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REPRESENTATION OF IMMIGRANT FAMILY CONFLICT IN POPULAR CULTURE: POWER, ESSENTIALISM AND EMANCIPATION

REPRESENTATION OF IMMIGRANT FAMILY CONFLICT IN POPULAR CULTURE: POWER, ESSENTIALISM AND EMANCIPATION

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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TITLE: Representation of Immigrant Family Conflict in Popular Culture: Power, Essentialism and Emancipation

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Abstract

Immigration is a complex process that involves multiple social, economic and political challenges. Immigrants face numerous structural barriers throughout the settlement process including "stress, underemployment, downward mobility, discrimination, poor housing, lack of access to services, and inadequate social support" (Simich, Beiser, Stewart and Mwakarimba, 2010, p. 260) that contribute to their status as a marginalized social group. The discourse of 'culture' is a prevalent paradigm to explain the integration outcomes of immigrants in our society. From a critical perspective, the discourse of acculturation can be used to perpetuate social power imbalances by universalizing dominant culture, obscuring the effects of social power imbalances and essentializing immigrant identities.

This research examines the social justice implications of the public discourse on immigrant families through a critical discourse analysis of three popular culture films with the central theme of immigrant family conflict. Analysis of the films reveals that the discourse of immigrant family pathology is present in the narrative structure of all three films. At the same time, all of the films also represent counter narratives that highlight the complexity and fluidity of contemporary immigrant identities. It is argued that the films represent the protagonists engaging in the process of challenging both mainstream and traditional essentialized cultural identities. This process, termed 'the third space' by Bhabha (1990), is argued to have emancipatory potential for immigrant communities and for the pursuit of social justice.

Acknowledgements

The MSW program at McMaster has been an enlightening experience that has challenged and expanded my thinking and inspired me to strive to seek social justice. This program has made me proud of my profession and cognizant of the power and responsibility I posses as a social worker. I would like to thank the staff and faculty at the McMaster school of social work for their professionalism, support and inspiration. In particular, I would like to thank Gary Dumbrill and Sheila Sammon for challenging me and providing me with guidance and encouragement.

In addition, I would like to thank my colleagues in the MSW program for making this year truly enjoyable, allowing me to learn from them and inspiring me with their generosity and kindness.

This research has been inspired by my childhood experience of immigration to Canada. As such, I would like to acknowledge the opportunities I have gained as a Canadian and a citizen of democratic country. This privilege has stimulated my commitment towards social justice, liberty and equality.

Finally but perhaps most importantly, I would like to thank my family for providing me with the unconditional love and acceptance that has allowed me to become the person I am. My adolescent experiences have been the inspiration for this thesis. Reflecting on these years have made me appreciate the unwavering love and patience of my parents, Alex and Lilia Rabinovich. I also thank my husband Jon Sepia for his kindness, love and support. Thank you.

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Introduction

My family arrived to Canada as refugees from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in 1989. For 10 years prior to this, my family were 'refuseniks', a term used to describe Soviet Jews who were denied permission to emigrate abroad by the Soviet government. My maternal aunt and grandmother had immigrated to Canada in 1979, and my family had sought permission to emigrate since then. As Jews living in the FSU my family experienced both systemic oppression such as the prohibition of religious practice, official limitations on professional and academic advancement and personal experiences of anti-Semitism, which was widespread throughout the country. Gitelman and Ro'i (2007) write that "In the course of less than a century, Jews in Russia/The Soviet Union have survived two world wars, revolution and political and economic turmoil, as well as persecution by both Nazis and Soviets" (p. 1). The Soviet communist philosophy "regarded the total assimilation of Jews as an essential feature of social progress and an indispensable prerequisite of the socialist order" (Eliav, 1969, p.237). Accordingly, the Soviet government attempted to pursue a policy of forced assimilation marked by prohibition of all religious activity, forced dissolution of Jewish communities, confiscation of property and physical oppression such as placement in prisons or gulags (Pinkus, 1989). Despite the policy of assimilation, "Jews were, however, denied the possibility of a complete social assimilation and

disappearance into the majority population for they continued to be identified as Jews 'by nationality,' in accordance with the traditional ethnic structure of East European society" (Eliav, 1969, p.239). Consequently, this policy perpetuated anti-Semitism and "served as a significant factor for the retention of Jewish consciousness by the Jews themselves, notwithstanding their deracination from all roots of Jewish religion and culture" (Eliav, 1969, p.240). This "paradox between forced deracination and cultural assimilation" led to Jewish disillusionment with the Soviet regime and a search for a Jewish identity (Eliav, 1969, p. 237).

During the Cold War, the human rights abuses of the Soviet government towards Jews became a major issue in the West. As the Cold War progressed, my family became the subject of a popular media campaign in the West to aid Soviet Jews. As the campaign progressed, my parents went on a hunger strike in protest of the continued government denial to emigrate. Finally, after 10 years, my family was granted permission to emigrate in 1989. My memories of this time are vague, I can recall journalists visiting us and bringing me gifts of toys and candy I had never seen before. I can also recall our arrival into Canada and what seemed like hordes of journalists walking backwards and snapping pictures of our family. These events that occurred in my childhood have played an integral part in shaping my identity.

As a youth growing up in Canada, I became aware of differing expectations in the home and at school. For example, at school we would be asked to sit on the floor, while at home my parents taught that people sat in chairs,

and animals sat on the floor. At school, we would be taught that all people are the same, but at home I was taught that I was part of an ancient nation that must constantly struggle to remain different. Furthermore, my family's experience led my parents to be suspicious of government intervention, and sceptical of assimilationist state policies. As I grew into an adolescent, my identity became increasingly fragmented. While I was faced with the same developmental struggles of all adolescents, I was additionally faced with the task of reconciling my familial values with surrounding social norms and expectations. For example, my family strongly believed that I must preserve my Jewish ancestry by marrying within my race. This became a source of immense confusion, frustration, guilt and fear for me as I struggled to understand why it was so important and what I believed. As I searched for answers, the messages I received from school, friends and the media suggested to me that my family was being unreasonable and living in the past and that I had a duty to follow my heart and find my own path in life. However, at the same time, I felt a duty to pay respect to my ancestral heritage and family. Throughout my adolescent years and early twenties, I engaged in a period of self-exploration and reflection that involved living abroad, being exposed to differing perspectives and learning about my family history and religion. As I neared my mid-twenties, I began to feel that I had finally begun to reconcile my fragmented identity and solidify my own views on religion, family, culture and life.

As I reflect on this phase of my life, I acknowledge that much of my experience is a common hallmark of the adolescent developmental phase. However, I also feel that much of the tension that I felt was exacerbated by a necessity to fuse opposing value systems into a cohesive personal identity. This process forced me to undergo a period of self-reflection that ultimately allowed me to solidify my identity. In the process, I learned many valuable lessons. Furthermore, my experiences living abroad (in Israel, Costa Rica and the US) caused me to acknowledge that many taken-for-granted popular culture values are in fact not universal values but rather expressions of that particular society. Furthermore, I believe that my family's experience has contributed to my interest in the critical interrogation of cultural and state ideology. My ontological perspective incorporates these experiences, and thus I am interested in the critical examination of taken-for-granted public knowledge and the ensuing implications for social justice.

In this research, I will critically examine the representation of cultural conflict in immigrant families in popular culture. In order to do this, I will study commercially successful films due to their role as powerful representations of popular culture. In particular, I will examine depictions of conflict between adolescent immigrants and their parents with a focus on the representation of family conflict and diversity in popular culture. As such, I seek to examine the social justice implications of the current discourse on immigrant family conflict in popular media.

Theoretical Framework

Ontological Perspective

My approach to this research is shaped by a critical, anti-oppressive and constructionist ontological perspective. The critical social science (CSS) perspective views society as oppressive and seeks to illuminate and challenge the power imbalances that uphold oppression (Neuman, 2011). According to Moosa-Mitha (2005), an anti-oppressive (AOP) research perspective is situated within the intersection of critical and difference-centered perspectives. Thus "the specific and differential nature of oppression is acknowledged, but without losing the sense of collective experiences of oppression" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 65). From this perspective, culture is conceptualized as something subjective and fluid that every individual experiences differently and that intersects with other social locations. At the same time, an AOP perspective acknowledges a power differential between dominant culture and minority groups and the collective experience of cultural oppression..

Burr (2003) describes the goal of social constructionist research as seeking to "identify the ideological and power effects of discourse" (p. 4). Thus a constructionist perspective posits that discourses constituted by "language and other symbolic systems" (Burr, 2003, p. 4) uphold social power relations and thus is interested in examining and challenging discourse. Burr (1995) writes that "for

Foucault, power and resistance are two sides of the same coin. The power implicit in one discourse is only apparent from the resistance implicit in another" (p. 64). From this perspective, the conflicts arising from acculturation gaps may be viewed as a microcosm for the conflicting discourses of dominant culture and minority cultures. Foucault "rejects the view of power as an essentially repressive force, seeing it instead at its most effective when it is productive, when it *produces* knowledge" (Burr, 1995, p. 65). Further, Foucault argues that in Western societies, control has shifted from "sovereign power" to "disciplinary power" in which "people are disciplined and controlled by freely subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of others and to their own self-scrutiny" (Burr, 1995, p. 68). This view suggests that social power imbalances can be created and perpetuated through the subtle power of discourse. Accordingly, my research examines the exercise of power through the popular culture discourse on acculturation.

Conceptualizing the Immigrant Experience

In my experience, immigration was a challenging and complex process. The combined effects of losing support systems, becoming immersed in a new environment with different standards of conduct and losing previous social status can result in emotional turmoil and confusion. In my family, each member was impacted by immigration in unique ways. From a broader perspective, the individual challenges experienced by my family were arguably compounded by structural barriers to integration.

Marginalization and Structural Barriers

Pumariega and Rothe (2010) write that "The process of immigration can involve many steps that are potentially stressful and even traumatic" (p.506). Immigrants face numerous structural barriers throughout settlement including "stress, underemployment, downward mobility, discrimination, poor housing, lack of access to services, and inadequate social support" (Simich, Beiser, Stewart and Mwakarimba, 2010, p. 260). Consequently, *Statistics Canada* notes that "The past 25 years has seen a more or less continuous deterioration in the economic outcomes for immigrants entering Canada" (Picot, 2008, p. 5). In addition to economic barriers, immigrants face social exclusion in the form of subtle and overt discrimination and xenophobia (Pumariega and Rothe, 2010). Anis (2005) notes that "prejudiced attitudes in their environment" result in "stress, as well as mental and physical problems" for immigrants and "may also affect parents' ability to raise their children in their new environment" (p.4). The structural barriers faced by immigrants are compounded by "poor and inconsistent social services responses by local agencies and communities" (Pumariega and Rothe, 2010, p. 506). Accordingly, research shows immigrants to have "lower levels of utilization of mental health services", "increasing risk for psychopathology" and higher risk of referral to juvenile authorities and diagnosis as "socially deviant" for immigrant youth (Pumariega and Rothe, 2010, p. 510). Accordingly, Mullaly (2002) identifies immigrants as a 'subordinate social group' that "experience more surveillance and intrusion and have less protection of their rights than do

those of the dominant group" (p.42). This highlights the need to respond to economic, political and social marginalization and lack of sufficient social services for immigrant communities.

Culture to Explain Immigrant Outcomes

Cultural adaptation and integration is arguably a central part of the immigration process. However, culture can be a broad term that can serve numerous purposes. As such, I seek to critically examine the concept of culture and its application to immigrants in my research.

Andersson (2003) writes that the "tendency in majority populations to use culture arguments to explain the lack of integration of immigrants into different fields of society has increased" (p.83). Jayasuriya (2008) writes that

> Ethnic and cultural diversity and pluralism have become significant factors in contemporary social and political theorising. This has led to an increase in interest in notions of cultural pluralism, collective identity and nationalism -all of which are in one way or another linked to the concept of culture (p.30)

Thus, culture is considered to be "critical for an understanding of human behaviour, especially as social action" (Jayasuriya, 2008, p. 30). Pumariega and Rothe (2010) define culture as "the shared collective knowledge, beliefs, skills, and traditions that allow a group of people and families to adapt successfully to their ecological contexts over multiple generations and often millennia" (p. 507). The discourse of 'culture' is prevalent in the contemporary understanding of immigrant community, identity and integration outcomes.

Discourse, Culture and Power

Ngo (2008) writes that "culture and identity are the result of differentiation in social relations precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside discourse" (p.6). Discourses can be understood as "central modes and components of the production, maintenance, and conversely resistance to systems of power and inequality" (Park, 2005, p.11, 12). From this constructionist perspective, culture can be conceptualized as a discourse that is "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (Ngo, 2008, p.6). Furthermore, cultural identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity" (Ngo, 2008, p.6). Accordingly, the construction of culture is considered to be "always 'ideological,' always situated with respect to the forms and modes of power operating in a given time and space" (Ortner, 1998, p.4).

The Functions of Culture

i) Source of Identity

According to Barnes (2005), culture encompasses "symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories and rituals of daily life" (p. 968). The difference approach to identity politics "proceeds from the assumption that the foundations of personal identity lie in cultural and national sources" (Schouls 2003 p.4). Accordingly, it is believed that "culture provides

individuals with a horizon of meaning that is essential to their being human" and "helps to identify individuals: it gives them "strategic and stylistic guides to action"' (Schouls 2003 p.4). Barnes (2005) writes that culture provides "a cultural repertoire or 'tool kit'" that is used to "negotiate a place in society" (Page 968). In this sense, culture can be conceptualized as a source of identity for individuals and communities.

ii) Response to Marginalization

Schouls (2003) writes that "In general, groups in search of increased shares of political autonomy from states tend to be united by bonds of kinship, ethnicity, traditional community, territory, or tribal affiliation and are often referred to as "nations," "peoples," or "cultures" (p. 2). Accordingly, culture serves as a means of obtaining resources and a tool in responding to external threat and oppression (Schouls, 2003). Schouls (2003) writes that although the various forms of identity politics "take no universal form, they all share the common feature of being constituted by people who perceive their identities to be under some kind of threat" (Schouls, 2003, p.2). From a constructionist perspective, all groups can be viewed as being under threat due to the fact that social power relations are in a constant state of negotiation. Consequently, it is argued that social groups face the constant need to define and justify their existence and maintain their social power. From this perspective, culture can be viewed as a means of unifying groups and supporting their quest for power, status and resources.

iii) Dividing Force

Schouls (2003) writes that culture "not only provides individuals with identity but also divides them from one another at the deepest level of human existence" (p.5). In her conceptualization of 'agonistic pluralism', Mouffe (1993) considers the creation of an 'Other' essential to the formation of a community due to the fact that "every definition of a 'we' implies the delimitation of a 'frontier' and the designation of a 'them'. Consequently, the "definition of a 'we' always takes place, then in the context of diversity and conflict" (p. 84). In addition, culture can serve as a means of supporting the economic and political needs of nation states to create boundaries. Jenson and Papillon (2000) write that,

> With economic restructuring, there are questions about the capacity of state institutions to ensure inclusion and participation to all members of a political community. Immigrant and refugee flows as well as movements of persons within economic trade zones have highlighted "fundamental issues about who is in and who is out, that is precisely where the boundaries of citizenship are (and cited in George, Lee and McGrath, 2003, p.72)

Park (2010) notes "that because national borders are imperfect, supplementary mechanisms for exclusion are deployed" (p. 383). In the face of these needs for differentiation, culture can serve as a means of creating psychological, economic and political boundaries for communities and nations.

