

**A NEW LOOK AT KOREAN CANADIANS AND THE IMMIGRANT
EXPERIENCE IN TORONTO AS EXPLORED IN CANADIAN MEDIA:
CBC'S *KIM'S CONVENIENCE***

By

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Withya Ganeshalingam

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ABSTRACT

CBC's Kim's Convenience (2016) is a play by Ins Choi that was adapted into a TV show in October 2016. This show focuses on a Korean–Canadian family and their convenience store situated locally in Regent Park, Toronto, Ontario. The show speaks to the immigrant experience and life in Canada as described through first generation parents, and second-generation Korean Canadian children. This MRP will analyze the ways in which stereotypes are presented in *Kim's Convenience* to subvert naturalized dominant negative discourses and tropes of racialized bodies, while simultaneously being used as a tool to produce counternarratives. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological tool, this paper will explore the use of stereotypes in the portrayal of racialized accents, intergenerational conflicts, intercultural relationships, and the use of Regent Park as a setting for the show.

Keywords: immigrants, immigrant writers, immigrant narrative, Korean Canadian, CBC, stereotypes, accents, intergenerational conflict, intercultural relations

*“For all things I have the strength through the one who gives me power” – Philippians 4:13
[New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures]*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Canada is often referred to a home for immigrants, and as a multicultural country; however, many of our institutions have yet to reflect that diversity. One of the institutions that must be questioned is the media. Although multicultural policies have made their way into Canadian broadcasting policy, there are very few programs on national television that speak to the immigrant experience, or provide representation for immigrant groups in Canada (Murray, 2009). Approximately one in five citizens in Canada are classified as first generation, which refers to immigrants who are foreign born, as indicated on the 2011 census (Statistics Canada, 2011). In addition, between 2001 and 2006, Canada's ethnic population increased by 27 percent, which is five times faster than the growth of the overall population. Unfortunately, the representation of immigrant groups on national television is usually very limited, and there is often a negative stereotypical characterization of race and ethnicity (Mastro, 2009).

Media studies have shown the significant role of media in reflecting and defining the nature and identity of the nation state, and of Canadian society (Heins & Cho, 2003). Media plays a fundamental role in defining how we frame issues, how we perceive ourselves, and how others perceive us (2003). People look to the media to make sense of the world around them and form attitudes about themselves and others. Specifically, television has been one of the most predominant means of information distribution of media; it is a medium through which the public accesses information about everything and anything (Akira et al, 2014). Apart from news broadcasts, television shows with seemingly little value can teach a vast amount of information and frame expectations about history, politics, social value, and various cultures (Akira et al, 2014). Situation comedies, dramas, and reality TV teach us about the world around us, and our

role within it. These genres and cultural forms are not simply entertainment, but “powerful socializing agents that show the world as we might never see it in real life” (Akira et al, 2014: p.3). For example, past research has confirmed that exposure to situation comedies is strongly related to the social attitudes formed regarding the various identities portrayed on the show (Busselle & Crandall, 2002). The media allows for the formation and maintenance of portrayals, which shape what viewers come to believe are the prototypical features associated with different races and linguistic groups.

Although Canadian multicultural policies have made their way into Canadian broadcasting policy, these policies have only influenced diversity ‘behind the screens’ or the creation of ethnic media, where specific ethnic or immigrant groups create their own content and shows in their own languages, which is often only limited to a specific ethnic group (Mastro et al, 2015). Mastro et al (2015) argue that while there is representation of immigrants and people of colour on mainstream television shows in Canada, these individuals play minor or non-recurring roles, and are rarely given lead roles. There have been very few Canadian television shows or programming directed at mainstream audiences that feature lead roles held by people of colour to portray the immigrant experience. Furthermore, few are directed or produced by immigrants, or children of immigrants themselves. *Little Mosque on the Prairie* was one of the few television shows on Canadian television on CBC, Canada’s public broadcaster, to examine the immigrant experience, specifically the Muslim immigrant experience (Hussain, 2010). It was a comedy series that first aired in 2007 and ran successfully for three seasons. It was not only a show predominantly with a Muslim cast examining Muslim lives, but was created by Ryerson graduate Zarqa Nawaz, a child of immigrants. More recently, CBC has aired Ins Choi’s *Kim*’s

