.* sc. 3 (*All For You*), sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*), sc. 6 (*I Need You More Than Ever*), sc. 10 (*Whatever It Takes*).

287. *Id.* sc. 11 (*The Right Size*).

288. *Id.*; see generally Josefina Lopez, *Love Your Curvas*, *LATINA*, Oct. 2002, at 85.

289. *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES* sc. 11 (*The Right Size*).

290. *Id.* sc. 8 (*Help Yourself*).

291. *Id.*

292. *Id.* sc. 10 (*Whatever It Takes*).

aspires to branch out by designing her own line, not simply producing dresses designed by others.

As the crisis at the factory is resolved by Ana's intervention, Ana also completes her college essay. She continues her secret relationship with Jimmy. When she tells him that her mother does not understand her, but seems to hate her, telling her she is fat and ugly, he insists that she is not fat, but beautiful.²⁹³ Bound for Teacher's College himself, he reassures her that she will get accepted to college.

In fact, Ana soon learns, when her teacher pays a second visit to her family's home, that she has been accepted to Columbia with a full scholarship.²⁹⁴ Thus, the financial obstacle to her attending college seems to be removed. Ana and her father are excited, but when her parents learn that Columbia is in New York, her mother is aghast, and even her father wonders why Ana cannot attend a "wonderful college" in the area, rather than going all the way to go to New York.²⁹⁵ Ana and her teacher explain that Columbia is one of the best schools in the nation. Her teacher appeals to Ana's parents, "you left your country for a better opportunity, now it's Ana's turn."²⁹⁶ Here, the film reprises the mother's earlier statement that it should be "Ana's turn" to work. But at this stage, Ana's parents unite around the value of family unity. Ana protests that going to Columbia will not change anything, but her father declares: "I didn't come this far to see my family break apart," and her mother asks Ana if she wants to abandon her grandfather.²⁹⁷ Sadly, Ana admits she does not. Ana's father tells her teacher that Ana will go to college, but not now, and her mother tells him that "this is a family matter."²⁹⁸

This poignant, even tragic scene, is a fictional rendering of a difficult problem faced by many Hispanic women in immigrant families: "Many Latina girls who complete their high school education and have a chance to attend college are among the very few or even the first family member to have an opportunity to become highly educated and career oriented."²⁹⁹ But even though parents may view education as a path to opportunity for their children, they may discourage college if it means their daughters must move away from home.³⁰⁰ Or, like Ana's mother, they may be dismissive of college if

293. *Id.* sc. 11 (*The Right Size*).

294. *Id.* sc. 12 (*All the Way to New York?*).

295. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 12 (*All the Way to New York?*).

296. *Id.*

297. *Id.*

298. *Id.*

299. De León, *supra* note 249, at 395.

300. GINORIO & HUSTON, *supra* note 252, at 42.

they believe that their daughters' proper role should be that of wife and mother.³⁰¹ They may not want their daughters to leave their home until marriage, or they may expect their daughters to work in and carry on the family business.³⁰² Such daughters have their own career goals that conflict with parental expectations.

As one report on Latinas and education found, Latinas must imagine and negotiate "possible selves" out of the social context of the various communities in which they live—communities formed by families, peers, and schools.³⁰³ These possible selves may be constrained by some of these contexts, and broadened by others.³⁰⁴ Ana's view of her self, as ready to leave home and go to Columbia, conflicts with her parents' view that they must deny her this opportunity to go to Columbia because of family unity. This appeal to family unity and keeping the family together resonates with the cultural value of "familialism," which is important to many Hispanic families' values.³⁰⁵

Precisely because of the value placed on family, "it is the family that often 'gives permission' for Latina girls to disengage from the family and to begin the process of upward mobility."³⁰⁶ For this reason, a critical factor in fostering Latina girls' academic success is to encourage parents to be part of their daughters' educational and career development.³⁰⁷ Viewing *Real Women Have Curves* in this light, it is apparent that Ana's teacher twice reached out to Ana's parents to try to enlist their support for Ana's education.