The Discourse of Acculturation

Acculturation is one of the predominant concepts that informs the conceptualization of the immigrant experience. Within this discourse, the term 'acculturation' conceptualizes the adaptation process of immigrants upon settling

in a new country. In the early literature on acculturation, Gordon (1964) conceptualizes acculturation as a unidimensional process in which "immigrants are portrayed moving along a continuum, with at one pole maintenance of the immigrant culture and at the other adaptation of the host culture" (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault and Senécal, 1997, p. 375). Within this paradigm, the eventual outcome is considered to be the full adaptation of the host culture, and the abandonment of the culture of origin. Within this discourse,

> the term *assimilation* is used to describe the changes that immigrants make to the dominant host culture to become a 'rightful member' of the majority, to fit into the existing social structure of the host society (Woldemikael, 1987). Through this prism, problems of adaptation are attributed to the immigrants themselves, who are held responsible for their failure or success in assimilating in the host society (Bourhis et al., 1997, p. 376)

The unidimensional model of acculturation has subsequently been expanded to address the fact that "the host majority is also changed by the presence of culturally distinctive immigrants" (Bourhis et al., p. 376). Consequently, the concept of bicultural acculturation was introduced by Berry (1974, 1980). Bicultural acculturation posits that "rather than being in opposition with each other along a single dimension, the immigrant and host community identities are shaped as distinct processes that develop separately along orthogonal dimensions" (Bourhis et al., p.376). Within this model, immigrants choose their acculturation strategy based on the utility of maintaining their culture or origin and/or adapting the host culture. Bourhis et al. (1997) further argue that

immigrant acculturation outcomes are also shaped by the attitudes of the host majority and by state policy.

More recently, Portes and Zhou (1993) proposed segmented assimilation theory as an explanatory model for the differential outcomes of immigrants in an increasingly diverse society. Xie and Greenman (2005) write that,

> Segmented assimilation theory is based on the recognition that American society is now extremely diverse and segmented, with an underclass residing in central cities where many new immigrant families first settle upon arrival. Thus, it is argued that different groups are available to which the new immigrants may assimilate, and that as a result they may take divergent assimilation paths. (p. 4)

Peguero (2009) highlights that "Segmented assimilation theory recognizes that although U.S. society is racially and ethnically diverse, it is also stratified along socio-economic lines" (p. 272). This idea broadens the concept of acculturation to include the fact that immigrants acculturate into divergent socio-economic groups. This allows for the examination of immigrant outcomes within the context of broader social power imbalances.

Critical Analysis of the Acculturation Framework

My family's experience with state oppression and with the difficulties of immigration has contributed to my interest in critical analysis of the implications of the public discourse on immigrant integration. As such, I am interested in examining the potential risks of the acculturation framework from a social justice perspective.

Assimilation and Cultural Oppression

Sakamoto (2007) cautions that while the official policy towards immigrants is now integration, the historical presence of assimilationist ideas "continues to lurk behind social policies and social services for immigrants" through the implicit assumption of conformity to dominant culture (p. 515). Sakamoto (2007) further suggests that the power differential between immigrants and the host society may prevent the mutual influence of immigrants and the host society on each other as described in the bidimensional model. Sakamoto (2007) further notes that "the change processes of host societies are often neglected in research" (p.520). Thus it is argued that social power imbalances may in fact prevent immigrants from influencing the host society.

Mullaly (2002) describes cultural imperialism as a form of oppression wherein,

> the dominant group universalizes its experience and culture and uses them as the norm. Through a process of ethnocentrism the dominant group, most often without realizing it, projects its experience and culture as representative of all humanity (p. 46).

Consequently, "it is the subordinate groups who must surrender their respective cultures and adopt the dominant culture, which is presented as a common, universal humanity" (Mullaly, 2002, p. 99). Thus, "the purported neutrality of universal individual rights obscures the fact that the integrity of minority cultural differences is often vulnerable to the decisions made by the dominant culture" (Schouls 2003 p.21). As a result, seemingly liberal policies may in fact be "a cultural imposition of the hegemonic culture that, in turn, threatens vulnerable minorities with cultural extinction" (Schouls 2003 p.23).

Park (2005) argues that culture serves as a discursive tool to differentiate minorities and universalize the mainstream as a result of the attribution of 'culture' to minorities and the construction of the mainstream as 'culture-free'. This discourse is upheld by the underlying assumption that "the notion of culture is that which differentiates minorities, immigrants, and refugees from the rest of society, culture as a signifier of personal dignity and identity can be understood to be true only of minority/immigrant/refugee populations" (Park, 2005, p. 19). The differentiation of minorities through culture results in their marginalization, "Against the blank, white backdrop of the "culture-free" mainstream, the "cultured" Others are made visible in sharp relief, and this visibility-a sign of separateness and differentiation from the standard- are inscriptions of marginality" (p.22). Park (2005) further argues that

> Embedded in the conceptualization of culture as difference, in other words, is that of difference conceptualized as deficiency. 'Culture' in this arithmetic is a marker for the periphery, a contradictory descriptor for a deficit since to *have* 'culture,' in this schema, is to be assigned a position subordinate to that of those inscribed as without 'culture.'(p.22)

Thus, the differentiation of immigrants through culture is "constructed from within an orthodoxic, hegemonic discursive paradigm" and "deployed as a marker of deficit" (Park, 2005, p. 29). Park (2005) writes, "That 'culture' is conflated with race and ethnicity is conceptually and methodologically dubious; that it is invariably equated with minority races and ethnicities is cause for consternation" (p. 21). Thus, the framing of difference in cultural terms can obscure racism. Hill (2006) writes,

> In psychology and sociology, culture is studied differently among ethnic minority and majority families. Among ethnic minority families, it is the proximal aspects of culture that are often studied. In contrast, among majority families, the proximal influence of culture is almost ignored. Everyone has culturally-based experiences, and parenting, family dynamics and children's development within all families are shaped by culturally-based beliefs and practices (p. 115).

The discourse of culture ignores social power imbalances by presenting dominant culture as a universal norm. Young (1990) writes that "the dominant cultural products of the society, that is, those most widely disseminated, express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these [dominant] groups" (p. 59). From this perspective, the discourse of culture can be viewed as a means of universalizing the values of the dominant group and marginalizing the values of outsiders. Furthermore, the concept of cultural oppression suggests that social power imbalances may prevent immigrant cultures from influencing the dominant culture.

Lack of Attention to Social Power Structures

Ku (2011) argues that cultural analysis serves to depoliticize the lived realities of immigrant communities by ignoring social structures. From a critical sociocultural perspective, Li (2010) argues that immigrant experience "cannot be understood fully in isolation of the existing system of power" and "must be examined in a broader political and socioeconomic context" (p. 121). Park (2005) criticizes the popular discourse on culture due to the fact that "the central role of power becomes concealed" and the lack of attention to structural reform (p.25).

Consequently, Park (2005) argues that the discourse of culture serves to individualize and pathologize the 'cultured';

> If the "cultured" are indeed the exotic, different, deficient human beings, the construction inscribes them as, then the source of the problem lies in their difference and their inability to adapt to the normative society, not vice versa (p.25).

Consequently, the relegation of the immigrant experience to the private, depoliticized sphere of culture "deflects attention from exclusionary historical practices as well as discrimination immigrants continue to face" (Ngo, 2008, p. 5).

Framing immigrant family conflict in terms of acculturation may hinder anti-oppressive practice by obscuring oppression faced by immigrants based on race, class and/or immigration status. Sakamoto (2007) writes

> At root, in its apolitical nature, acculturation theory largely ignores structural issues affecting individuals in their dealing with unfamiliar culture(s). In doing so, acculturation theory does not capture the big picture behind acculturating individuals and may lead to pathologization of immigrants who may not be seen as acculturating 'enough', even if their behaviour is related to their experience of social exclusion or discrimination within the larger society (p.520).

Margolin (1997) cautions that the social work profession risks perpetuating oppressive social structures by creating an individualized discourse of client pathology;

> By focusing on the characteristics of clients, on *their* pathology, *their* delinquency, *their* failures, attention was diverted from the conditions external to them that constrained and limited their choices. The point is that aggressive social work's discourse on the negative traits of the poor legitimized the existing social order by deflecting attention from the unequal distribution of social resources and opportunities responsible for turning some people into clients and others into judges (p. 105).

Mullaly (2002) writes that anti-oppressive practice should "(1) not reproduce the inequalities of larger society; 2) challenge attitudes and agency cultures that moralize social problems and blame their victims; 3) not ascribe all social problems to individual deficiency" (p. 94). Thus, it follows that anti-oppressive practice with immigrant families entails looking beyond family pathology and acknowledging the impact of structural conditions on acculturation gap conflict.

Obscuring Racism

Park (2005) writes that culture "has also largely replaced the categories of race and ethnicity as the preferred trope of difference" (p. 29). This can serve to obscure racism as culture is "a markedly less controversial indicator than race, a category whose continued ubiquity is increasingly denied both conceptual legitimacy and political bona fides" (Park, 2005, p. 29). Theodorou (2011) cautions that,

> The racist undertones of the colorblind ideology, and its subsequent discourse and social practices, can be quite difficult to identify as they are based on ideas of meritocracy, individualism, and egalitarianism, which on the surface appear explicitly anti-racist (p. 504)

Thus, framing difference in terms of culture can serve to deflect attention from critical analysis of structural issues such as racism. Park (2005) writes that "While stereotypes of racial characteristics are vehemently repudiated in social work discourse, stereotypes fashioned from "culture," a term used interchangeably with, and as a descriptor for race, escapes equal censure" (p.24).

Reinforcing the Status-Quo

Park (2005) writes that

> "culture," as the operationalized measure of racial and ethnic status, is conceived as an objectifiable body of knowledge which can constitute the legitimate foundation for the building of interventions. Such interventions, produced entirely within the conceptual paradigm which constructs "culture" as a deficit marker for subjected populations, cannot be considered other than an instrument which reinforces the subjugating paradigm from which it is fashioned (p. 29).

This argument is reminiscent of Lorde's (1984) position that "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" because "when we use the Master's tools (i.e., the tools of patriarchy), we are reifying his authority, his ability to determine which tools are effective. Therefore, each act of "dismantling" also rebuilds his power." Li (2010) similarly argues that "No problem can be fundamentally solved with the same thinking in a system that creates it" (p. 133). Thus, it is argued that in limiting discussions of immigrant communities to the dominant discourse of culture, there is a risk of continuing to reproduce hegemonic power relations. Accordingly, there is a need to critically examine the cultural discourse and problematized its oppressive tenets.

Fixed Identities, Essentialization and Binaries

Ngo (2008) writes that "the emphasis on traditional cultural values reifies the notion of culture, positioning it as some thing that is fixed or a given, rather than as a social process that finds meaning within social relationships and practices" (p. 5). The conceptualization of culture as a static entity fails to allow for the redefinition of cultural identities in the face of contextual change.

Loughran (2003) writes that the reality of relations between groups and individuals is distorted by "simple optimism" and "simple pessimism" and,

> This distortion is especially likely to occur when a group of people is conceived of as a whole-even as a unit-because they have something in common. When a group of people is conceived of as a whole, as a unit, then past and present are more likely to be interpreted in the singular. What has happened to them in the past, what is happening to them now and in the present is determined by the past and present of the group; and within this framework of interpretation, it is easier to see people's past and present in terms of a simple (in the sense that it is singular) progression from one state of affairs to another state of affairs (p. 119).

The conceptualization of immigrants as a singular group can also serve to essentialize their identities. Park (2005) cautions that racial stereotypes "are made possible by the acceptance of the conceptualization of culture as a category defined by essential, fixable traits" (p.24). Further, the essentialization of immigrant identities can facilitate the social construction of binaries between the immigrant community and mainstream society. Ngo (2008) argues that "binary oppositions inscribe judgment and a pecking order (i.e., good/bad, ours/theirs) into cultural practices and values" (p. 5). For example, dichotomized representations result in the framing of immigrant conflict as clashes between "traditional values" and "modern values" in which immigrants are depicted as "backward or stuck in time" (Ngo, 2008, p. 5). The essentialization of immigrant identities and the construction of binaries between immigrants and the mainstream can serve to reflect and perpetuate social power imbalances.

The acculturation framework is problematized by the fluidity and plurality of culture. In their Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM), Bourhis, Moïse,

Perreault and Senécal, (1997) caution that "different immigrant groups are expected to adapt different configurations of acculturation orientations depending on their ethnocultural origin, social class background, age, sex, degree of ingroup identification, degree of contact with the host majority, and state integration policies towards them" (p. 382). From an anti-oppressive perspective, Mullaly (2002) cautions that "when we consider different forms and sources of oppression and different groups of oppressed people, there is a danger of viewing and treating everyone within a particular group as the same…any homogenization of people oversimplifies the complexities and varieties of social reality" (p. 157). Thus, the acculturation framework is problematized by the grouping of diverse immigrant and host country populations into a single category based on 'culture'.

The Third Space and Challenging Cultural Essentialism

From a constructionist perspective, Anis (2005) conceptualizes culture as "a mediating space between agents and structures" rather than "a property of ethnic particularity" (p.5). In the relational pluralism paradigm, "it is individuals who give ethnic structures such as tribes and nations their form" and these structures "should not be seen as ends in themselves" (Schouls 2003 p.32). Rather, ethnic structures "are constructions expressed in the way they are because they are deemed representative of identity in given periods of time" and "are always developed in the context of, and in response to, social relations with other groups" (Schouls 2003 p.32). From a constructionist perspective, there are

multiple ways of conceptualizing culture, and particular formulations of culture emerge as a product of contextually specific circumstances and power relations.

Hall (1989, 1990) and Bhabha (1994) understand culture and identity as a "continuous process of change and negotiation" (Ngo, 2008, p.6). Hall (1996) writes that due to the construction of identity based on discourse and response to representations, identity is "fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (p. 4). Bhabha (1994) writes that the construction of identity through discourse and representation creates a 'third space' or 'in-between' that "carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (p. 38). Accordingly, Ngo (2008) writes that

> The culture and identity of immigrant students and families thus cannot be conceptualized simply as something that is static, passed from one generation to the next. Notions of immigrant experiences must move beyond an either–or paradigm (i.e., either one is traditional or modern), toward an understanding of the in between (p. 9)

Bhabha (1990) identifies two key problems with the endorsement of cultural diversity in Western society; the first is that "although there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says 'these other cultures are fine but we must be able to locate them within our own grid' "(Rutherford, 1990, p. 209). The second is that "in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged racism is still rampant in various forms. This is because the universalism that

paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests" (Rutherford, 1990, p.208). Accordingly, Bhabha (1990) argues that "the difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 209).

Bhabha (1990) further argues that "cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 210). Thus, cultures are considered to be interdependent and accordingly, the coloniser and the colonised are interdependent. Bhabha proposes that "the third space" is an ideological space in which identity is "not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1995, p. 183). The notion of hybridity "denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). Thus it is hoped that the third space can provide a space in which "we can speak of Ourselves and Others" and "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1995, p. 183).

Fragmentation, Challenging Oppression and Radical Democratic Citizenship

Pluralist ideology is based on the premise that "it is considered of value to the host community that immigrants maintain key features of their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness while adopting the public values of the host majority" (Bourhis et. al, 1997, p.373). Canada's policy of multiculturalism is considered to be an example of pluralist ideology (Bourhis et. al, 1997). Mullaly (2002) situates

multiculturalism within postmodern and liberal ideology. From an anti-oppressive perspective, Mullaly (2002) writes that

> separating different forms of oppression from each other leads to a conservative brand of politics that mitigates against any notion of solidarity among groups into common causes to begin to change oppressive social structures. Instead, a competition for resources, media attention, and public support among various subordinate groups occurs-a competition that obviously benefits the dominant group (p. 99).