Convenience (2016), originally a play adapted into a television comedy series. This show focuses on a Korean Canadian family and their convenience store located in Regent Park in Toronto. It speaks to the immigrant experience and life in Canada as described through first generation parents, and second-generation Korean Canadian children. Choi, the producer and director of *Kim's Convenience*, is also a 1.5-generation Korean Canadian, a child of immigrants, who came to Canada at a young age. This show is situated in Regent Park, a fundamentally diverse neighborhood with a high immigrant population, rather than Toronto's Korea Town. This MRP will examine the portrayal and representation of the Korean Canadian immigrant experience in Canada as seen on *Kim's Convenience*, and as situated in Toronto, Ontario. This paper will analyze the ways in which stereotypes are presented in *Kim's Convenience* to subvert naturalized dominant negative discourses and tropes of racialized bodies, while simultaneously being used as a tool to produce counternarratives. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological tool, this paper will explore the use of stereotypes in the portrayal of racialized accents, the intersections of race, gender and sex, intergenerational conflicts, intercultural relationships, and the use of Regent Park as a setting for the show.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT

2.1 Choi's *Kim's Convenience*: Historical Development

Choi is the director and original playwright of *Kim's Convenience*. He is a first-generation immigrant who was raised in Canada; both his parents were from North Korea. He travelled to Canada as part of the refugee journey from Korea in search of freedom. His mother grew up in an orphanage, and they arrived in Canada with "two hundred dollars, three kids, and a

lot of hope” (Choi, 2012). Similar to the plight of many refugee families in Canada today, his own life resonates with my own, as I am also a 1.5-generation Canadian who came to Canada with my parents in search of freedom and peace, fleeing from a war-torn country. Choi graduated from an acting program in York University in 1998 that influenced his interest in playwriting. He often criticized the lack of representation of Asian males in main roles on screen. This influenced his decision to have a predominantly Asian cast on *Kim’s Convenience*, with many other diverse cultures represented on screen as well. Choi himself asserts that *Kim’s Convenience* was written as a “love letter” to his parents and all first-generation immigrants who call Canada their home (Choi, 2012). Choi grew up in a tight knit community in Canada, similar to that presented in the play. This play speaks to the real life experiences of immigrant families who struggle to find success despite numerous barriers, and make a better life for their children. Choi has written from a personal yet specific place, to present immigrant families from the perspective of a Korean Canadian who grew up in that community (Choi, 2012). Choi integrated his own experiences as a Korean Canadian growing up in a multi-ethnic community, by integrating existing naturalized stereotypes in his portrayal of the Korean Canadian immigrant family and other ethnic/racialized groups to subvert negative perspectives and assumptions, while simultaneously using stereotypes to present and educate viewers about alternative narratives.

Choi spent five years writing the script for *Kim’s Convenience*, when he became part of the third playwriting unit for Fu-GEN, an Asian Canadian theatre company, launched under the leadership of Nina Lee Aquino, Richard Lee, David Yee, and Leon Aureus (2012). This local institution nurtured the Asian theatre community in Toronto, and became the venue through

which *Kim's Convenience* had its first debut in 2011. Although Choi initially submitted the play to a few theatre companies in Toronto, no one was interested, and so Choi “birthed this play himself”, by researching independent theatre festivals such as the New Play contest and the Toronto Fringe Festival (2012). These local institutions played a major role in the success of *Kim's Convenience*. The Toronto Fringe Festival is an annual theatre festival that features unjuried plays by unknown or well-known artists taking place in theatres of Toronto (Toronto Fringe, 2015). This festival presents over 150 individual productions across Canada and around the world. As outlined in the Fringe’s Strategic plan, one of the five goals is to reflect diversity in the community, and “create a platform for all artists and audiences” (Toronto Fringe, 2015).