C. Ana Finds Her Gold

Ana's father proves able to "give permission" for Ana to separate from the family and to accept the scholarship at Columbia.³⁰⁸ Implicitly, a catalyst for this change is Ana's demonstrated loyalty to her sister. When Ana repays the loan she took on Estella's behalf, she tells her father that she has something to tell him, but does not know how to say it.³⁰⁹ Anticipating that she wishes to speak about college,

301. *Id.* at 43.

302. *Sunday Morning: Attending College Can Be a Real Challenge for Young Latina Women* (CBS television broadcast, Aug. 1, 2004) [hereinafter *Sunday Morning*], available at http://www.lexis.com/research/retrieve/frames?_m=33cc90ca97b6481df33c5fd9feb01e31&csvc=bl&cform=bool&fmtstr=FULL&docnum=1&_startdoc=1&wchp=dGLbVlz-zSkA1&_md5=0b780bdb02a571ff76ca41fa60d6299.

303. GINORIO & HUSTON, *supra* note 252, at vii.

304. *Id.*

305. *See supra* text accompanying notes 256–259.

306. De León, *supra* note 249, at 394.

307. *Id.*

308. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 16 (*Blessings*).

309. *Id.*

he tells her, “You have my blessing.”³¹⁰ As Ana prepares to leave for college, other family members give their own blessing. Her sister tells her she is “going to do great,” and her grandfather reassures her not to worry about him because she will always be in his heart.³¹¹ But her mother cannot or will not do so, despite Ana’s pleas that her mother come out of her locked bedroom and “[g]ive me your blessing.”³¹² Inside the room, Carmen’s eyes are wet as she looks at photos of Ana. But with or without her mother’s blessing, Ana will leave home. Only after Ana leaves the house does her mother come out of the room to watch from the window as the truck drives away.

Why does Ana’s mother withhold her blessing? Perhaps she can not bear to separate from her youngest child. Perhaps she resents that Ana’s pathway to college will allow her to live a different life than the one Carmen has lived, one with long years of physically taxing work, rather than to take Carmen’s place in the factory. Or perhaps she truly believes Ana is making a mistake by leaving home, and is not going to support that mistake.³¹³

Despite this estrangement between Ana and her mother, the final scene of the film suggests that Ana has found a way to integrate some of her mother into her own identity—or possible self—while still asserting her agency and pursuing her own dream. As Ana walks down the streets of Manhattan, she self-consciously sashays, or struts, her own version of the way her mother previously urged her to walk “like a lady,” but which Ana earlier parodied.³¹⁴ Now, Ana’s sway seems to signal a confidence and self-acceptance. As the filmmakers interpret this scene, Ana’s walk signifies that she is a new person—a woman “owning her body” and enjoying her life.³¹⁵

D. How Did Ana Construct Her Identity?

In addition to Ana’s journey from home to Columbia, she also has, by film’s end, journeyed toward self-acceptance of her body and her sexuality. What factors helped her to do so? Several critical experiences in the film help to form Ana’s confidence and shape her coming-of-age as a young woman.

310. *Id.*

311. *Id.*

312. *Id.*

313. Director Patricia Cardoso offers this reading of Carmen’s refusal to leave the bedroom. See *id.* commentary, sc. 16 (*Blessings*), *supra* note 233.

314. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 16 (*Blessings*), sc. 11 (*The Right Size*) (Carmen urges Ana to “walk like a lady”).

315. *Id.* commentary, sc. 16 (*Blessings*), *supra* note 233.