Thus, Mullaly (2002) critiques multiculturalism due to the fact that "Rather than social change, multiculturalism makes the self its primary political agenda", and that variables of gender, race and class "operate independently from one another so as to fragment people into racial, gender and class groups" (p. 99). While multicultural discourse has the political purpose of allowing immigrants to "formulate coherent personal identities" as members of an oppressed group, this formulation of personal identity is seen as "an end in itself" rather than the consciousness-raising of critical social theory, that sees it as a "a means to political action" (Mullaly, 2002, p. 100).

Sakamoto (2007) cautions that,

> When these assumptions of acculturation—a liberal multiculturalism view which may celebrate diversity but would not confront oppression (e.g. Maidment and Cooper, 2002)—are uncritically 'imported' into social work along with the explicit theory itself, there is a danger of social workers' becoming complicit in the oppression of immigrant clients with whom they work (p.520).

Accordingly, the formation of immigrant identity based on culture serves to fragment immigrants into separate communities, and thus remove grounds for challenging collective marginalized social status. This critique falls within the

larger challenge posed to critical social work by postmodernism due to the "The weakening of meta-narratives of social justice and emancipatory democracy in favour of relativism, deconstruction of multi-realities, and the jettisoning of any notion of core values" (Noble, 2004, p. 298).

These critiques challenge liberalist ideology for preventing individuals from forming a common goal of combating oppression. Mouffe (1993) suggests that while liberalism fails to promote a common good, it is important to acknowledge that the imposition of a common good can have totalitarian implications. Thus, a complex dilemma arises wherein there is a need to challenge oppression on a broad scale, however the imposition of a common goal on diverse groups is problematized due to the need to preserve individual liberty.

In her conception of radical democracy, Mouffe (1993) argues that "essentialism is inescapably deficient when it comes to the construction of a democratic alternative whose objective is the articulation of the struggles linked to different forms of oppression" and that essentialism "leads to a view of identity that is at odds with a conception of radical and plural democracy and that it does not allow us to construct the new vision of citizenship that is required by such a politics" (p. 75). Mouffe (2003) proposes that "the deconstruction of essential identities should be seen as the necessary condition for an adequate understanding of the variety of social relations where the principles of liberty and equality should apply (p. 76, 77).

Mouffe (2003) argues that there is a "need to establish a chain of equivalence among the different democratic struggles so as to create an equivalent articulation between the demands of women, blacks, workers, gays and others" (Mouffe, 2003, p.77). Mouffe (1993) conceptualizes radical democratic citizenship as a political community governed by a 'respublica', defined as "rules of civil intercourse" that "creates a common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises" (p.67). Thus, Mouffe (1993) writes that,

> a radical democratic interpretation will emphasize the numerous social relations where relations of domination exist and must be challenged if the principles of liberty and equality are to apply. It should lead to a common recognition among different groups struggling for an extension and radicalization of democracy that they have a common concern and that in choosing their actions they should subscribe to certain rules of conduct; in other words, it should construct a common political identity as radical democratic citizens (p. 70).

Similarly, in the identification approach to identity politics, it is believed that "the object of attention should be not culture but those bonds of relatedness and loyalty that link individuals to their ethnic communities in the first place" (Schouls 2003 p.11). The concept of the respublica creates the possibility of the deployment of culture as a common bond between immigrants that supports community cohesion and mutual support. This concept can further be politicized to enact the idea of a community bound together by a common pursuit of social justice. This framework offers a means of utilizing cultural analysis for the purpose of pursuing social justice within a democratic society. It is argued that

using the third space to continuously redefine culture offers a means of pursuing this goal.

Conceptualizing Immigrant Family Conflict: The Acculturation Gap Discourse

The 'acculturation gap' is a predominant discourse employed to interpret immigrant family conflict and pathology. When families immigrate into a new country, a phenomenon termed an 'acculturation gap' is believed to occur wherein, "children acculturate to the new culture at a faster rate than do their parents" while "adults tend to retain aspects of their culture of origin, and their acculturation to the new culture is slower" (Birman, 2006, p. 568). The development of acculturation gaps "are thought to contribute to family conflict between the generations, which has been found to be more pronounced in immigrant than in nonimmigrant families" (Birman, 2006, p. 568). In my family's experience, the emergence of acculturation gaps did contribute to conflict as my parents found my adaptation of some Canadian values to be troubling. Nevertheless, it is argued that the attribution of immigrant family conflict to acculturation gaps without critical analysis is problematic in that it risks obscuring other causes of family conflict. In social work practice, this can prevent addressing structural causes of conflict such as poverty, gender inequality or racism. Furthermore, this may risk the individualization and pathologization of immigrant clients.

The Academic Discourse on Acculturation Gaps

Research has shown that parents in immigrant families are more likely to retain culture of origin, while children are more likely to accept the values of the host culture (Lim, Yeh, Liang, Lau, and McCabe, 2008). This discrepancy, referred to as dissonant acculturation, acculturation disparity or acculturation gap "is postulated to be a major source of potential conflict in parent-child relationships and youth distress in immigrant families" (Lim et al., 2008, p.85). In addition, there is an extensive body of empirical research supporting the association of acculturation gaps with numerous risk factors for immigrant families and youth. Recently, Telzer (2011) highlights the complexity of the acculturation gap-distress model by proposing the modification of the acculturation gap-distress model to include "social and contextual variables" such as domain and direction (p. 313). Lim et al. (2008) write that while the research attempts to capture the complexity of the acculturation process by acknowledging it as a "bidirectional and multifaceted process" there continue to be "contradictory and complex findings, indicating that much remains to be understood" (p. 86).

Source of Family Conflict and Pathology

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between the acculturation gap and immigrant family conflict. (Dinh et al., 1994; Kwak, 2003; Landau, 1982; H. Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999; Rosenthal, 1984). Dinh et al (1994), Kwak (2003) and Nguyen et al (1999) found acculturation gaps to be a potential source of conflict in immigrant families and parent-child relationships.

Barrier to Family Communication

In recent studies, Kim and Park (2011) examined the impact of parent–adolescent communication on the acculturation gap–distress model in Korean American families. Merali (2004) conceptualizes acculturation gaps as being related to "adolescents being subject to different behavioural demands in the home and school contexts which may interfere with the development of a consolidated identity", "declines in perceived parenting efficacy due to problems transmitting cultural values to children" and "reduction in perceived family support and cohesion" (p. 92). Merali (2004) further notes that "It appears that family processes and outcomes may be shaped by the limited information that parents and adolescents have about each other" (p. 92).

Source of Adolescent Pathology

Soh-Leong, May, Liang, Lau and McCabe (2009) found associations between acculturation gaps and youth distress. In a longitudinal study of children of immigrants, Ying and Han (2007) found support for the hypothesis that "perceived intergenerational discrepancy in acculturation during early adolescence would predict intergenerational conflict in late adolescence, which, in turn, would increase depressive symptomatology in late adolescence" (p. 61). Smokowski and Bacallao (2006) found acculturation conflict to be a risk factor for adolescent aggression in Latino youth. Martinez (2006) found acculturation gaps to be associated with greater likelihood of substance use. In order to facilitate anti-oppressive social work with immigrant families it is argued that it is helpful to situate the research on acculturation gap conflict within the broader

context of social power imbalances and intersecting oppressions that may impact immigrant families.

Research Question

In light of the above, I am interested in examining the implications of the public discourse on immigrant family conflict. From an anti-oppressive perspective, this is an important area for critical examination due to the marginalized status of immigrant communities and the presence of cultural oppression. From a constructionist perspective, I am interested in examining how social power imbalances are perpetuated through discourse. For this reason, I consider the examination of popular culture films to be an important source of epistemological evidence due to their powerful role in creating popular discourse. Therefore, the intent of my research is to critically examine the representation of immigrant family conflict in popular culture. In particular, I am interested in examining how the popular culture discourse may impact the acculturation outcomes of immigrant families from a social justice perspective.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) fits well with my theoretical framework due to its critical, constructionist orientation. The data to be analyzed will consist of popular culture films that have the central theme of immigrant family conflict. It is argued that popular films create and contribute to the public discourse on immigrant families through the utilization of language and symbolic imagery (Burr, 2003). Accordingly, my choice of methodology reflects an interest in how the public discourse on immigrant families is created through film. Furthermore, the critical orientation of CDA research reflects my interest in how the aforementioned discourse impacts social power imbalances and social justice.

CDA Theoretical Framework

Critical Theory

Wodak and Meyer (2002) write that critical social theory "should be oriented towards critiquing and changing society, in contrast to traditional theory oriented solely to understanding or explaining it" (p. 6). Consistent with this critical orientation, CDA produces research that seeks to reveal and challenge oppressive social structures. Zdenek (2006) writes that "CDA specifically deals with the study of the discursive reproduction of power abuse, with forms of domination and social inequality" (p. 613). Henry and Tator (2007) describe CDA as "a type of research that primarily studies how social power, dominance,

and inequality are produced, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political arenas of society"(p. 120). One of the main purposes served by CDA research is to uncover oppressive discourses in order to promote social justice.

This research goal is consistent with the critical social science (CSS) approach of promoting structural social change as described by Neuman (2011), as well as with Chilisa's (2011) notion of decolonization of "the captive mind" (p. 17). Thus, a crucial purpose of my research is to identify, deconstruct and challenge the reproduction of oppressive discourses in the films.

Exercise of Power through Discourse

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) write that

> discourses emerge as particular ways of construing (representing, interpreting) particular aspects of the social process that become relatively recurrent and enduring and which necessarily simplify and condense complex realities, include certain aspects of them but not others, and focalize certain aspects whilst marginalizing others (p. 1215).

Thus, CDA takes the perspective that there are multiple means of interpreting the world, and discourses assign a particular meaning to social processes through the creation of knowledge.

Foucault's (1980) conceptualization of discourse as "a technique used by the power elite to exert control over other constituent groups" (p.27) has informed the significance of power in CDA. Locke (2004) suggests that CDA potentially reveals "ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonize human subjects through often covert position calls" (p. 2). Thus, the exercise of

power through discourse is conceptualized as potentially implicit and subconscious. This view is consistent with Foucault's disciplinary power, described by Burr (1995) as follows; "Foucault therefore rejects the view of power as an essentially repressive force, seeing it instead as at its most effective when it is productive, when it *produces* knowledge" (p. 65). In view of this, Locke (2004) writes that CDA "Views power in society not so much as imposed on individual subjects as an inevitable *effect* of a way particular discursive configurations or arrangements privilege the status and positions of some people over others" (p. 1). Thus, CDA has an epistemological interest in the subconscious exercise of power. Locke (2004) writes that "CDA's concern is with the *opacity* of texts and utterances- the discursive constructions or stories that are embedded in texts as information that is less readily available to consciousness" (p. 40). Accordingly, my methodological approach considers representation to be a complex and multi-faceted process. This complexity is exemplified by the fact that the producers of the films I have chosen identity themselves as members of the cultural groups they portray in their films. Accordingly, it is argued that oppressive representations in film emerge as a holistic product of complex social structures.

Dialectical Perspective

Fairclough (1992) writes that "On the one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels…On the other hand, discourse is socially constitutive" and so "Discourse contributes to the

constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them" (p. 63, 64). Thus, it is argued that discourse plays an active part in the constitution of social structures. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) describe the epistemological implications of the dialectical perspective as "explicating how these dialectical processes and relations are shaped by relations of power, how the dialectics of discourse figures in the constitution and consolidation of forms of social life which lead to and perpetuate injustices and inequalities" (p. 1215). Thus, CDA's dialectical perspective creates the need to analyze discourse in the broader context of social structures. Accordingly, my research seeks to position the representations in the films in the context of contemporary political events and socio-economic structures in order to understand how discourse and social structures mutually influence each other.

Film as Discourse

I have chosen to analyze films in my research due to their powerful role in shaping and transmitting public discourse.

Avila-Saavedra (2011) writes that

> Foucault (1978) argued that social power works through discourse. Ideological and cultural expressions are discursive formations of knowledge, and television is one center where power-knowledge is exercised. Therefore, the television text is approached as the symbolic articulation of the social, political, and cultural ideological discourses that inform our understanding of Latino ethnicity in the United States (p.277).

Accordingly, films are conceptualized in the research as a medium through which power is exercised by mainstream society. Moore and Pierce (2007) describe popular films as "a powerful 'mode of discourse' that at once tell us about our lives and those of others, but also shape the stories we might tell" (p. 172). Moore and Pierce (2007) further write that "The expansive reach of the narrative frames in movies make them a particularly important site for examining popular culture constructions of social issues" and "because of the popularity of movies as a source of entertainment and cultural expression, the reach of this discourse goes further than many other discursive forms" (p. 172, 173).

Brooks and Hébert (2006) further highlight the significance of film as a form of discourse,

> In our consumption-oriented, mediated society, much of what comes to pass as important is based often on the stories produced and disseminated by media institutions. Much of what audiences know and care about is based on the images, symbols, and narratives in radio, television, film, music, and other media. How individuals construct their social identities, how they come to understand what it means to be male, female, black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American—even rural or urban—is shaped by commodified texts produced by media for audiences that are increasingly segmented by the social constructions of race and gender. Media, in short, are central to what ultimately come to represent our social realities (p. 297).

Silverstone (2007) argues that "power is gained through appearance in the public sphere, and appearance in the public sphere in contemporary global society is achieved via the media" (Larson, 2009, p. 8). Silverstone (2007) writes that

> [The] space the media create, its omni-ever-present, indestructible, ephemeral, relentless, fractured, encompassing, intrusive, mediated space, is *the* public space, perhaps the only viable public space now available to

> us in a world of global politics and global interconnection. It is a public space grounded in appearance... (p. 26).

Accordingly, popular films are considered to be an important source of epistemological evidence in examining dominant public discourse.

Narrative as Discourse

Bordwell and Thomposon (2003) write that "Although there are several ways of organizing films into unified formal wholes, the one that we most commonly encounter in commercial feature films involves telling a story" (p.47). Bordwell and Thomposon (2003) attribute the popularity of narrative form to its ability to "arouse our interest and coax us to follow a series of events from start to finish" (p. 47). Numerous theorists have recognized "The transformative effect of narrative in cultural meanings, values, and ideologies" (Cao, 2011, p.8). Cao (2011) argues that,

> The media rely crucially on storytelling skills in packaging their messages to the audience. All stories are realised linguistically through the operation of narrative, media narrative therefore has become central in the formation of images of the external world (p. 6).

Thus, Cao (2011) believes that "it is through the linguistic 'engine' of narrative that daily media stories are transformed into pattered discourses of the cultural 'other'" (p.7). Therefore, CDA of film discourse entails examination of transmission of discourse through narrative.

Racial Representation in Film

Moore and Pierce (2007) write that "The expansive reach of the narrative frames in movies make them a particularly important site for examining popular

culture constructions of social issues such as race relations in American society" (p. 173). The impact of film is compounded in racially and socio-economically segregated societies where "popular films about race and racism offer many white Americans narratives for experiences they may not have had" (Moore and Pierce, 2007, p. 173). Brooks and Hébert (2006) argue that race is a socially constructed concept and thus "The racial categories we use to differentiate human difference have been created and changed to meet the dynamic social, political, and economic needs of our society" (p. 297).

Hall (1997) defines *representation* as "the production of meaning through language" (p.16). Cao (2011) draws on Foucault to relate cultural representation in the media to sites of ideological power struggle,

> In this system of representation, or 'regime of truth' in Foucault's words, the discourse of the 'other' reflects the language used in the mass media that continues to impact the popular sense of 'us' and 'them', their interrelationships and power relations. They continue to operate powerfully across the world in confirming, reinforcing and reproducing often unequal intercultural relations. However, discourse is a symbolic battle that has to be fought to win. No discourse can proclaim a permanent victory. Discourse in this sense is part of a perpetual struggle in the volatile world of symbols and signs, as well as in the physical world where cultural relations are constantly reconfigured in a changing world. (p. 14).