Many local Toronto artists and producers have performed in, or written for the Fringe, especially producers and actors of colour. *Da Kink in My Hair*, written and produced by Trey Anthony, was a play that was originally performed at the Fringe Festival, and became a successful TV series in Canada. *Kim's Convenience* was also showcased on the Fringe and successfully won as the main submission for the Fringe Festival. Choi produced, directed and performed in the play for the Toronto Fringe Festival. The show ran successfully, and all advance tickets were sold out. It garnered praise and support from Korean Canadians all over Canada, as well as the support of various ethnic communities in Toronto. Thus, this local institution can be seen as an incubator for immigrant-based or racialized shows. Eventually, theatre companies reached out and Soulepper Theatre Company ran the show. In its opening week in 2011, *Kim's Convenience* sold out its entire 38-show run in Toronto, and the show toured across Canada (Choi, 2012). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which ran *Kim's Convenience* as a television show may have selected the show for its potential in fulfilling

broadcasting policies to increase diversity on screen (Bateman & Karim, 2009). *Kim's Convenience* has completed the first season, and another season is in the making. It will be important to contextualize Korean immigration to Canada, as it is fundamental to understanding social, political, and cultural issues and experiences portrayed on *Kim's Convenience*.

2.2 Korean Canadian Immigration History

Currently, Korean immigrants are one of the largest Asian groups in North America (Noh, 2008). The biggest wave of Korean immigration to Canada happened during the 1980s. More than 26,000 Korean immigrants came to Canada through two primary avenues: as sponsored family members, and through the independent class with their educational and occupational qualifications (Noh et al, 2012). The second wave consisted primarily of permanent migrants who settled in Ontario and the western provinces, mainly British Columbia (2012). The third wave (between 1986 and 2003) was an upward flow from 1,100 in 1986, peaking to more than 9,600 in 2001, but then down to 7,000 in 2003, reaching an eight-year total of over 78,000 persons (Noh et al, 2012). However, since tourists and international students are omitted from this data, this is an underestimation of Korean migration to Canada. If the temporary migration were included, the yearly volume of Korean migration would have numbered approximately 20,000 in early 2000s (Noh et al, 2012). From 2004 onwards, there has been another rise in migration flows from Korea; however, this time Korean immigrants came through different avenues—as transnational migrants through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) (Kim & Belkhdja, 2012). Many Korean migrants arrived through the PNP, which has led many Koreans to be dispersed across Canada. This led to a slow decline in Toronto, and an increase of Korean migrants in Vancouver and Winnipeg (2012).

There are approximately 168, 890 people of Korean ethnic descent in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). It has generally been acknowledged that the beginning of Korean immigration to Canada lies with the initiation of diplomatic relations between the two governments in 1963 (Yoo, 2002). However, these relations began much earlier in the late 19th century and early 20th century when Christian missionaries came to South Korea and developed a strong relationship with the local communities, building hospitals, churches, and schools (Yoo, 2002). This was when the first recorded Koreans came to Canada. Since it was too costly to send Canadian missionaries back and forth from Canada, the Canadian Christian missionaries decided to educate and train Korean missionary helpers by sending them to study abroad in Canada (Yoo, 2002). From 1963 to 1985, the initiation of diplomatic relations between Canada and South Korea provided Koreans with the opportunity to consider Canada as a destination for permanent settlement (Noh et al, 2012).

Korean immigrants started to develop their own communities, and established the Toronto Korean Church (St. Luke's Church) in 1959. It was the first Korean church, on the corner of Sherbourne and Carlton Street in Toronto (Noh et al, 2012). In the early 1970s, there were poorer economic conditions, political instability and military dictatorship in South Korea, and thus there was a rapid increase in permanent migration from South Korea at this time (2012). After 1975, the levels dropped and stayed low. This could be due to the South Korean government revising their emigration policy to restrict movement of wealthy Koreans, military officers, retired generals, and high-ranking government officials (2012). In 1973, the Ontario Korean Businessman's Association (OKBA) was established, as a local institution to support and

foster growth amongst Korean ethnic communities across Ontario (Couton, 2015). OKBA supported Korean immigrants by offering group purchasing to small businesses through its wholesale outlet, and mainly serviced Korean convenience store owners (Couton, 2015). These two institutions played an integral role in the creation of Korean communities, and influenced most of the Korean immigration to Canada. It allowed Korean immigrants to establish life in Canada with support and without language barriers (2015).