First, her relationship with Jimmy offers her a different perspective about her body and sexuality than that offered by her mother. From Carmen's view, being thin and virginal are prerequisites for Ana to attract a husband.³¹⁶ This emphasis upon virginity perhaps reflects the continuing importance, for Latina immigrants living in the United States, of a traditional Hispanic cultural ideal of female virginity and sexual purity as both a matter of individual and family honor.³¹⁷ Ana resists her mother's views, countering that who a woman is as a person—her thoughts, and ideas—are more important than her weight or virginity.³¹⁸

When she is with Jimmy, instead of criticism, she hears praise and reverence. After Ana's parents state their opposition to her attending Columbia, and as Jimmy is about to leave for Teacher's College, Ana decides to become sexually intimate with him.³¹⁹ She responsibly prepares by buying condoms (contraception is not a topic her parents are likely to have discussed with her). She also insists that they leave the lights on because she wants him to see what she looks like. As they both look at her body in the mirror, he remarks, in Spanish, "what a beauty!"³²⁰ This initial sexual experience is friendly, fun, and tender. But when he says he will write or e-mail her, she forbids it, predicting that they will not have anything more to talk about and that he will meet a skinny girl. This remark suggests that her emerging confidence in her body is still tenuous.

Ana's relationship with Jimmy is also notable because she explored sexual desire on her own terms and without harming herself emotionally or physically. Moreover, as Cardoso points out, this relationship, although important, does not become the focal point of Ana's life.³²¹ Lopez comments that Jimmy does not save Ana, as the white hero does in so many films about Latinas; Ana must find her own self-worth on her own.³²² At the movie's end, Ana is at Columbia, and the viewer may infer that she might see Jimmy again, who is at nearby Teacher's College. But, in contrast to Jess and Joe, there is no explicit nod in that direction.

Ana's sexual experience with Jimmy, however, dramatically changes the way she looks at her own body. When her mother inter-

316. *Id.* sc. 7 (*What I Do Best*).

317. GIL & VAZQUEZ, *supra* note 262, at 128.

318. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 7 (*What I Do Best*), sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*).

319. *Id.* sc. 13 (*See Me*).

320. *Id.*

321. *Id.* commentary, sc. 11 (*The Right Size*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

322. *Id.*

rupts Ana looking at herself in the bathroom mirror with her robe open, she calls Ana a tramp for losing her virginity, insulting her in Spanish “Now you’re not only fat, now you’re a whore.”³²³ She asks Ana why she did not value herself. But Ana resists her mother’s evaluation, retorting that “there’s more to me than what’s in-between my legs.”³²⁴ In commenting on this scene, Josefina Lopez challenges Carmen’s notion that Ana has lost something, instead countering that Ana has gained something—her sexuality and her own power.³²⁵ When Ana’s retort triggers a slap and a warning not to embarrass her mother by becoming pregnant, Ana taunts her that she is the one pretending to be pregnant. In a cruel but apt reading of their relationship, Ana declares “You’re only pretending you’re pregnant because you want a baby in the house. But you can’t have a baby. I’m not your baby anymore.”³²⁶ Shortly thereafter, Ana and her mother visit a doctor who explains to Carmen that she is not pregnant but instead is going through menopause.

Now, Ana, reversing the usual dynamics in their relationship, can tell Carmen not to eat dessert because the doctor told her to avoid sugar.³²⁷ Carmen, however, turns the conversation to Ana’s weight. In a scene memorialized in the advertisements for the film (“Go ahead. Eat the flan.”),³²⁸ Carmen instructs Ana not to eat the flan, but Ana defiantly takes a bite. As the filmmakers suggest, eating the flan could symbolize a range of acts of self-assertion; here, it is evidence of Ana’s growing capacity to challenge her mother’s negative images of her.³²⁹

The most crucial showdown between Ana and her mother over their differing views of her appearance and of femininity occurs in the much discussed underwear scene in the factory, from which the title of the film derives.³³⁰ Ana and the other workers are hot and sweaty as they try to finish the big order. Finally, Ana takes her shirt off, and her mother rushes to cover her. Ana asks her sister and coworkers if they are not hot in their clothes. Her mother once again tells Ana and Estela that they should lose weight because they would “look beauti-

323. *Id.* sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*) (English translation of Spanish dialogue).

324. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*).

325. *Id.* commentary, sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo) [hereinafter commentary, sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*)].

326. *Id.* sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*).

327. *Id.*

328. See *id.* commentary, sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*) (discussing advertisements for the film), *supra* note 325.

329. *Id.*

330. *Id.* sc. 15 (*Real Women*).

ful without all that fat.”³³¹ But Panchita, a coworker who is also heavy, stands up to Carmen, telling her that Ana and Estela look beautiful as they are. Carmen’s criticisms trigger an important speech by Ana that reveals her complex feelings about her weight and the place it plays in her identity. Rebuffing her mother’s insults about how she looks in the underwear, Ana says, “I happen to like myself.”³³² But she also admits that she does want to lose weight. However, “part of me doesn’t because my weight says to everybody, ‘fuck you!’”³³³ She continues: “How dare anybody try to tell me what I should look like or what I should be when there’s so much more to me than the weight.”³³⁴

After Ana’s speech, her coworkers and sister also take off their clothes, humorously competing over who has the most cellulite or stretch marks.³³⁵ In a poignant scene, when Ana tries to get her mother to join them, she starts to lift up her mother’s shirt and, before she is slapped away, glimpses her mother’s caesarean scar. Her mother tells her, “This is you,” and Ana replies, “That’s a big scar.”³³⁶ This moment might seem to provide a bridge between them, yet her mother can neither accept nor join in with Ana and the rest of them. Instead, she scolds, “[L]ook at all of you,” and asks if they are not embarrassed.³³⁷ Panchita responds, “Look how beautiful we are,” and Ana says, “This is who we are, Mama, real women.”³³⁸ With that, Carmen, the only one fully clothed, leaves the factory.

The outcome of Ana’s showdown with her mother is a striking reflection of the distance Ana has come in gaining the affection and respect of Estela and Ana’s coworkers. And the distance Ana has come in her ability to sympathize with her sister and identify with the factory is evident in what Ana does next; she turns the radio to Latin music, begins dancing and parroting Estela’s usual role, and urges that they should finish the big order that night.³³⁹ They all return to work in their underwear, happily dancing and working to the music. Even more striking in this scene is Ana’s capacity to find happiness in this workplace, given that her parents’ disapproval of Columbia seems to put that dream out of her reach.

331. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 15 (*Real Women*).

332. *Id.*

333. *Id.*

334. *Id.*

335. *Id.*

336. *Id.*

337. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES sc. 15 (*Real Women*).

338. *Id.*

339. *Id.*

E. Real Women Have Curves in Context: Family, Gender, Immigration, and Identity

Ana's coming-of-age story ends with her beginning a new stage of her journey as a college student at Columbia who is far from home. A critical step on her path was the initiative she took to enroll herself in a high school in Beverly Hills. Even though her mother has a different conception of Ana's proper role, and her father expects her to delay college, Ana persists in applying for college. But, in the end, her ability to fashion her identity—or a possible self—that differs from her mother's vision depends in part on the support of family (her grandfather and, later, her father) and on the catalyst provided by her teacher by informing her about the possibility of a scholarship at Columbia. If her father had shared her mother's vision of Ana's proper role, then he would not have valued Ana's higher education and Ana might have remained in the factory, working for her sister, or she might have married.

Thus, some of Ana's family ties foster her own efforts to construct her identity and pursue a vision of a good life while other family ties constrain her. But the very family obligation she initially resents, working in her sister's factory, also transforms her in a way that allows her father to support her quest to go away to college. Ironically, it is her demonstrated loyalty to family that enables him to give his blessing to her moving away from family. Like *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Real Women Have Curves* also offers a rich portrayal of integration: Ana honors her commitment to her family, and in so doing, gains her father's support of her own pursuit of her future.