Thus, the depiction of race and culture in popular film is considered to be a site of an ideological power struggle for representation. Furthermore, discursive representation is considered to be a fluid and ongoing process.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Film

Holistic Analysis

Bordwell and Thomposon (2003) suggest a holistic approach to the analysis of film due to the fact that "audiences experience whole films, not snippets or abstract themes" (p. xvi). Bordwell and Thomposon (2003) argue that "a film is not simply a random batch of elements" but rather "every film coaxes us to connect sequences into a larger whole" (p. 49, p.48). Accordingly, film can be understood as "a *formal* construct" wherein *form* is defined as "the overall system of relations that we can perceive among the elements in the whole film" (Bordwell and Thomposon, 2003, p. 49). A film is considered to be "made up of parts that relate to one another in specific and deliberate ways in order to have an effect on the audience" (Bordwell and Thomposon, 2003, p. xvi). The overall form of a film can be divided into two subsystems; the narrative that comprises "the film's story" and the stylistic system comprised of choices such as "the way the camera moves, the patterns of color in the frame, the use of music, and other devices" (Bordwell and Thomposon, 2003, p. 49). The viewer interprets the film by merging the narrative and stylistic subsystems into one larger system and thus "it is the overall pattern of relationships among the various elements that makes up the form" (Bordwell,and Thomposon, 2003, p. 49). This suggests that it is necessary to take a holistic approach to CDA of film that considers the interplay of narrative and stylistic systems to comprise a comprehensive film.

Narrative Structure

Bordwell and Thomposon (2003) write that historically "fictional cinema has tended to be dominated by a single mode of narrative form" termed *classical*

Hollywood cinema (p.89). The narrative structure of *classical Hollywood cinema* is defined by; a desire, a goal, a counterforce or opposition, the achievement of the goal and closure (Bordwell and Thomposon, 2003). Thus, it follows that popular films tend to have a systematic narrative structure. Cao (2011) defines media narrative as "structures of story-telling deployed by media practitioners to present a motivated picture of the world" (p. 6). Cao (2011) draws on Propp's (1968) study of Russian folktales to conceptualize the narrative structure of contemporary mass media. Propp (1968) found that folktales have a "universal narrative structure" and used the term *dramatis personae* to refer to the function of motifs within this structure (Cao, 2011). Examples of *dramatis personae* are the roles of villain and hero wherein "a *villain* fights, opposes or crushes the *hero* and commits an act of *villainy"* (Cao, 2011, p. 8). The significance of *dramatis personae* lies in "what they do to advance the narrative rather than what they *are*" thus they serve to "constitute the fundamental components of a story because as constant elements in a story they are independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled" (Cao, 2011, p. 8). Cao (2011) proposes that the identification of *dramatis personae* could allow for the deconstruction of "internal structures of media narrative" (p. 8). However, Cao (2011) suggests that a Proppian analysis of film is incomplete due to its "exclusive interest in internal narrative structures without relating them to wider social contexts in which they are imbedded" (p.8). CDA similarly takes a dialectical perspective that places research within the context of macro social structures and power imbalances (Chouliaraki and

Fairclough, 2010). Thus a CDA of popular films calls for the identification and deconstruction of systematic narrative structures and their relationship to social power imbalances.

The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis of CDA research is discourse, however there are tensions within the theory regarding the scope of discourse analysis. Fairclough (1992) writes that in CDA, "discourse refers to language as a form of social practice", a "mode of action" and a "mode of representation" (p. 63). Wodak (2002) writes that "The term CDA is used nowadays to refer more specifically to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication" (p. 2). As such, CDA is interested in the analysis of language as a medium of communication of discourse. However, Leitch and Palmer (2010) write that "There is considerable variation within CDA theory as to the definition of 'text' in terms of what is included or excluded as a textual element within discourse" (p. 1196). Van Dijk (1997) defines written language as 'text' and spoken language as 'talk' (p.3). In contrast, Fairclough (1992) considers text to include written and spoken language and further argues that CDA must conceptualize text to include visual images and sound. Consequently, Leitch and Palmer (2010) raise concerns that "in choosing how to limit the corpus of texts, researchers confront the methodological issue of 'rigour vs. significance'" (p. 1196). Phillips and Hardy (2002) argue that "It is not individual texts that produce social reality, but structured *bodies* of texts of

various kinds – discourses – that constitute social phenomena (p. 82). Leitch and Palmer (2010) believe that this creates the need for intertextuality: "the analysis of both individual texts and the relationships between texts" (p. 1197). Fairclough (1992) argues that intertextuality introduces power and hegemony into CDA by allowing researchers to "chart the possibilities and limitations" of intertextuality (p. 103). As such, the definition of discourse is a current tension in CDA that represents the need to balance methodological rigour and reliability with flexibility and credibility. In my research, I have chosen to focus on the analysis of words and exclude the analysis of visual images and sound. This choice was made in order to facilitate consistent analysis and methodological rigour and to maintain a clear and manageable focus. It is acknowledged that this choice may limit the flexibility of my research and its ability to capture the holistic message of the films. In addition, I take an intertextual approach to my analysis of films by attempting to place the films in a broader social context and to relate them to one another.

Cultural Representation

I examine the following representational strategies in my analysis due to their significant role in the social construction of the public discourse on culture.

Essentialism

Cao (2011) defines essentialism as "a definition of identity that suggests a clear, fixed and authentic set of characteristics associated with a certain culture" (p.13). Essentialist representation is likely to "to simplify, *essentialise*, or

typologise a character and to position him or her in a clear-cut character role in a unified advance towards a final narrative end" (Cao, 2011, p. 13). In contrast, non-essentialist representation "focuses on differences as well as common or shared characteristics" and "tends to complicate, individualise, and contextualise a character so that it is unlikely a character fits neatly into a narrowly defined role" (Cao, 2011, p. 13). Brooks and Hébert (2006) write that "Lumping together races and ethnicities into one homogenized group ignores the cultural diversity that characterizes human difference "(p. 310). Cao (2011) relates essentialist representation to the confinement of the subject to their role in *dramatis personae* (previously discussed). Accordingly, "Dislodging such character roles is the first step to rupture an *essentialist* representation" (Cao, 2011, p. 13). Accordingly, I seek to identify and challenge essentialist representations in my analysis.

Assimilationist Representation and Universalization of Whiteness

Brooks and Hébert (2006) write that the media creates an,

> assimilationist view of racial interaction that emphasized individualism, racial invisibility, and perhaps most important, middle-class success. The ideological function of these representations worked to support the contention that in the context of current political, economic and cultural arrangements, all individuals— regardless of color (and gender)—can achieve the American dream (p. 305)

Brooks and Hébert (2006) further write that "television's idealization of racial harmony, affluence, and individual mobility is not within the grasp of millions of African Americans" and "such representations subsist in the absence of significant change in the overall status of African Americans in the United States (p. 305). Assimilationist representation occurs through the casting of

racialized characters and families into roles that "lack racial marking" (Brooks and Hébert, 2006, p. 310). Assimilationist representation arguably serves to promote "white masculinity as the invisible norm" by failing to acknowledge and portray cultural and racial difference (Brooks and Hébert, 2006, p. 304). Orbe and Kinefuchi (2008) write that

> a small, but significant, body of research has criticized the ways in which these films represent issues of race, racism, and race relations, focusing on interracial cooperation and deemphasizing social inequalities between different racial groups (p. 135).

This critique can be related to a broader critique of assimilationist ideology as seeking to integrate "formerly excluded groups" into a society where "the rules and standards have already been established" by the privileged group (Mullaly, 2002, p. 98).

Challenging Hegemonic Narratives

Pötzsch (2011) writes that "Every order, even a hegemonic one, is merely temporary and inherently precarious; it can be subverted" (p. 77). Cao (2011) writes that "*Dislocation* occurs when character roles of *dramatis personae* are invalidated by the introduction of elements incompatible with such roles, or by the omission of qualifying elements" (p.14). This process serves to challenge the systematic Proppian narrative structure and create space for alternative representations (Cao, 2011). In accordance with Foucault's view that "power and resistance are two sides of the same coin" it is suggested that the deconstruction of popular representation of race and culture serves as a site of resistance to hegemonic discourse (Burr, 1995, p.64).

Critiques of CDA

Ethics of Interpretation: Broader Meaning and Individual Agency

A dialectical approach to discourse analysis suggests that there is a circular relationship between discourse, individuals and social structures. One of the limitations of my research is that the focus of analysis on dominant discourse created by popular media ignores the agency of individuals to resist and shape discourse. Wray-Bliss (2003) writes that the first "methodological precaution" prescribed by Foucault is that the analysis of power should not be limited to its "central location" but rather "should focus upon 'power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary'" (p. 309). In failing to consider the agency of viewers to choose what media they view, CDA fails to consider the power available for exercise by viewers. Widdowson (1996) highlights the potential ability of individuals to impact discourse, "There is always room for manoeuvre. That is our salvation. Whatever communal ideological values are institutionally in power, they can be, and constantly are, subverted by individual initiative" (p. 58). For example, in the context of the technological advances and communication advances associated with globalization, it is argued that there are numerous alternatives to popular culture easily available to viewers.

According to linguist Michael Stubbs, a prominent weakness of CDA is that it "rarely questions the effects of text on the reader or audience" (Henry and Tator, 2007, p. 124). Henry and Tator (2007) write that "there is now much

greater emphasis on the role of the audience, and on recognizing that texts are not necessarily received or understood in the same manner as they are conceived" (p. 119). Furthermore, from a postmodern perspective, the implicit assumption that there is a consistent interpretation of media imagery imposes an artificial collective identity on diverse viewers and fails to consider the fluidity and subjectivity of interpretation. Wodak (1999) writes that in CDA, "A 'right' interpretation does not exist and a hermeneutic approach is necessary. Interpretations can be more or less plausible or adequate, but they cannot be 'true'" (p. 187). This is consistent with an interpretative social science perspective (ISS) that suggests there are multiple truths and interpretations of reality (Neumann, 2011).

Freshwater (2007) writes that "Discourses can of course be refused contested and critiqued and resisted, however when we relate this to power and marginalisation, the people that challenge them are not always the marginalised, rather some other authority who seeks to empower and emancipate" (p. 111). Thus, a further tension my research is the ethics of interpreting and challenging discourse on behalf of marginalized groups. Thus, a potential weakness of my research is that it may further silence marginalized voices by interpreting discourse on their behalf through my subjective framework. Accordingly, Wodak (1999) cites the importance of reflexivity in CDA, "*critical* implies that a researcher is self-reflective while doing research about social problems. This means that members of a culture (including researchers) will work to understand

their own culture and, rather than pronouncing truths, propose interpretations and solutions to perceived problems" (p. 186). In my research, this makes it necessary to be reflexive of the subjectivity of my interpretations and the potential of this to overshadow marginalized voices in order to effectually serve the emancipatory purpose of CDA research.

The Paradox of Political Research

Another prominent criticism of CDA is that it is shaped by the researchers' political ideology and often has a political agenda (Henry and Tator, 2007). Linguist Henry Widdowson (2007) writes that by failing to include the perspectives of viewers in its analysis, CDA runs the risk of falling into a "catch 22" by producing a politically motivated discourse, which it ideologically seeks to resist (p. 121). This criticism falls within a broader critique of anti-racist research methodology as being "a fiercely partisan discourse" (Sefa Dei, 2005 p. 7). Wodak (1999) writes that in CDA, "Researchers choose objects of investigation, define them, and evaluate them. They do not separate their own values and beliefs from the research they are doing" (p. 186).

Henry and Tator (2007) respond to this criticism by asserting that while CDA is shaped by the researchers' political and ideological position, "instead of remaining covert, that position is openly and clearly articulated by its practioners", thus allowing knowledge consumers to draw independent conclusions (p. 127). This disclosure appears to be a means of navigating the relativist position of postmodern research that "all value positions are equal"

(Neuman, 2011, p. 119). In order to navigate this tension, it is suggested that it is essential for the researcher to be reflexive of and disclose ideological position and methodology. Wodak (1999) writes that "The data need to be allowed to speak for themselves" and thus "Analyses should neither be purely inductive nor deductive, but abductive, in which analysts are explicit about what they are actually doing" (p. 186). As a means of defending the ideological validity of critical research, Wodak (1999) suggests that research as political action is "not in itself a bad thing" (p. 186). Wodak (1999) highlights the goal of critical research as producing not only analysis but seeking to promote social change, "CDA does not stop once it has analyzed a problem. Rather, it attempts to intervene into social processes by proposing verbally and in writing possible changes that could be implemented by practitioners" (p. 187).

Lack of Attention to Economic & Socio-Political Structures

CDA's focus on language gives rise to the argument that the analysis of social and political structures is more relevant than language. Zdenek (2006) argues that "CDA as an academic and pedagogical enterprise might not be necessary at all" because,

> What prevents people using their innate cheater-detecting logico-rhetorical modules to protect their own interests is not a cognitive deficit per se but economic forces or socio-political institutions that restrict freedom of expression and freedom of access to information. If this is true, then what is needed is historical, social, economic and political analysis not the analysis of language itself" (p. 614).

CDA is further critiqued for attributing power to language without rigorous empirical evidence. Jones (2004) argues that CDA "acknowledges the

existence of the material social process outside discourse but, at the same time, assumes or takes for granted the shaping power and effects of discourse, in effect coming to see reality only through discursive spectacles" (p. 107). Thus CDA's focus on language as a vehicle of oppression is problematized by the critiques that this cannot be empirically proven and that this oppression occurs within the context of material social structures. These critiques are challenged by the position that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structures.

Application of CDA to Research

As per the critical orientation of CDA orientation, I am interested in the deconstruction of oppressive discourses in popular films. Furthermore, CDA's critical orientation and view of discourse as a means of obtaining and exercising power further suggests that the particular choice of representations in the films are significant (Locke 2004). As such, my analysis attempts to consider why particular representational schemas have been chosen and the ensuing implications. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) consider discourse as representational schema that "necessarily simplify and condense complex realities, include certain aspects of them but not others, and focalize certain aspects whilst marginalizing others" (p. 1215). Accordingly, my analysis of the films takes the position that there are numerous possible representations of immigrant families, and that the choice to focus on a particular representation is significant.

I conceptualize 'oppressive discourse' as a subtle, subconscious process that emerges as the product of holistic and complex social structures. For this reason, the representations in the films are considered in the context of broader social structures and power imbalances as described in the dialectical approach to CDA. In addition, I view the films themselves from a holistic perspective, and thus I find it important to examine the narrative structures of the films and relate them to broader public discourses. From an ethical perspective, I attempt to disclose and be reflexive of my ontological framework and how it impacts my interpretation of the films. Finally, in an attempt to acknowledge the complex and fluid nature of power and utilize CDA in an emancipatory manner, I attempt to examine the exercise of power by various actors, including marginalized groups in the films.

Description of Data

Films Chosen for Analysis

I utilized two primary criteria in selecting films for analysis; the films are all considered representative of popular culture due to their broad distribution and affiliation with the major media corporations and the films all have the central theme of a cultural conflict between immigrant parents and their adolescent daughters.

In addition, I chose the films due to my initial reactions. Upon viewing the films, I observed a similar narrative structure throughout the three movies wherein the adolescent protagonist had a goal or dream to which her parents objected for cultural reasons. The plot of the movies subsequently focused on the protagonist overcoming the obstacles posed by her parents in order to follow her dreams. I had a strong reaction to this narrative structure due to the fact that I felt that the films positioned the parents and their cultural views in an antagonistic and superficial manner and thus implicitly promoted cultural assimilation. For this reason, my initial goal in choosing these films was to identify and challenge the implicit assimilationist narratives within their narrative structures.