Interestingly, in his foreword for the play, *Kim's Convenience*, Choi refers to the church and the convenience store as the main symbols of the Korean communities, or in his words, the “Umma” and “Appa” of Korean Communities in Canada (Choi, 2012). Choi featured both the Korean family business and the Korean church on *Kim's Convenience*. Despite the portrayal of the Korean church on *Kim's Convenience*, I will not analyze the Korean Church or the use of stereotypes in the portrayal of the Korean Church, as there are not any significant references to Church that could be analyzed in the first season. Choi featured stereotypes about family businesses, and the notion that immigrant family businesses are often passed on to children; however he subverts these naturalized assumptions by portraying an alternative narrative of children who do not want to take up the business, and rather are quite independent in their career choices.

CHAPTER 3: STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

Kim's Convenience as a television show was written and produced by an immigrant writer/producer, Choi. He engages with the use of stereotypes in his show as a place of familiarity for viewers who are not in contact with different racial groups, while subverting these stereotypes to create alternative representations of immigrants, and racialized groups on mainstream media. Despite its success, *Kim's Convenience* as a play and as a television show has never been analyzed before for research purposes. There have been some critical reviews published on the play, but only a few reviews in news media on the television show (Green, 2017; Wong, 2016; Lee, 2016). This could be due to the fact that it is a very recent show. There has been no substantial research in the academic field to analyze *Kim's Convenience* as one of the very few immigrant narratives on mainstream media in Canada. Although there has been research on the use of the stereotype in immigrant or ethnic-based narratives published in Canadian media, there has been no critical analysis of *Kim's Convenience*, or Choi's use of stereotypes in the portrayal of the immigrant experience and other racial groups. Thus, my paper seeks to analyze the portrayal of immigrants and racial groups in *Kim's Convenience* and the use of stereotypes within the show.

Immigrants and people of colour have long been misrepresented by mainstream media as “problems” or “social threats” to Canadian society, highlighting differences between who is perceived as Canadian and who is not (Cui & Kelly, 2013). Bauder (2008) suggests that the construction of danger (deployed to argue against immigration) is the primary discourse associated with immigration in Canada. Immigrants are effectively depicted as criminalized,

deviant, and representing a threat to Canadian society (Buzan et al, 1998). This can become the basis of understanding different racial groups for members of society who may not be in contact with different racial groups, reproducing ignorance and divide (Chavous et al, 2004).

Immigrants are portrayed negatively, and the media creates, reinforces and magnifies negative stereotypes of immigrants (Ross, 2011). This can become the basis of understanding different racial groups for members of society who may not be in contact with different racial groups, reproducing ignorance and divide (Chavous et al, 2004). As Tooke & Baker (1996) assert, “When experiential knowledge does not exist, we often assume that images we see in film reflect reality” (p.89). Movies, television shows, and commercials can exert powerful influence on viewers and their social understanding of the world; thus it will be crucial to review existing literature on Canadian media and the portrayal of immigrant narratives through media such as film and television shows. This section of the MRP will seek to analyze the production of knowledge through representation in Canadian media, define and conceptualize stereotypes as a tool for representation in media, while analyzing existing work on immigrant narratives written by immigrants or people of colour, and the use of the stereotype in their portrayals of the immigrant experience and/or racialized groups.