Noting the salience of the depiction, in *Real Women Have Curves*, of family resistance to a daughter's leaving home for college, one recent news show reported: "For Hispanic women, the road from the barrio to the college campus can be a minefield strewn with cultural and economic obstacles, as well as those sexual and ethnic stereotypes."³⁴⁰ Young Hispanic women at one campus reported that they found empowerment through bonding with other young women who are similarly "educational pioneers in their families," and through the encouragement of their teachers.³⁴¹ They fight off stereotypes that beauty, rather than brains, are the way to attract a husband and that, at their age, they should be a married housewife.³⁴² Hispanic girls struggle with conflicting messages, where "the Old World model of

340. *Sunday Morning*, *supra* note 302.

341. *Id.*

342. *Id.*

what a female should be” conflicts with “the Americanized version that tells us you can be a mother and have a career.”³⁴³ Mindful of such reports, Cardoso concurs that it is hard for young women in immigrant Hispanic families to grow up with two distinct messages: That this is America and you can have it all, but this message does not apply to you because you are Latina.³⁴⁴

Read against this background, Ana’s story is one of triumph. How did Ana achieve what she did? On one view, socialization about her proper role as a female might have so determined her identity that she would not be able to envision or act upon the path she undertakes in the film. Some research on Hispanic families, for example, finds that daughters are often “socialized to be dependent, obedient, responsible, and submissive; disagreement and conflict with parents and elders are often not tolerated.”³⁴⁵ Clearly, neither Ana nor her family fits this model easily, as Ana’s steadfast defiance of her mother and her father’s respectful treatment of her indicate.

But what gives Ana such strength? Paradoxically, perhaps the very intensity of her conflict with her mother helps her to develop her strength. Filmmakers Cardoso and Lopez suggest that Ana needed the “headstrong” stubbornness that her mother gave her so that she could stand up to her mother and, ultimately, leave home.³⁴⁶ Estela points out the similarities between Ana and Carmen, although Ana denies it.³⁴⁷

Ana’s strength, her outspokenness, and her ability to stand up to her mother and to other people also embody Cardoso’s and Lopez’s own visions of what they wished they could have been at Ana’s age.³⁴⁸ Cardoso explains, for example, that when Ana catches Jimmy staring at her breasts, and confronts him about it, she acts in a way that

343. Dana Canedy, *Troubling Label for Hispanics: “Girls Most Likely to Drop Out”*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 25, 2001, § 1, at 24. In his research for *Real Women Have Curves*, George LaVoo commented, in particular, on the impression that Canedy’s article made on him. See REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 12 (*All the Way to New York*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo) [hereinafter commentary, sc. 12 (*All the Way to New York*)].

344. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 12 (*All the Way to New York*), *supra* note 343.

345. Jill McLean Taylor, *Cultural Stories: Latina and Portuguese Daughters and Mothers*, in URBAN GIRLS, *supra* note 249, at 117, 123 (citations omitted).

346. REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES commentary, sc. 8 (*Help Yourself*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

347. *Id.* commentary, sc. 2 (*Like Mother . . .*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

348. *Id.*

Cardoso had always wanted to when men stared at her.³⁴⁹ And when Ana fights back after her mother calls her a “whore” for losing her virginity, Cardoso expresses what she wishes she had been able to say to her own mother in a similar circumstance.³⁵⁰

The men in Ana’s life also enable her to assert her agency and shape an identity that reconciles family and a world outside her neighborhood. In particular, the portrayals of Ana’s teacher, father, and grandfather offer positive portraits—or role models—of Latino men who help a young woman rather than restrict or oppress her.³⁵¹ Indeed, in doing so, *Real Women Have Curves* differs from films that render Latinos sexist, violent, drug dealers, or gang members.³⁵²