Representation of Popular Culture Discourse

Bordwell and Thompson (2003) write that "The most heavily patronized theatres belong to chains or circuits, and these are in turn controlled by relatively

few companies" (p.9). The major multinational conglomerates in the film industry are; AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, Sony, News Corp. and Vivendi Universal (Bordwell and Thompson, 2003, p. 15). These six major corporations "attract 95 percent of ticket sales in the United Sales and Canada and more than half of the international market" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2003, p. 9). Accordingly, the films chosen for this research are all affiliated with the major film distributors. *Real Women Have Curves* was produced by HBO, the Broadcast division of AOL Time Warner, *Bend it Like Beckham* was distributed by Fox, the production and distribution wing of News Corp. and *Double Happiness* was produced by Fine Line, the production and distribution wing of AOL Time Warner (Bordwell and Thomposon, 2003, p. 15). As such, the films chosen for this analysis are argued to contribute to popular culture discourse due to their affiliation with the six major media corporations.

Immigrant Family Conflict

All the movies chosen for this analysis have the central theme of a family conflict in immigrant families between the parents and adolescent daughters. In all of the movies, aspects of an 'acculturation gap' conflict are present wherein the adolescent seeks to adapt values representative of the host country, while the parents wish the adolescent to maintain home country values. The representation of the conflict is the primary area of investigation.

Description of Films

Bend it Like Beckham

Bend it Like Beckham tells the story of a young girl from a Sikh family who struggles to follow her dreams of playing soccer despite the disapproval of her traditional parents. The protagonist of the film is Jesminder, known as Jess, a Sikh teenager living in London, England. Jess is passionate about playing soccer and dreams of one day becoming a professional, however her parents want Jess to become a lawyer, get married to an Indian man and start a family. Jess's family is comprised of her parents, Mr and Mrs Bharmra and her sister Pinky.

The plot of the film progresses as Jess meets a friend named Jules that encourages Jess to join a local girl's football team. Prior to this, Jess had been playing soccer in the park with local boys. Jess joins the team and lies to the coach of the team, Joe, telling him that her parents accept her playing soccer. Jess's dreams of playing soccer are endangered when her parents find out about her team and forbid her from playing. The plot is further complicated as Jess and Jules have a falling out as Jules accuses Jess of pursuing a romantic relationship with Joe. The plot reaches a climax when the soccer team is scheduled to play an important match, at which a US scout will be present on the same day as Pinky's wedding. The central conflict is resolved as Mr. Bharmra relents and encourages Jess to pursue her dreams. The film ends with Jess leaving for America to play soccer at a top university with a scholarship and Jess and Joe acknowledging that they have romantic feelings for each other.

Bend it Like Beckham was released in 2002 and is classified by the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) in the comedy/drama/romance/sport genre

(Internet Movie Database, n.d.). The estimated box office budget of the movie is £3,500,159 and the estimated gross revenue of the movie is $76,583,333 (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). The film was largely met with positive reviews from critics, it was nominated for 28 awards, and won 14 awards and topped box office charts worldwide (Internet Movie Database, n.d.).

The director of the film is Gurinder Chadha, a British filmmaker of Indian origin (Wikipedia, 2012). Chadha has integrated her own childhood experiences into the movie, the movie touches on several controversial themes to both Indian and mainstream communities such as same sex relationships and gender roles of Indian women in British society (Fischer, 2003). In a profile of Chadha, Watson (2004) writes that "After a confused childhood, in which she rebelled against her Punjabi roots by refusing to sign up for dance lessons or watch Bollywood films, Chadha spent a year exploring her roots in India" (para 1). Chadha later joined the BBC and became frustrated because instead of working to "create better images of people like me" she became "bogged down with 'silly local stories' " (Watson, 2004, para 1). When describing the intent of *Bend it Like Beckham,* Chadha states that

> The football was a metaphor for trying to break out and do things differently… But not wanting to be a rebel. Wanting to take your culture and the essence of who you are with you. The fact that 'Beckham' travelled so well internationally is testament to the fact that there are a lot of people in that position around the world. Who aren't necessarily Indian but Mexican American or Chinese Australian (Watson, 2004, para 4)

Furthermore, Chadha describes her intent as a producer as follows

> The whole reason I'm making movies is to make people think outside of the box. Whether it's race, class, gender, sexuality, whatever," she says. "Often the difference between that [puts up hands as a closed box] and that [slightly more open] is just ignorance, not having access to these other things. You can't expect someone who lives in a small town in Yorkshire to be as cosmopolitan as someone who lives in Camden Town. So what I do with my films is present that cosmopolitan view (Watson, 2004, para 15).

Real Women Have Curves

The protagonist of *Real Women Have Curves* is Ana, an 18 year old female that immigrated to the US from Mexico with her family at a young age. Ana's family is comprised of Ana, her mother Carmen, her father Raul, her sister Estela, and her grandfather. Ana's mother is a seamstress, her father is a landscaper, and her sister owns a small garment business. Ana's relationship with her mother is a central theme in the worldviews. Ana's mother expects her to follow a traditional lifestyle that entails getting married and fulfilling domestic responsibilities.

The film begins as Ana graduates high school. Her teacher, Mr. Guzman encourages Ana to apply for college, however Ana's parents feel that she should stay home and help her family rather than continue her education. Over the summer, Ana is pressured by her family to take a job at Estela's struggling garment factory. Ana is resistant to working at the factory and refers to it as a 'sweatshop' and notes the exploitation of workers. Throughout the film, Ana comes to acknowledge Estela's hard work at the factory. Estela is faced with losing her business when she struggles to finish an upcoming collection and Ana secretly helps her by borrowing the money from their father.

Over the summer, Ana also develops a romantic relationship with her classmate, Jimmy. Ana loses her virginity to Jimmy, and subsequently ends the relationship as she tells Jimmy to continue on with his life in college and not worry about her.

Ana receives a full scholarship to Columbia University, and informs her family that she plans to leave for New York. To her surprise, her father is supportive of her decision, while her mother refuses to grant Ana her blessing. The film ends as Ana begins her new life in New York.

Real Women Have Curves was released in 2002, and is classified as a comedy/drama (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). The film earned over five million dollars, and received 6 awards including the prestigious Humanitas Prize at the *Sundance Film Festival* (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). The film was directed by Patricia Cardoso. Cardoso was born and raised in Columbia, and immigrated to the U.S. with her family in 1987 after received a Fullbright Scholarship (Buchanan, 2009). The film was originally a play written by Josefina Lopez. In the following interview, Lopez describes how her experience led her to become a playwright and author.

> I came to the U.S. when I was five years old. My father and mother were legal. I have seven siblings and six of us were undocumented. We were undocumented and we lived in Boyle Heights and I really had no sense of self or of entitlement. And in my household the understanding was that women, we were basically there to be servants. And that men were superior and that was the way it was and *ni modo.* I had not entitlement at all and for me writing has always been about affirming my humanity, reclaiming my humanity. That was why I started writing to reclaim the fact that I was a human being and that I had inalienable rights. That I wasn't an "alien" but that I was a human being. I would say that anger was

> the motivator for writing my first play, Simply Maria or The American Dream. I grew up in a household where there was so much unfairness and injustice and I basically had to shut up and take it or do something about it. So I would always speak up and my parents would say, "*Mira*, if you were back in the rancho, you wouldn't complain." I was basically told I had not right to be angry. So when someone is told you have no right to be angry, you swallow your anger and then you get angry at yourself for buying that B.S. So this created this momentum. This chain of anger, anger, anger. When I was eighteen years old I wanted to go to college. And my parents said you can't go because you are Mexican, and undocumented and we don't have the money. They basically believed: "Look, you're going to get married and it will be a waste to educate you." I was so angry that I had to write something. I was going to commit suicide or explode. (Latinopia, 2009, para 4-8)

Lopez also describes how the theme of race and beauty emerged in her work;

> I wanted to talk about our bodies because at that time I had a friend. And he was Asian and he asked me if I thought Asian women were beautiful. And the first thing that came to mind was that I didn't think they were beautiful. I caught myself thinking that. And then he said to me. If you are always comparing Asian women to white women, then they are always going to fall short. Because you are saying that the white woman is the standard of beauty. But all women are beautiful and beauty is not something that is limited to one race. And he asked me do you think that Latina women are beautiful and I realized that I didn't think they were. I was not aware that I had these unconscious beliefs. And I said wow that's terrible that I don't think that Latina women are beautiful. So I asked myself why don't I think that Latina women are beautiful? Why because we are short, we're indigenous. All these seeds of racism in me. And so I said I want to write a play about the beauty of women (Latinopia, 2009, para 12,13).

Double Happiness

The protagonist of the film is Jade Li, a Chinese-Canadian female in her early twenties. Jade's family consists of her mother and father Mr. and Mrs. Li,

and her younger sister Pearl. Jade also has a brother named Winston that has been disowned by their parents for reasons not fully revealed in the film.

Jade's dream is to become an actress, however her parents disapprove of this profession and prefer Jade to pursue a more stable and profitable profession. Jade's parents also want her to marry a Chinese man.

In the beginning of the film, Jade has a one-night stand with Mark, a young man that she meets at a club. Jade does not pursue the relationship, but they meet again by chance and Mark pursues Jade. Their relationship develops, however, when Jade's parents discover their relationship they are furious. Jade ends the relationship and tells Mark she could never hurt her family. In the meantime, Jade's parents continue to encourage her to meet a Chinese man and attempt to introduce her to suitable partners. Jade humours her family by going on the dates despite the fact that she has no interest in her suitors. She discovers that one of her suitors is gay and also going on dates to please his family.

Jade's family values appearance and engages in an effort to appear prosperous when Jade's uncle visits from China. Jade discovers that her uncle is also projecting a false identity and that he is hiding the fact that he has fathered a child in China with his maid.

Jade reveals to her family that she intends on moving into her own apartment and living an independent life. Her father is furious and rejects her, while her mother reveals she feels helpless to challenge Jade's father's stringent

views. The film ends as Jade prepares to live in her new apartment and rekindles her relationship with Mark.

Double Happiness was released in 1994 and earned a gross total of $759,393 and won 4 awards including an award for Best Canadian Feature Film at the *Toronto International Film Festival.* The film was directed by Mina Shum, an independent Canadian filmmaker (Wikipedia, 2012). Shum was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to Canada with her family as a one year old (Wikipedia, 2012). *Double Happiness* is a semi-autobiographical film that reflects Shum's experiences of navigating between the traditional expectations of her family and asserting her independence (Melnyck and Austin Smith, 2010). Shum describes her approach to filmmaking as follows;

> I think every film is a question, a question I'm having about how to live my life, and you're also revealing something . Especially since I write comedies and comedies are rooted in tragedy. (...) When you're pushing those buttons with yourself as a creator, you're pushing those buttons for the audience. So (these questions and answers) may be called feminism or multiculturalism, but to me it's all about HOW DO WE LIVE? In a world that's changing constantly, I'm always trying to figure out a way to entertain and enlighten, and that's for myself as well. (...) Because I'm a living breathing human being in Vancouver, which is a very multicultural city, and I'm a woman, I tend to get tagged as someone who might write about "issues." But that's not where it starts for me, it starts on a very human level. I use narrative to reveal things that people don't see. I'm hoping to show that normal is a variable thing. For me, how to achieve happiness and what is defined as normal are parallel questions (Davar, 2008, p.1).

Shum further comments that

> I think (finding identity) is a universal struggle. (...) So much of my personal identity according to others has to do with the way I look. I think I'm always trying to thwart people's perceptions of me for that reason. (Davar, 2008, p.1).

Shum describes how her own life experience is reflected in *Double Happiness;*

> I called it semi-autobiographical, more truth than fact. What I wanted to do was make a movie for me when I moved out because there was nobody telling me it was okay. I wanted to reach out to that girl who was 18 and so scared. (...) In fact, many kids moved out because of my damn movie! (laughs). (...) Someone just asked me yesterday, "are families as traditional now?" It's like, well maybe not quite as traditional as that story was, it was exaggerated for cinema, but there's still stuff to be mined out of that restrictive (relationship) (Davar, 2008, p. 2)

Shum reflects on her views on the influence of family on identity;

> I think family ultimately has a grave effect on your personal identity. They're your first mirror. (...) They're your first sense of safety and home, so depending on how functional they are, you bring those preconceptions into how you relate with other people. (...) I think that physical presence is that way people deal with you but I think your family is the way you relate to the world. (Davar, 2008, p 1,2)

Shum also offers the following reflections on religion and identity in her life

> I was exploring ideas of faith, partly because I got into researching Chinese religion (...) and so I wanted to kind of instill the story with that. (...) (Chinese religions) leave room for your own personality and interpretation within a religion, so I kind of wanted to explore that just for myself. (The film is) a hodgepodge of everything really, so now what do I believe in? EVERYTHING. (laughs). I think it's better than believing in nothing, so...(Davar, 2008, p. 2)

Writers and Producers Social Location

Upon investigating the social location of the writers and directors of the films, I was surprised to learn that all of the movies are directed/written by females that personally experienced immigration in their youth or adolescence

and represent the culture of origin of the writer/director. This fact complicated my initial perception of the films and raised the need to consider the implications of the writers'/directors' social locations.

Minority Self-Representation

All three of the films chosen for analysis are directed/written by females that personally experienced immigration in their youth and/or adolescence and as such can be conceptualized as self-representations. The affiliation of the writers/directors with the immigrant cultures represented in the film suggests that the films can not be considered to be strictly representative of dominant culture. The juxtaposition of the immigrant identities of the writers/producers and the mainstream distribution of the films produces an interesting combination of dominant culture narratives and counter narratives.

Master Narratives and Counter Narratives

Larson (2009) defines a master narrative as "the upper tiered, "official" narratives about history, society and identity" (p. 6). Master narratives can be considered as a dominant discourse that emerge from a combination of sources including the state, the media, academia and the arts (Larson, 2009). In contrast, a counter narrative is a discourse that runs in opposition to the master narrative (Larson, 2009). Counter narratives can emerge from the same sources as master narratives and "Both master and counter narratives are constructed and disseminated in part by the media; the question of which narrative is master and which is counter, and how any of these ideas become popularized to the point of

national narrative is a matter of power and control" (Larson, 2009, p.7). This conceptualization implies that popular culture discourse is in fact highly complex and can simultaneously be reproduced and challenged within one source. This view further suggests that power can be exercised by various actors within popular discourse. The films in this analysis are an excellent example of this complex exercise of power due to the immigrant identities of the writers/producers and the mainstream distribution of the films.

The Power of Representation

Larson (2009) argues that the power to construct and control narratives is related to the control of representation

> Appearing is a key issue because appearing presupposes agency, the power to act, to construct a portrayal determined by the appearer rather than by the show-er. This power of appearing is lost when one becomes merely a subject who is reported on, who is shown rather than who creates his or her own appearance. In the case of being a shown subject, often the power of monstration is given to the show-er, who contextualizes the image and voice of the subject. When one subject is shown by another, the power to represent his or her identity is in the control of the show-er. When identities are linked to one public or another in a certain context often enough in the media, narratives of identity are formed (p.8)

Accordingly, when a group does not have the agency of representation in the public arena, it lacks the ability to influence master narratives.

Self-Representation

Larson (2009) proposes that "The best way for immigrant populations to appear with agency in the media is to become media producers themselves" (p. 27). It is argued that this allows space for immigrant communities to gain the

agency of self-representation in the public sphere. Silverstone (2007) further argues that contemporary media has a moral responsibility to create space for the self-representation of the Other. Silverstone (2007) writes that "the obligation to offer hospitality to the stranger in the symbolic space of media representation is a precondition for media justice" (p. 139). Larson (2009) further conceptualizes self-representation as a democratic right and a safeguard against oppression. In addition, self-representation can be conceptualized as a potential means of challenging master narratives and creating counter narratives by allowing space for previously excluded voices in the public sphere. Thus it is argued that self-representation in the media is a

Barriers to Self-Representation

The autonomy of minorities to represent themselves in the media is limited by the structure of popular media. Canadian journalist Linda McQuaig writes

> We must remember that virtually all media outlets are owned by rich, powerful members of the elite. To assume that this fact has no influence on the ideas they present would be equivalent to assuming that, should the entire media be owned by, say, labour unions, women's groups or social workers, this would have no impact on the editorial content (McQuaig 1995,12).