3.1 Canadian Media and the (re) presentation of immigrant narratives

The concept of representation is important in our discussion of *Kim’s Convenience*. Stuart Hall analyzes the production of knowledge through culture, where culture can be regarded as a system of representation (1997). Hall explains that, “representation is the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (1997, p.17). Thus, it can be argued, “meaning is produced by the practice, the ‘work’ of representation. It is constructed

through...meaning producing practices” (1997, p.18) For Hall, the educational force of culture resides in the ways in which it pays attention to representations as a condition for learning, agency, the functioning of social practices and politics itself (p.22). Culture is substantive as it can be present in various institutions, new technologies, practices, and products, which have vastly expanded “the scope, volume and, variety of meanings, messages and images that can be transmitted through time and space” (Hall et al, 1997, p.23). The cultural realm has produced an explosion of information, but culture is not just dialogue or text, it is the site “for the production and struggle over power” (Grossberg, 1994, p.248). Culture as representation can be seen as public pedagogy, which for Hall represents a moral and political practice, and that pedagogy must be linked to practice that furthers racial, economic, and political democracy. Hall emphasized educators, which include comedians, producers, directors, and actors, to focus on representations as a mode of public exchange, and explore the ways “these images, especially the historical and contemporary meanings they carry and understandings they express are aligned and realigned with broader discourse” (Giroux, 2000, p.408).

In his paper “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation (1996a)”, Hall analyzes a whole range of cultural forms and the participation of young black cultural practitioners engaged in culture in the UK. He finds that such ‘educators’ create a “syncretic dynamic which critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and “creolizes” them, disarticulating given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning” (p.221). Thus, cultural educators are involved in breaking dominant discourse and fixed identities, by rearticulating and portraying their own identities in ways that they want to have them shown. Hall (1996) conceptualizes cinematic representation as a mirror through which identity can be rediscovered

or reimagined. He argues that it is not a “second mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation that is able to constitute us to new kinds of subjects, and thereby enables us to discover places from which to speak (p.221). The process of developing ethnic identity according to Hall (1996) is shaped by emergent cinematic representation that can broaden existing notions of what it means to be Canadian (p.223). Different cultural forms such as video or print help people make sense of social reality, and such representation frames and structures “the way we live and experience reality” (Grossberg, 1996, p.99; Cui & Kelly, 2013). Hall argues that social reality and representation are “mutually constitutive” in that they produce meanings for what passes as real, as they are real in their effects (Fiske, 1996, p.214). Hall supported young black filmmakers who engaged with alternative narratives, a new experimental genre of filmmaking that worked against dominant constructions and representations, negative portrayals, and existing ideological constructs to express their own emergent cultural identity in the UK (Cappellini et al, 2016).

According to Paul Ricoeur’s (1985) theory of “narrative identity”, the “expression of individual and collective self in cultural products necessitates the perpetual redefinition and reconstruction of identity” (p.355). He argues that there are multiple truths, realities, and identities that can be experienced through “art and literature, just as in life” (p.357). Ricoeur’s theory describes how narratives can contribute to the understanding of self as well as of others, but also demonstrates the significance of exploring representations of identities and identity performances in cinema (Decock, 2012). Ricoeur argues that works of art have the “capacity...to indicate and transform human action” (1985, p.160). Media produced by POC/immigrant writers, which portray the immigrant experience, play an emancipatory role by

engaging in resistance against dominant negative oppressive discourses about immigrants and racialized bodies while simultaneously engaging in a form of cultural pedagogy to educate viewers, create new knowledge about immigrants in Canada and “transform human action” in society (1985, p.160). Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity provides a potential theoretical framework to use in analyzing and exploring the benefits of using stereotypes on *Kim’s Convenience* to subvert negative assumptions while creating space to insert alternative narratives. The narratives found in *Kim’s Convenience* can provide unique perspectives on complex concepts and issues related to immigrants and ethnic groups negotiating their identity through intercultural exchanges on television.