In sum, Ana’s coming-of-age reflects a delicate negotiation between the demands of family and her own dreams and desire for independence, and coming to new understandings about family loyalty, her body, and her sexuality. Ana travels between worlds—between home and her elite high school, between her sister’s factory and her private time in which she writes her college essay and sees Jimmy, and, at the film’s end, from her family home and her neighborhood to New York and an elite university. Negotiating these different worlds tells a specific story about Ana, as a Latina and daughter of immigrant parents. But, in rendering the specific context of her life, *Real Women Have Curves* touches on more universal themes about identity. In showing Ana’s growing acceptance of her body as that of a “real woman,” *Real Women Have Curves* also sends a message about a more universal journey, “a journey of self-acceptance and self-affirmation” that stresses the importance of self-love and recognizing inner beauty.³⁵³ Ana’s acts of self-assertion—from eating the flan to taking off her clothes in the factory to show her mother that they are all women, “real women”—become emblematic of other acts of self-assertion, such that, as the movie teaser promises, to be a real woman is to “take chances,” “have flaws,” and “embrace life.”³⁵⁴

349. *Id.*

350. *Id.* commentary, sc. 14 (*Pregnant Pause*).

351. *See id.* sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*), sc. 9 (*Night Out*), sc. 10 (*Whatever It Takes*).

352. For a discussion of such stereotypes in film, see Ediberto Román, *Who Exactly is Living La Vida Loca?: The Legal and Political Consequences of Latino-Latina Ethnic and Racial Stereotypes in Film and Other Media*, 4 J. GENDER, RACE & JUST. 37 (2000). Tellingly, some potential financiers of *Real Women Have Curves* asked if the filmmakers could include at least one darker, more violent, male character. *See REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES* commentary, sc. 4 (*Find Your Own Gold*) (commentary by Director Patricia Cardoso, Co-Screenwriter Josefina Lopez, and Producer/Co-Screenwriter George LaVoo).

353. Lopez, *supra* note 288, at 85.

354. *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES* (from front of DVD jacket). The film also seems to be one factor leading to greater consciousness around body acceptance. *See, e.g.*, Rhonda Bodfield

V. CONCLUSION

The two films analyzed in this article, *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Real Women Have Curves*, are useful resources in considering what sorts of factors facilitate constructing identity in context. Their coming-of-age stories combine autobiographical elements, reflecting their creators' own experiences in specific communities, with creative visions of how young women might develop and assert agency. As personal narratives, as well as imaginings of possibilities, they suggest the multiple dimensions of the task of constructing identity in context.

In stressing culture as a process and constructing identity as a journey, these films also resonate in helpful ways with ongoing academic explorations of how best to represent the interplay between identity and culture and the dynamics between individual and group identity. Both films represent their heroines as agents, who are not fully determined by or victims of their culture. There are openings, or spaces, in which they assert their agency. Culture, for Jess and Ana, is not akin to a constraining garment that they must throw off in order to be free. Each finds a way to embrace aspects of their ethnic and cultural identity that they find valuable, but in ways that they tailor to their conception of self. Similarly, Jess's parents and, at least, Ana's father, also seem to regard the cultural paradigm as negotiable; they can and do find a way to accept their daughters' choices.

Although these films are aptly described as multicultural coming-of-age stories, their significant messages about construction of identity need not be confined only to negotiations of culture, or the story of a minority cultural group within a majority society. They illustrate the more general phenomenon of finding openings, or spaces, amidst various sorts of constraining structures. This is evident, for example, in *Bend It Like Beckham's* exploration of the parallels between Jess's and Jules's struggles against the constraints of conventions of femininity.

From a standpoint of institutional design, both films suggest the importance of a society in which a multitude of private and public institutions offer the resources that enable persons to develop and pursue their capacities. Indeed, such institutional resources were critical to making these films. To return to Appiah's image of a "tool kit of options,"³⁵⁵ that kit cannot be infinite, but strong institutions can also help to ensure that it is more than an empty set.

Bloom, *Women Feel More At Home with Body, Researchers Say*, AUGUSTA CHRONICLE, Feb. 29, 2004, at G7.

355. Appiah, *supra* note 1, at 96.

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