In Herman and Chomsky's (2002) 'propaganda model', "among their other functions, the media serve and propagandize on behalf of the powerful societal interests that control and finance them" (p. xi). Herman and Chomsky (2002) further argue that

> These structural factors that dominate media operations are not all controlling and do not always produce simple homogenous results. It is well recognized, and may even be said to constitute part of an institutional critique such as we present in this volume, that the various parts of media organizations have some limited autonomy, that individual and professional values influence media work, that policy is imperfectly enforced, and that media policy itself may allow some measure of dissent and reporting that calls into question the accepted viewpoint. These considerations all work to ensure some dissent and coverage of inconvenient facts. The beauty of the system, however is that such dissent and inconvenient information are kept within the bounds and at the margins, so that while their presence shows the system is not monolithic, they are not large enough to interfere unduly with the domination of the official agenda (p. xii).

This argument suggests that the potential of marginalized groups to effectively challenge master narratives in the mainstream media is limited by the hegemonic structure of the media industry. Herman and Chomsky (2002) further imply that there is a danger of tokenism when minority voices in the mainstream media appear to illustrate diversity, but in fact lack the power to autonomously create counter narratives.

In addition to the challenges of Western media industry structure, the directors are also faced with the challenge of representing their own ethnic community. In her latest project, *Bride and Prejudice,* a Bollywood version of Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* Chadha takes on the task of challenging Bollywood traditions such as the "often overlooked tradition for social commentary" (Watson, 2004, para 5). For example, Chadha states that she purposefully portrayed poverty in the film and cast a Black female as a singer because "Black girls aren't in Bollywood movies, but it was important to me to have a black girl do one of the songs. Most people take that in their stride, but it's

an incredibly radical thing for a Bollywood movie" (Watson, 2004, para 11). Further illustrating the complex power dynamics of representation, Chadha explains that she also met with the *Jane Austin Society,* and addressed their concerns of the faithful representation of Austin's work (Watson, 2004). Thus, representation is conceptualized as a complex and multi-faceted process shaped by multiple actors including Western media, ethnic and cultural communities and interest groups. Accordingly, the analysis of the representations in the films attempts to take into consideration the relative power and interests of the actors involved.

Findings and Discussion

Personal Reflection

Initially, upon watching the films, I identified with the protagonists. The films evoked memories of my adolescent experiences of negotiating my own identity in the face of competing pressures and messages. I saw my emotional journey reflected in all of the films as the protagonists all appeared to love their families and feel apprehension and guilt about disappointing them. The protagonists had their own goals and desires that were important to them that conflicted with their families' views. As a result, the central plot of the films revolves around the protagonists' journeys in reconciling these tensions. Consequently, it is possible that my identification with the characters and their families has shaped my analysis and interpretation of the film. This possibility is consistent with the critique of CDA as producing subjective research (Wodak, 1999). It is suggested that these themes may similarly stand out for other viewers and/or may be intended by the writers/producers. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that my identification with the characters has shaped my analysis of the films.

My emotional experience was very similar to the depictions of the protagonists in the movies. However, as I reflect upon my adolescent experience after the passing of some time, I now see the situation differently than I did at the

time. As an adolescent, although I loved my family, I struggled to understand their desire to intervene in my life. I desired autonomy and freedom, similar to most adolescents and I perceived my parents actions as unnecessarily controlling. With the passage of the adolescent developmental phase, I reconciled many of the tensions within my identity. I believe that my identity currently encompasses aspects of multiple sources including my early upbringing in Russia, my Jewish religion, the majority of my life in Canada and multiple other factors. Some parts of my personal journey included rejecting aspects of dominant Canadian culture and embracing other aspects of my identity. Consequently, after the passing of some time, I have come to understand my parents and appreciate their desire to intervene in my life. In this regard, I felt that the films did not reflect my experiences because the protagonists seemed to largely reject their culture of origin and embrace mainstream culture. As such, my initial reaction to the films included some scepticism about the possible underlying narratives of assimilation and cultural imperialism. For this reason, I found it important to critically examine the narrative structure of the films. Upon closer examination of the films, I have found that the representations in the films are in fact more complex than a hidden agenda of cultural assimilation. While there are certain aspects of assimilationist master narratives, there are also prevalent counter narratives that challenge essentialized cultural identities and challenge the pathologization and individualization of immigrant family problems. In addition, the social locations of the writers/producers of the films suggest that the films are not entirely

representative of dominant culture despite their mainstream distribution. As a result, my analysis of the films resulted in a shift in my conceptualization of the concept of culture. I was forced to acknowledge the complexity of the exercise of power in dominant discourse. This realization allowed me to see power as something that is multi-faceted and consequently to recognize the fluidity of cultural identity. Consequently, this shift in my thinking allowed me to see the potential for emancipatory change in cultural identity through the challenging of binaries and essentializations and the freedom to redefine culture.

Narrative Structure of the Films

Cao's (2011) definition of media narrative as "structures of story-telling deployed by media practitioners to present a motivated picture of the world" implies that there is an underlying purpose to the narrative structure of films (p. 6). Cao (2011) further invokes Propp's (1968) conception of *dramatis personae* to suggest that certain consistent motifs or characters serve particular purposes in advancing universal narratives. Accordingly, the deconstruction of narrative structure and *dramatis personae* is considered to be a means of deconstructing "internal structures of media narrative" (p. 8). It is argued that the underlying narrative structures of the films represent master narratives in public discourse. All three of the films appear to closely follow a classic Hollywood movie "narrative structure." Bordwell and Thompson (2003) describe such structure as story involving a desire, a goal, a counterforce or opposition, the achievement of the goal and closure (Bordwell and Thomposon, 2003). The desire or goal in the

three movies is the self-actualization goal of the teenage protagonist. In *Real Women Have Curves* Ana's goal is to attend college, in *Bend it Like Beckham* Jess's goal is to play soccer and in *Double Happiness* Jade's goal is to become an actress and to live independently. In all of the films, the counterforce is the parents' objection to the protagonists' desires and in all of the films and the final outcome is the protagonist stepping onto the path towards achieving her goals.

Master Narratives and Dominant Discourse

Dramatis Personae: The Parent as Obstacle

In all of the films, the parents serve the narrative purpose of acting as an obstacle to the achievement of their children's goals. Cao (2011) argues that in media narrative "Character roles are normally defined in terms of a 'sphere of actions' " (p. 8). The spheres of actions of the parents in the films are largely focused on controlling their children's behaviour. Furthermore, the parents in the films are motivated by ensuring their children's adherence to cultural traditions. Due to their *dramatis personae* as obstacles to the protagonists' achievement of their goal, the parents are structurally positioned as antagonistic characters. This antagonistic depiction implicitly extends beyond the individual parents to suggest that the parents' culture is repressive to their children. In *Bend it Like Beckham*, Jess illustrates her view of her parents as a barrier to her goals when she compares her restrictive parents to her British friend Jules' parents:

> *Jules is so lucky! Her mum and dad must really support her to let her go all the way to America to play. I don't even know how to tell my mum and dad about Hounslow Harriers*

In *Real Women Have Curves,* Ana similarly compares her mother to her love interest Jimmy's White mother in the following dialogue:

> *Ana: Jimmy, does your mom understand you?*
> *Jimmy: Most of the time. Does your mom?*
> *Anna: No. I don't know, it's like she hates me. She thinks I'm fat and I'm ugly and God knows what.*

Consequently, a representational schema appears to emerge that frames the parents in an antagonistic manner and furthermore positions their firm adherence to traditional customs as obstacles to the protagonists' self-actualization.

A critical approach to the utilization of cultural analysis suggests that the comparison of the immigrant families in the films to White parents can serve as a means of universalizing mainstream parenting and marginalizing immigrant parenting practices. Furthermore, the comparison of White and immigrant parents suggests that their problematic parenting can be attributed to their adherence to cultural traditions. Accordingly, this *dramatis personae* can be argued to advance a discourse of immigrant parenting and adherence to cultural tradition as problematic. This discourse suggests that immigrant family conflict is caused by adherence to 'backwards' or 'repressive' cultures of origin. This can result in the delegitimization of immigrant cultures and consequently inhibit the expression of true plurality in the public sphere.

Cultural Traditions as a Barrier: Gender Roles & Sexuality

In all of the films, the protagonists are female teenagers and accordingly gender-based expectations play a significant role in the films. In all of the films,

the central storylines revolve around the expectation that the protagonist will get married, have children and fulfill their feminine household obligations. The protagonists in contrast seek to pursue other goals, resulting in family conflict. From a constructionist perspective, the focus on repressive gender roles and conservative approaches to sexuality in immigrant families represents the creation of a particular discourse amongst numerous possibilities. This discourse chooses to emphasize the repressive aspects of immigrant culture and thus contribute to the conceptualization of immigrant culture as problematic.

i) Women as Submissive

In *Double Happiness,* Jade's parents hold traditional expectations of their children based on gender. When Jade's father gives her advice on how to interact with men, he states

> *You mustn't act the way you do with him. Don't argue so much. Men don't like that. You've got to be gentle, soft.*

Thus, Jade's father enacts the traditional expectation of women as being gentle and submissive. Furthermore, Jade's parents hold the expectation that a male should take care of a woman. Thus, when Jade is sent out on a date with a Chinese boy she does not like by her parents, she lies to explain why it did not work out:

> *Jade: He's just not my type.*
> *Mother: Andrew is a nice boy.*
> *Jade: ,, he made me pay the bill.*
> *Mother: No!*
> *Jade: Yes!*
> *Mother: Wha!*

> *Jade: Mom, don't tell auntie Mar or anyone. I don't want to embarrass him.*
> *Mother: He made you pay? huh?*
> *Jade: he said he lost his wallet! I think we're just friends, mom*

In response, Jade's mother is dismayed that a male would fail to pay for his date and agrees that Jade must end the relationship. In *Real Women Have Curves* Ana's mother also conveys the expectation that a woman must be submissive in the following statement

> *Look at her, Miss Know-lt-All. Your husband won't like you knowing so much.*

ii) Importance of Marriage & Virginity

In *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess's mother states

> *Jessminder, are you listening to me? Have you gone mad? Football, shootball! Your sister's getting engaged, and you're sitting here watching this skinhead boy!*

This comment highlights the high value that Jess's mother places on marriage and the relatively lower value she places on recreation or other pursuits.

In *Real Women Have Curves,* Ana's mother strongly values marriage and prays that her daughters will get married. In the following dialogue, Ana's mother and her friend Gorgina discuss the figure of Saint Antonio that Ana's mother keeps in her kitchen in hopes of helping her daughters find husbands.

> *Gorgina: I see you have a new Saint Antonio.*
> *Ana's mother: That's for Ana.*
> *Gorgina: And how many years have you had this one hanging here?*
> *Ana's mother: That one.... Eleven years. I put it up on Estela's 17th birthday. I'm gonna take it down.*
> *Gorgina: No! Leave it there. Who knows, Estela could still get married.*
> *Ana's mother: It's too late for Estela to get married. Now I have to concentrate on Ana.*

Ana's mother further displays traditional gender-based values when she suspects Ana has lost her virginity and is dismayed as she believes that virginity is valuable to preserve.

Ana's mother: You tramp.
Ana: What?
Ana's mother: You lost your virginity, didn't you?
Ana: Mom, you're imagining things.
Ana's mother: - I can tell! You're not only fat, now you're a puta!
Ana: You would say that, wouldn't you?
Ana's mother: Why didn't you value yourself?
Ana: Because there's more to me than what's in between my legs!
Ana's mother: You better not get pregnant and embarrass me.

The films share the common theme of parents being afraid that their daughters will be undesirable as wives due to their behaviour. For example, in *Double Happiness,* when Jade's parents discover Jade with a white man they caution;

Have you no sense? hmm? Would anyone ever want to take you as a wife?

iii)Domestic Work

A common theme emerged in the films as domestic work such as cooking and cleaning being the expectation for women. In *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess's mother states:

I was married at your age! You don't even want to learn to cook dhal!

* * *

What family will want a daughter-in-law who can run around kicking football all day but can't make round chapattis? Now exams are over, I want you to learn full Punjabi dinner, meat and vegetarian!

In *Real Women Have Curves,* Ana's mother similarly holds the belief that women take on the responsibility of cooking as she states;

> *I'm really sick, you'll have to make breakfast for the men*

Ana's mother expresses disapproval with Ana due to the fact that she does not perform her chores and domestic obligations in the following comment:

> *I told you. She doesn't do her chores...she doesn't clean her room, she doesn't do laundry...she doesn't cook.... She gives me plenty of trouble.*

The value of domestic work forms a potential conflict between the mothers and teens as the mothers appear to place greater value on domestic work than on their daughter's other interests and achievements. For example, in response to Ana's teacher's plea for Ana to attend college, Ana's mother states:

> *I can teach her.I can teach her to sew. I can teach her to raise her kids...and take* care *of her husband. Those are thing they won't teach her in school.*

iv) Same Sex Relationships

In the following dialogue in *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess finds out that one of her close friends is gay.

> *Jess: - Well, Beckham's the best.*
> *Tony: - Yeah I really like Beckham, too.*
> *Jess: - Of course you do. No one can cross a ball or bend it like Beckham.*
> *Tony: No, Jess. I really like Beckham.*
> *Jess: What, you mean...? But you're Indian!*
> *Tony: I haven't told anyone.*
> *Jess: God, what's your mum gonna say?! My sister thinks you're mad about me!*
> *Tony: I am! I just don't want to marry you.*
> *Jess: What would all those tossers say if they knew?*
> *Tony: Jess, you're not going to tell anyone?*
> *Jess: 'Course not. It's OK, Tony. I mean, it's OK with me.*

In this exchange, Jess expresses surprise that Tony is gay due to the fact that he is Indian. This implies that Indians are not tolerant of same sex relationships and further explains Tony's need to keep is sexual orientation a secret.

In the following dialogue from *Double Happiness,* Jade is set up on a date with a boy from her culture, and on their date he reveals that he is gay.

> *Jade: Well, Andrew, um, please don't take this the wrong way, but my parents put me up to this date.*
> *Andrew: ,, no.*
> *Jade: Yeah.*
> *Andrew: Well, this wasn't my idea either*
> *.Jade: Oh. Well, I was fooled.*
> *Andrew: It's o.k. so was I.*
> *Jade: ,, I thought that my parents were one-of-a-kind.*
> *Andrew: mine told me what to talk about.*
> *Jade: Yeah, well, my mom did my hair.*
> *Andrew: Well, that explains that.*
> *Jade: Come on, let's go for a drink.*
> *Andrew: I know a good bar around the corner.*
> *Jade: ,, ,,,, this is the Chelsea. (note: Andrew takes Jade to a gay bar)*
> *Andrew: You've heard of it?*
> *Jade: Uh, yeah. Andrew, are you trying to tell me something?*
> *Andrew: Disappointed?*
> *Jade: ,, devastated.*

In this exchange, Andrew and Jade appear to bond over the fact that they are both coping with the pressure of parental expectations. It appears that the immigrant parents in the films are not accepting of same sex relationships. As such, disclosing their sexual identity becomes difficult for the teens. The protagonists of the films appear to be accepting and tolerant of same sex relationships in contrast to their parents. Furthermore, the protagonists appear to form a bond with the boys after their disclosure due to the fact that they share a

common experience of struggling with resisting their families' traditional expectations.