Previous literature has analyzed the role of ‘immigrant literature’ in the literary field (Hesse, 1991; Saul, 2006; Kamboureli, 2007); however, there is a lack of research on immigrant literature in media, including television. Immigrant narratives are “written by immigrant themselves, or their children...and puts at the forefront the social and cultural reality of immigration through the depiction of real life journey and plight of a fictional immigrant character modeled on his real counterpart” (Bates, 2016, p.6). Bates argues that immigrant narratives on visual media, especially television, play a “practical and symbolic role” in processes of identity construction. As Chris Barker (1999) argues, “television has become a leading source for the construction of identity projects.” (p.4)

Bates (2016) analyzes the construction of the immigrant and his identity on immigrant narratives produced by immigrant producers or their children. Bates (2016) analyzes the second generation of immigrant writers and their representation of immigration using the medium of

television in French literature. He argues that they are not simply victims or passive consumers of the “cultural products imposed on them”, but are “producers of new meanings and new identities that are hybrid and fluid, and defy traditional notions of identity as sameness or as fixed” (2016, p.19). Bates deconstructs the ways in which immigrants manage to mediate, question and negotiate representations on television, and the ways in which immigrant narratives not only allow for immigrants to “be seen” but also offer an opportunity for reclamation of power (p.240). The “oppositional gaze” allows the ability to look back and engage in sites of resistance against dominant narratives and representations of immigrants (bell hooks, 1992, p.115; Bates, 2016, p.8).

Chao (2015) argues in her analysis of *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (LMP) that the show utilizes situational comedy to “insert a banal and normalized gaze towards Muslims and contest hostile representations of Islam in Western media” (p.27). Chao also utilizes the concept of an “oppositional banality” which refers to the generation of oppositional possibilities produced through immigrant narratives that can “neutralize an antagonistic gaze” produced through dominant narratives and the portrayal of immigrants (p.30). Cultural resistance to existing stereotypes and misrepresentations produced through dominant discourses in media can be done through self-representation and self-articulation through “counter images, narratives and history” as seen in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, especially post 9/11 (p.30).

The use of humour and situation comedy was analyzed, and Chao contends that such comical scenes “drastically sever Muslims from their highly-politicized ‘terrorist’ designation and transform them into bodies that generate laughter through forms of humour” (p.39). Chao

(2015) argues that television genres such as situation comedy determine capacities for those bodies represented within, how viewers experience those encounters, and what forms of knowledge are produced. LMP transforms Muslims from “news-making bodies to comedy-making and banal bodies” (p.34). The Muslims represented in the show are made ordinary, with their own personal problems of everyday life and personalized with their own individual histories (Chao, 2015, p.21).

Kim’s Convenience is also a situation comedy that seeks to portray the experiences of the Korean Canadian immigrant family as well as intercultural and multi-ethnic relations. *Kim’s Convenience* is also an immigrant narrative as it was directed by a 1.5-generation immigrant, Choi—born in South Korea but raised in Toronto, Ontario (Toronto Life, 2016). In my analysis, I will critically examine the ways in which Choi rejects the normalized dominant gaze towards immigrants and racial groups, and inserts an ‘oppositional gaze’ or an ‘oppositional banality’ to resist and subvert naturalized negative representations about racial groups and immigrants specifically by using stereotypes as a tool. I will now provide a conceptual framework for the use of stereotypes in the media, which includes conceptualizing stereotypes and the ways in which stereotypes can be reimagined to resist and/or subvert normalized negative assumptions of racialized bodies.

3.2 Re-imagining the use of stereotypes in mainstream media

In his seminal essay on the structure and working of racial stereotypes, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism,” Bhabha (1994) defines the “stereotype” as an ambivalent structure that is “one of the most significant discursive and

physical strategies of discriminatory power—whether racist, sexist, peripheral or metropolitan” (95). It is important to note that the stereotype does not just attempt to define an individual, but cultural and political agents resort to stereotypes to construct their own identity, and to project ideal images meant to sustain a sense of community or simply portray group difference (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha’s understanding of the stereotype is concerned with how it works in context as well as the entire structure (1994). In Bhabha’s view, the stereotype is shaped by a contradictory structure, which combines phobia with the fetish, and in this way, it maintains its complex and flexible nature in disparate texts to ensure it becomes permanent in its context (1994, p.107). According to Bhabha (1994), stereotypes should be defined or understood as interrelations of presence/absence through processes of substitution. Therefore, when we analyze fixed stereotypes, we need to also pay attention to what is missing from that representation, regardless of whether it is the section not represented or the substituted object.