Problematic Immigrant Parenting

The parents in the films seek to pass on their values to their children, and appear to worry when they fear their children rejecting their values. This is arguably also a common occurrence in non-immigrant families. However, the immigrant families' expectations of their children appear to be marked by a fear of their children's Westernization and fear of their ethnic communities' reaction to their children's behaviour. This narrative appears to contribute to a discourse of immigrant family conflict caused by cultural difference and thus to the 'culturalization' of immigrant family problems.

i) Corrupting Influence of Western Culture

In all 3 films, the parents appear to fear the 'Westernization' of their children. For example, in *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess's father states;

> *You know how hard it is for our children here. Sometimes they misjudge and start behaving like the kids here*

In *Double Happiness,* Jade's mother is dismayed to learn that her brother Winston is living with a white girl. Similar to Jess's parents, Jade's parents wish for their daughter to marry a "nice boy" from their own culture. Thus, the parents in the films fear the assimilation of their children and have a desire for their children to maintain their home countries' traditions. In *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess explains her parents resistance to her playing soccer to her coach as follows;

> *Coach: Why are they so frightened to let you play?*

Jess: They want to protect me.
Coach: From what?
Jess: This is taking me away from everything they know.

In *Double Happiness,* Jade's mother expresses fear in response to Jade's desire to be independent when she states

You'll be luck not to end up on the street…who knows what will happen?

The portrayal of immigrant families' desire to adhere to traditional customs and refusal to allow their children to integrate arguably contributes to a discourse that attributes lack of immigrant integration to their own refusal to integrate. Consequently, this discourse can obscure other reasons for lack of integration.

ii) Community Reaction

The parents appear to fear the reactions of their community in response to their children's behaviour. In *Bend it Like Beckham,* mother suggests that Jess's disobedience of cultural traditions will bring shame on the family.

Not at all! She shouldn't be running around with all these men showing her bare legs to 70,000 people! She's bringing shame on the family. And you three shouldn't encourage her! Jesminder, you get back home now!
***
Chi Chi Chi. He was touching you all over! Put his hands on your bare legs! You're not a young girl any more! And showing the world your scar!
***
She's divorced! that's what she is. Cast off after three years of being married to a white boy with blue hair! Her poor mother. She hasn't been able to set foot in that temple since. I don't want the shame on my family. That's it! No more football

These comments appear to attribute Jess's mother's resistance to her playing football to how it well reflect on their family's social standing in their ethnic community.

Furthermore, when Jess's sister plans her wedding party, her mother states

We'll show them we're not poor people!

These comments highlight the importance the families place on maintaining a prestigious social standing in their community. In *Double Happiness*, Jade's parents similarly display a desire to appear successful in the eyes of their community when they request that Jade and her sister like in order to appear successful to Jade's uncle visiting from China:

> *That's why you have to be very good when he's here, to show your father has been a successful man.*

Ironically, Jade's uncle discloses that he is also being untruthful in order to maintain his social prestige by hiding his illegitimate family in China in the following dialogue.

> *Uncle: When I look at her, I feel whole, but it doesn't make it right. She's much younger than me. She was once my maid. Now we have child together.*
> *Jade: You have a family?*
> *Uncle: Your father would say this is not a family. ,, .. I get tired.*
> *Jade: They don't exist.*
> *Uncle: What?*
> *Jade: Your family-- they're like ghosts, something not even worth talking about. They're ghosts.*
> *Uncle: If I talk about them, I'll be the ghost*

It is argued that in contemporary Western society, valuing social standing and prestige is considered to be a superficial value. Furthermore, in the films the

parents' value of social standing appears to supersede their concern for their children's happiness or their families' well-being. Taken out of context, this representation can contribute to a discourse of immigrant parents as dogmatic and superficial. This particular discourse can also potentially overshadow the deeper causes for parents' resistance to their children's 'Westernized' behaviour such as religious or moral beliefs. Overlooking the deeper reasons for parental disapproval and attributing disapproval to superficial reasons such as community appearance can serve to marginalize legitimate issues and concerns of immigrant families. This lack of attention to legitimate concerns implicitly universalizes the mainstream and delegitimizes immigrant communities.

Dramatis Personae: The Mainstream Culture Love Interest

In all of the films, the protagonist becomes involved in a romantic relationship with a White male. In all of the movies, the protagonist's family disapproves of the romance and thus it is kept a secret. The love interests in the films aid the protagonists in achieving their goals and thus serve the *dramatis personae* of a hero, a saviour or a helper. Moore and Pierce (2007) describe a media narrative schema that features a White male hero that is presented as a saviour to racialized communities. Moore and Pierce (2007) argue that this schema "highlights the racial innocence of the central characters

and reinforces the ideology of liberal individualism" and "reflects not only the recent neo-conservative emphasis on "color blindness," but presents a

cinematic analogue to the anti-affirmative action narrative of the innocent white victim" (p. 171)

In *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess's love interest is the coach on her soccer team, Joe. After Joe learns that Jess's parents disapprove of her playing soccer, he comes to her house to persuade them of her exceptional talent. Subsequently, Jess comments,

> *That was so brilliant the way you came to my house. You were brave enough to face my mum! Your dad can't be as mad as her!*

Joe fulfills his *dramatis personae* as a saviour by encouraging Jess to follow her dreams in the following comment:

> *Whose life are you living, Jess? If you try pleasing 'em for ever, you're gonna end up blaming 'em.*

In *Real Women Have Curves* Ana's love interest Jimmy displays acceptance and appreciation for Ana's body in contrast to her mother. Jimmy compliments Ana's appearance and figure in the following comments:

> *What a beauty.*
> *You're not fat.*
> *You're beautiful.*

In the film, Jimmy and Ana have a sexual encounter over the summer. However, in the fall Jimmy plans to go away to college while Ana struggles to leave her family and attend school. Jimmy expresses a desire to maintain a relationship with Ana, while Ana rejects his offer.

In *Double Happiness,* Jade has a sexual encounter with Mark and similarly does not intend to pursue a relationship with him. Jade knows that her

family would disapprove and does not contact Mark. In the following exchange, Mark confronts Jade when they run into each other by chance and expresses his desire to continue their relationship.

> *Mark: Hey, look, no need to get nasty. ,, I'm not the one that ran out Are you feeling guilty?*
> *Jade: You were sleeping.*
> *Mark: We were sleeping together. My dad put you up to it, didn't he? ,, didn't he? Just so that I'd remain the ineffectual goof I really am. I-i-i actually thought I was going to become a confident human being, that a woman like you .. attractive.*
> *Jade: ,, listen, I'm sorry. I didn't know what else to do.*
> *Mark: I wasn't looking for a lifelong commitment, just a phone number, breakfast A cup of instant coffee would have sufficed.*
> *Jade: ,, listen, mark, can I buy you an ice cream?*
> *Mark: You remember my name. That's nice. ,, normally, in the mating ritual, the two people go out Get to know one another, bowl.*
> *(Jade laughs)*
> *Mark: Well, that-- that kind of stuff.*
> *Jade: All I can say is that my life is very complicated.*
> *Mark: Single mom.*
> *Jade: Uh-huh.*
> *Mark: Double mom. ,, obviously you deserve to be better treated.*
> *Jade: I got to go now, mark.*
> *Mark: ,, all right.*
> *Jade: O.k. bye.*
> *Mark: 555-Mark.*
> *Jade: What?*
> *Mark: 555-Mark. That's my number. call me. ,, 555-mark.*

By wishing to pursue a romantic relationship with the protagonist after their casual sexual encounters, the males display trustworthiness and sincerity towards the protagonists. This arguably positions the love interests into the *dramatis personae* of a hero.

Counter Narratives

While the films arguably demonstrated aspects of dominant narratives on immigrant families, there were also aspects of counter narratives. A possible explanation for this structure is the juxtaposition of the producer/writer's social locations as immigrant women and the distribution/production of the films within mainstream media. The films contain the self-representations of minority voices within the realm of the mass media industry. As such, the films may simultaneously subtly challenge and reproduce dominant discourse.

One of the ways that dominant narratives are challenged in the films is through the complication of essentialized identities. The complication of essentialized identities allows for consideration of intersecting identities and for the impacts of context on individuals. The complication of essentialized character identities prevents characters from fitting into neatly defined *dramatis personae*. Consequently, this allows space for the questioning of dominant narratives and the emergence of counternarratives.

Similarity to Mainstream Families

The family processes represented in the films arguably also occur regularly in non-immigrant families. For example, the family conflict that occurs as adolescents develop their individual identity and separate from the family unit can be considered a hallmark of the adolescent phase of development (Blos, 1967). The representation of similarities of the families represented in the films with non-immigrant families can highlight the universal commonality of all families. Accordingly, this discourse can challenge the attribution of immigrant

family conflict to culture. Furthermore, this discourse conceptualizes culture as something that may impact each family in a unique way.

In *Bend it Like Beckham,* the discourse on immigrant families is challenged by representing the same family problems occurring in non-immigrant families. This representation demonstrates that family problems are not uniquely attributed to immigration and culture. In *Bend it Like Beckham,* The issue of gender is shown to also play out in non-immigrant families. Jules's mother is also displeased with her daughter's passion for soccer and believes it will interfere with her prospects for marriage. Jules' mother makes the following comments:

> *Honey, all I'm saying is there is a reason why Sporty Spice is the only one of them without a fella*
>
> ***
>
> *Oh, will you both pack it in! Look at the state of my fuchsias! Alan, when are you gonna realise you have a daughter with breasts, not a son?*
>
> ***
>
> *No boy's gonna want to go out with a girl - who's got bigger muscles than him*!

These comments highlight Jules's mother's adherence to repressive gender roles and value of marriage similar to non-immigrant families. Furthermore, Jules's mother appears to view breasts as the defining characteristic of a female.

The issue of gender inequality is further shown to occur in non-immigrant families in the following exchange from *Bend it Like Beckham* when, Jules' suggests that lack of support for females in sports is not only a cultural issue, but also a broader gender inequality issue.

> *Jess: - Indian girls aren't supposed to play football!*

> *Soccer Team Girl: That's a bit backward innit?*
> *Jules: Yeah, but it ain't just an Indian thing is it. I mean, how many people come out and support us?*

In *Double Happiness,* Jade's love interest Mark reveals that he also has conflict with his family when he states

> *My dad put you up to it, didn't he? ,, didn't he? Just so that I'd remain the ineffectual goof I really am.*

Similarly, in *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess's coach discloses his problems with his father in the following comments:

> *Coach: That's stupid, Jess. Look, my dad was my coach. And scouts kept telling him that I was too slight to play, so he kept pushing me. That's how I screwed my knee.*
> *Jess: Your dad made you?*
> *Coach: I wanted to show him I wasn't soft, so I tried to play injured. - He was a bit of a bastard anyway.*
> ***
> *Coach: Your mam's a barrel of laughs compared to me dad! I don't need to feel close to my family, Jess. I don't need you to feel sorry for me.*

The portrayal of conflict between parents and children in non-immigrant families demonstrates that there are numerous factors that contribute to family conflict. While this representation does not negate examination of cultural conflict, it suggests that family conflict can not be exclusively attributed to culture.

Ambivalence Towards Dominant Culture

In *Bend it Like Beckham*, Jess questions the fairness of traditional gender roles when she asks herself the following question.

> *It's not fair that boys never have to come home and help. If I get an arranged marriage, would I get someone who'd let me play football whenever I wanted?*

However, Jess also displays ambivalence towards contemporary gender roles in the following exchange.

> *Jules: - Guess you'll be marrying an Indian, then!*
> *Jess: - Probably.*
> *Soccer Team Girl: - So how do any of you Indian girls put up with it?*
> *Jess: - It's just culture. That's all. Better than sleeping around with boys you aren't going to end up marrying? What's the point in that?*

This exchange is an interesting glimpse into the tensions between traditional and contemporary gender roles. This exchange reveals that gender roles are in fact complex and multi-layered. While traditional gender roles can be essentialized as repressive to women, contemporary gender roles can be essentialized as promiscuous and devoid of morality. This representation challenges the conceptualization of adolescent assimilation as a unidirectional process of rejecting country of origin customs and embracing the host culture. Furthermore, this exchange demonstrates that dominant culture can also be essentialized and critiqued. Finally, this exchange demonstrates the complexity of identity by representing Jess's struggle to fuse elements of her traditional culture and dominant culture into her unique identity.

Examining Social Context

Representation of the social context in which immigrant family problems occurs challenges the discourse of immigrant family conflict caused by individual pathology. The representation of the broader context of immigrant family problems allows for the consideration of social justices issues and how social power imbalances serve to create and perpetuate immigrant family problems.

i) Gender Inequality

In *Real Women Have Curves,* Ana openly questions and challenges repressive gender roles. When her mother talks about the importance of virginity, Ana replies,

> *Why is a woman's virginity the only thing that matters? A woman has thoughts, ideas, a mind of her own.*

Furthermore, in response to being asked by her co-worker why she doesn't want to be 'thin and sexy' Ana states:

> *You don't get it. I want to be taken seriously. Respected for what I think, not for how I look.*

Ana also challenges traditional gender roles in her romantic relationship with Jimmy. Ana challenges the expectation of a woman as submissive when she initiates a sexual relationship with Jimmy. Ana further takes charge when she requests that Jimmy leave the lights on and thus appears to imply that she is not embarrassed and feels she has nothing to hide. Ana says;

> *Wait. Turn the lights on. I want you to see me. See, this is what I look like.*

Subsequently, Ana displays a desire for autonomy and independence when she rejects Jimmy's offer to continue their relationship after they have sex.

> *Jimmy: I'll write to you.*
> *Ana: No.*
> *Jimmy: I'll e-mail you.*
> *Anna: No. Jimmy, really. Don't worry about me anymore, okay? I mean, once you get to college...we won't have anything to talk about, anyway... and I don't know, you'll probably end up meeting some skinny girl, right?*

Ana's refusal to pursue a relationship with Jimmy indicates that she is challenging the stereotype of a woman desiring a relationship or needing a man.

Jimmy is not an immigrant, and thus the gender dynamics of their relationship cannot be attributed to culture. Furthermore, Jimmy appears to be portrayed as a positive character that does not intend to disrespect Ana. Jimmy appears to offer to maintain a relationship with Ana out of obligation, this perhaps reflects the fact that males have been conditioned to believe that women desire romantic relationships and need male protection. Therefore, the dynamics of Ana and Jimmy's relationship arguably extend beyond the individual to broader social context.

Ana's comment about Jimmy meeting a skinny girl signify her ambivalent attitude towards her weight. Ana appears to acknowledge and challenge the social pressure for women to be thin and the social construction of thin women as desirable and she addresses the issue of weight in the movie. Ana's mother pressures her to lose weight, however Ana relates this to a broader social issue rather than solely to a conflict with her mother. Ana states:

> *Mama, I do want to lose weight. And part of me doesn't because my weight says to everybody, f-ck you!*

Ana's use of the word *everybody* indicates that she conceptualizes the pressure to be thin as coming from society rather than solely her mother. Ana demonstrates that women struggle to defy the social pressure to be 'thin and sexy' and to be taken seriously for their thoughts rather than their appearance and sexuality. The contextualization of Ana's struggles to broader social issues facing women illuminates the intersectionality of her identity. Furthermore, this

representation challenges her essentialized identity as an immigrant and illustrates the commonality between all women.

ii) Exploitation of Labour

In the following exchange from *Real Women Have Curves,* Ana questions the fairness of the exploitation of labour in her sister's factory.

> *Ana: How much do they pay us to make these dresses?*
> *Estella: $5 for assembling each.*
> *Ana: And how much do they sell them for at the stores?*
> *Estella: They sell them at Bloomingdale's for $150 .*
> *Ana: We make them for $5 they sell them for $150 ...does this seem right to you?*
> *Estella: Just work, okay?*

In the following dialogue Ana expresses resistance towards working in the factory:

> *Ana: You expect me to do this dirty work for nothing?*
> *Estela: This is dirty work?*
> *Ana: This is a sweatshop. Don't you get it? You're all cheap labor for Bloomingdale's!*

Ana experiences conflict with her family because she resists working in the factory because she views it as exploitative while her family view her as spoiled for not wanting to help them. Ana's resistance to working in the factory appears to be attributed to the social injustice of exploitative labour conditions rather than individual conflict within the family. The following dialogue appears to illustrate Ana's guilt for not helping her family:

> *Mother: I can't take it anymore. I'm too old for this. I don't know why I'm working. My hands have arthritis. And I'm going blind from so much sewing.*
> *Ana: Yeah, Mama, I know, okay. Everybody knows.*

Mother: Leave! If you want to leave, leave!
Ana: What?
Mother: Am I embarrassing you? Are you ashamed to work with us? So much effort, so much sacrifice.... And all for what? For you. You only think I'm a beast of burden.
Ana: Mama, come on let's go. Let's go back, come on

In the dialogue above, Ana leaves the factory and returns after seeing her mother's vulnerability. This suggests that Ana's refusal to work at the factory is not attributed solely to her micro family situation, but rather is connected to broader social issues.

Subsequently, in the following dialogue when Estela needs to approach her boss for an advance, Ana encourages her to speak to her in person, while Estela seems hesitant.

Ana: I know. If you really need this money, you should go and talk to her in person. A letter's not gonna do anything.
Estela: She's too busy, she won't see me.
Ana: I'll go with you.
Estela: She's too busy.
Ana: You're not afraid of her, are you?
Estela: Why should I be afraid of her? Ana, please don't say anything, okay?
Ana: I can try.

When Ana and Estella approach the boss (a Latina woman) for an advance, she replies,

I went out on a limb to hire you in the first place... because I believe a woman like me should help one like you...but I can only help you so much. You have to help yourself and meet your deadlines.

By 'woman like me', Estela's boss appears to be referring to Latina women. Thus, the boss appears to be classifying Estela's request for an advance beyond a personal interaction, to a broader generalization of Latina women.

Furthermore, the statement appears to hold the underlying implication that Estela has not done all she can to help herself. The boss appears to be portrayed as a brisk, businesslike woman and does not exhibit sympathy towards Estela. In her statement that Estella must help herself, Ana's boss also appears to reflect the American cultural ideology of individual achievement and self reliance in contrast to the Latin cultural ideology that emphasizes family and community (Sabogal, 1987). This scenario complicates essentialized cultural identities because Ana's boss is herself a Latina woman however she appears to demonstrate aspects of American cultural ideology.. Thus Estella and her boss are two Latina women that appear to have strikingly divergent cultural views and social locations. This scenario, illustrates the complexity of identity by demonstrating the differences produced within individuals of the same culture by divergent social locations and socio-economic statuses. This scenario further implies that immigrant family conflict extends beyond culture and may represent conflicts created by class struggle and labour exploitation.

iii)Racism and Exclusion

In *Bend it Like Beckham* Jess's father reveals his own experiences with exclusion in sports,

> *Young man, when I was a teenager in Nairobi, I was the best fast bowler in our school. Our team even won the East African Cup. But when I came to this country, nothing. I was not allowed to play in any of the teams, and the bloody goras in their clubhouses made fun of my turban and sent me off packing!*

Thus it is revealed that part of the reason Jess's father initially opposes her involvement in soccer is his own experience with racism. His experience appears to have made Jess's father believe that it is a useless endeavour for his daughter to attempt to pursue sports in the public arena. This glimpse into Jess's father past helps to explain his lack of acceptance of his daughter's dream. Due to his own experience with racism and exclusion, Jess's father appears to believe that people of his ethnicity will be prevented from participation in public sports by racism. As such, it is argued that Jess's father's initial refusal to accept Jess's passion for soccer can be viewed as a product of social conditions such as racism rather than solely parenting style.

Bornstein (2002) writes that "racism and discrimination become part of cultural histories and influence social class determination" and thus racism is considered to be a contextual variable that shapes ethnic and minority parenting (p. 6). Accordingly "Protecting children from the devastating effects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination is another important issue for ethnic and minority parents. Unlike socioeconomic status, racism is a stressor that is specific to minority families" (Bornstein, 2002, p. 10). Consequently, it must be considered that the protective behaviour of the immigrant parents portrayed in the films is related to the broader social issue of racism.

In *Bend it Like Beckham,* Jess experiences her own encounter with racism when an opponent calls her a 'Paki' during a match. In the following exchange

between Jess and her coach, racism is shown to be a complicated issue that impacts many social groups including White males.

> *Jess: That's not all! She called me a Paki, but I guess you wouldn't understand what that feels like, would you?*
> *Coach: Jess, I'm Irish. Of course I'd understand what that feels like.*

The issue of racism is further complicated in *Bend it Like Beckham,* when Jules's mother displays a subtle racism, by essentializing Jess. Jules' mother exemplifies a more subtle form of racism in the following statements;

> *Oh, that's nice. Jesmin-dah. Lovely! Now. Well, Jesmin-dah, I bet your room at home doesn't look like this eh! - With all these great big butch women on the wall!*
> ***
> *Jess, I hope you can teach my daughter a bit about your culture, including respect for elders and the like, eh? Cheeky madam! Well, Jess... You're a lucky girl aren't you? I expect your parents are fixing you up with a handsome young doctor soon aren't they? - Pretty girl like you...*
> ***
> *Jesminder. Oh, yeah, I'm sorry. You know I cooked a lovely curry the other day!*

In this form of racism, Jules's mother makes assumption about Jess's family, personality, values and taste in food based on her country of origin. Jules' mother is presented in a humorous manner in the film; this appears to use irony and humour to challenge essentialized cultural identities.

Complexity and Entering the Third Space

The theme of complexity emerges in the films as an indicator of the protagonists' need to fuse together divergent value systems. It is argued that this process represents their entering into the third space. In *Double Happiness,* when

Jade's love interest Mark is upset after Jade walked out on him after they slept together, Jade explains

All I can say is that my life is very complicated

In this explanation, Jade appears to be referring to her need to balance her family's expectations of her with her own desires. This complexity forces Jade to acknowledge the contradictions between her family's traditional culture and mainstream culture. As a result, Jade is forced to undergo a process of reconciling the tensions in order to arrive at her own identity. The theme of complexity arises again in the movie when Jade's date Andrew reveals his strategy for managing his parents attempt to set him up on dates.

Andrew: I'm dead serious-- a whole year.
Jade: ,, what? I mean, how do you do that?
Andrew: One date, a whole year. O.k., well, listen up. For the first two months, they find someone that I'm remotely interested in, and then we go out. And bang--i screw it up, or I'll say she screwed up,, .. 6 months by now. And everyone feels bad for setting me up wrong. And voila-- a year has gone by. Simple. right?
Jade: Yeah. sounds real simple. ,, Jesus!
Andrew: O.k. so it gets a little complicated

The theme of complexity emerges again in *Double Happiness* when Jade's uncle discusses his secret family:

Uncle:,, my life is very, very complicated, jade.
Jade: Join the club.
Uncle: When I look at her, I feel whole, but it doesn't make it right

In this statement, Jade's uncle appears to be referring to the complexity of loving a woman that his family would disapprove of. Consequently, the uncle is

forced to reconcile the tension between following his heart and maintaing family honour.

The central storylines of the films place all of the protagonists in a position where competing values collide, for example, respect for family and tradition and self-fulfillment. The emancipatory potential of the films is the representation of the protagonists entering into the third space to challenge essentialized identities and produce their own unique identities.

In their analysis of *Real Women Have Curves,* Carrillo, Moreno and Zintsmaster (2010) write that "using her feminism, Ana places herself outside of Mexican and Anglo cultural norms and acquires a border-like consciousness that allows her to critically reject and choose the best from both worlds. We also find that Ana moves between spaces that offer her different ways of seeing and being" (p. 497). Carrillo et al. (2010) further argue that Ana's character engages in decolonial practice by navigating between "an oppressive economic and patriarchal space, a mainstream feminist space, and a space where their embodiments and creative cultural discourse, practices, and beliefs shine" (p. 479). Thus, it is argued that *Real Women Have Curves* constitutes an example of the protagonist navigating within the third space to challenge essentialized cultural identities.

Implications

All of the films depict the struggles of immigrant teenagers to negotiate their individual identities in the face of pressure from their families to adhere to traditional values. It is argued that this process offers valuable insight into an emancipatory process that can be described as entering into the third space. In the films, this process occurs as the result of the protagonists being placed into a position where they have no choice but to critically examine both mainstream and traditional values. The process of entering the third space originates from the fact that the protagonists desires and their family's desires clash. As such, they face the painful decision of either sacrificing their dreams or hurting their families. Consequently, the protagonists are forced into the position of reconciling the tension between their own value systems and their parents'. As a result, they emerge with an identity that can incorporate aspects of both mainstream and traditional culture. Furthermore, entering into the third space allows the protagonists to escape cultural binaries and essentializations and form fluid identities that encompass changing external context.

Through my personal journey of analyzing these films, I have come to believe that there is no clearly delineated boundary between 'traditional' and 'mainstream' culture, and that the definition of culture continually shifts. This realization has allowed me to broaden my conceptualization of cultural

representation in the media. This view allows for the recognition of numerous actors within a complex social structure and further creates space for the recognition of the agency of marginalized groups.

In a broader sense, it is argued that binaries and essentializations are prevalent in contemporary public discourse. For example, socio-political discourse may dichotomize between 'right' or 'left' in politics, between personal responsibility and social assistance or between punishment and rehabilitation in law-enforcement. It is argued that such essentializations fail to allow individuals the space to move beyond simplified stances to arrive at dynamic, creative solutions that may contribute towards social progress.

It is argued that the process of entering into the third space has tremendous emancipatory potential for broader social change. Mouffe (1993) suggests that it is necessary to move beyond essentializations in order to achieve the goal of radical democratic citizenship. This pursuit is necessary in order to acknowledge differences and thus encourage diversity in a meaningful way. Mouffe (1993) further proposes that it is possible to form a bond among citizens that allows for radical democratic citizenship through a common commitment to liberty and equality. It is argued that the process of entering into the third space offers a means of achieving the goal of moving beyond essentializations. However, it is noted that in order to harness this process for progressive social change it is also necessary to conceive a feasible ideology for replacing essentializations with progressive ideas. The associated question of how to harness the process of

entering into the third space to achieve progress social change appears to be a significant arena for future research.

Implications for Social Work with Immigrant Families

It is hoped that this research can offer tools for engaging in respectful, anti-oppressive social work with immigrant families. Firstly, the recognition of the structural context of immigrant family conflict encourages social work practioners to engage in anti-oppressive practice by considering multiple factors such as poverty, discrimination and gender inequality that may contribute to immigrant family conflict. This view allows the social work profession to pursue social justice by advocating for structural changes to address the structural causes of family conflict. Furthermore, this view avoids pathologizing immigrant clients by acknowledging that some of the causes of their problems are rooted in factors beyond their control.

It is argued that the most important contribution of this work to social work practice with immigrant families is the recognition of the agency of families in regards to cultural conflict. Applying the concept of the third space to families engaging in cultural conflict allows the practioner to view culture as something that is fluid and in a constant process of definition rather than something that is predetermined and externally imposed on clients. This view implies that clients have the freedom to create and redefine their culture and to apply it to their lives in ways that best serve them. Furthermore, this suggests that dominant culture can also be challenged and that different cultures can be fused together to produce

individual identities. This is a flexible paradigm that can be employed to address important differences within immigrant cultures, such as diverging views on same sex relationships or gender roles between members of the same culture. Applying the concept of the third space to such situations of discord suggests that disagreement within the same culture is inevitable and productive. It is suggested that social work practioners can use these ideas to engage in a process of exploration with immigrant families to understand the underlying roots of cultural conflict. Further, social workers may work with clients to explore ways of redefining cultural views to best serve the unique needs of the family. In addition, this paradigm can be used to highlight commonalities between immigrant and non-immigrant families and subsequently to address common concerns such as poverty or gender inequality. The most important application of this paradigm is the acknowledgement of the agency of immigrant clients to create and apply their culture.

In order to apply this paradigm for the advancement of social justice, it is important to pursue more research on how the process of entering into the third space can be used to create a cultural bond based on the principles of social justice. Challenging binaries and essentializations is an important first step in tackling the oppressive elements of culture. However, it is necessary to subsequently replace essentializations with a common cultural bond based on the principles of social justice. Failing to consider this necessity can lead to the fragmentation of communities and the replacement of cultural bonds with

relativism. The question of how to create and negotiate a common cultural bond is a complex question that requires consideration of how to create the basis for a common identity without resorting to essentialization. In social work research, it would be helpful to address the question of how cultural bonds can be created in immigrant communities and applied in a progressive manner.

Limitations

One of the prominent criticisms of CDA research is the lack of emphasis on audience interpretation (Henry and Tator 2007). Wodak (1999) cautions that there is no single or correct interpretation in CDA research. Accordingly, it is noted that the analysis above is my subjective interpretation of the films. My analysis is shaped by my personal experiences and theoretical framework. My theoretical framework and personal experiences are disclosed above in an attempt to be transparent. Nevertheless, my analysis is subjective and interpretive. As such, my interpretation may differ from the intended meaning of the writers/producers and/or the interpretations of diverse viewers. For example, in their psychoanalytical analysis of *Real Women Have Curves,* Cooper and Harris (2002) describe the character of Ana's mother as "a walking monster of envy, of intergenerational transmission of trauma, of manipulation and prejudice and fear. (p. 1482). Perhaps due to my identification with Ana and with her family, I find this analysis to overlook the complexity of the mother's character and position. I acknowledge that others may have similar disagreement with my analysis based on their experiences and ontological position. A further criticism of CDA research is that it produces political research that supports its own discourse (Henry and Tator, 2007). My research is shaped by my own conceptualizations of

social justice and cultural diversity and thus will contribute to a particular discourse.

Conclusion

I undertook this research with the goal of critically examining the representation of immigrant family conflict in the popular media from a critical, constructionist perspective. My initial approach to the research was focused on the identification of assimilationist master narratives in the films. As I continued my research, I began to see a more complex picture that suggests that the films depict a struggle for representation and power amongst numerous actors. Furthermore, I found that the definition and representation of groups such as 'immigrants' and 'dominant society' are complex and fluid. This realization subsequently became the central focus of my research and arguably holds important implications for social work practice. This research allowed me to acknowledge the intersectionality of immigrant identities, the multi-faceted exercise of power by both dominant and immigrant cultures and the potential agency of immigrant families. It is hoped that applying these principles to social work practice can facilitate anti-oppressive work with immigrant families.

Bhabha (1990) states that

> the concept of a people is not 'given', as an essential, class-determined, unitary, homogenous part of society *prior to a politics*, 'the people' are there as a process of political articulation and political negotiation across a whole range of contradictory social sights " (Rutherford, 1990, p. 220).

This view allows for a process termed the 'third space' in which it is possible to challenge essentialized identities and taken-for-granted power

hierarchies. It is my view that the films depict the protagonists entering into the third space by being forced into a position of fusing irreconcilable value systems. As a result, the protagonists are forced to fuse different value systems into their own unique identity. It is argued that applying this process in a broader social sense offers a means of continuously redefining culture by rejecting essentialization and binary representation and embracing fluidity. Furthermore, it is argued that applying this process from a progressive position allows for the mobilization of culture to serve emancipatory ends.

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