Simplifying the diverse and contradictory codified stereotypes thus “constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations” because it denies “the play of difference” (1994, p.107). We need to be able to attend to the multiple forms of stereotypes as well as to the absent or substituted objects that provide us the larger picture, rather than a fixated understanding of a stereotype. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the stereotype highlights the multiplicity and “flexibility” of forms that are aggressively fixed and formalized in racial stereotypes, as we not only focus on what is present in its image, but what is absent or silenced within the stereotype (1994,p.95). An analysis of stereotypes in this way can allow us to see the contradictory forms of stereotypes that reveal tension, violence, and resistance inherent in stereotypes being aggressively imposed and oversimplified.

Negative representations reproduced as stereotypes in media are often found in print and news media. Most representations continue to categorize racialized immigrant groups as the “Other” and relegate them to flat, stereotypical images that emphasize “sameness and minimize agency and variety” (Berg, 2002). Henri Tajfel (1969, p.5) explains that stereotyping is neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’ but “necessary to meaning, to make sense of the world”. Tajfel argues that stereotyping is a form of human social categorization, which is inevitable and natural, psychologically (1969). When we meet people for the first time, we make initial judgments about them and fit them into categories by means of how we understand the world (1969). Thus, I will avoid analyzing the use of stereotypes as bad or dangerous, rather, viewing the use of stereotypes as an important tool in media to either naturalize assumptions regarding racial groups, or to subvert and resist them, using them as a tool to educate and understand differences.

I will utilize Puxan-Oliva’s (2015) theoretical understanding of racial stereotypes as a narrative, because historically charged and functioning stereotypes can be activated in the narrative. The use of words, expressions and statements in literature or narratives to create a representation or interpretation of stereotypes and race allow for readers to participate in their interpretation of race and racial issues. Seeing stereotypes as narrative forms, Puxan-Oliva (2015) implies that stereotypes already contain “stories” (p.360). Thus, authors and producers engage with stereotypes in their representation of race and racial issues to tell “their story”, especially when it involves their own racial identity (p.360). According to Puxan-Oliva (2015), pre-existing historical stereotypes should be reformulated and recreated in literature by authors and narrators to “elaborate a new perspective on the ways in which racial discourse is narrated,

and create new understandings of a particular racial identity” (p.362). In *Kim’s Convenience*, I will seek to analyze the ways in which Choi utilizes stereotypes to be “reformulated and recreated” to create “new understandings of a particular racial identity” (Puxan-Oliva, 2015, p. 362).

In *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and representation after 9/11*, Morey and Yaqin (2011) analyze the work of Shazia Mirza, a stand-up comedian in the UK. In her comedy, she portrays the cultural identity of *Muslimness* as perceived by viewers, which involves the use of various labels and stereotypes that indicate what it means to be Muslim as widely portrayed in media (2011). Mirza subverts views on such stereotypes by employing, repeating and exaggerating them in comedic form. She confronts the stereotype through the deployment of the stereotype in her own work. Judith Butler (1999, p.418) refers to this practice as “parodic recontextualization” where dominant stereotypes about racialized groups, in this case Muslim women, are imitated in performance, and creates space to question ideas of an ‘original truth’ behind the image (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p. 418). By doing so, Mirza is bringing under attack the locus of misrecognition from the viewer doing the stereotyping, not the stereotype portrayed itself. Mirza’s hyperperformativity challenges binary stereotypes by creating a third location that is a fusion of linguistic and cultural codes to make up what it means to be a British Muslim. Use of such stereotypes by POC writers creates “cultural estrangement, alienating the audience from any preconceptions” (201, p.196). By utilizing stereotypes within immigrant narratives written by immigrant/POC writers, you can seek to play around with “the expectation of the interlocutor, confuse and frustrate the simple operation of stereotyping” (p.197). Thus, while most analyses on stereotypes are in regard to their binary nature, the analysis done by Morey and Yaqin (2011) on

Mirza focuses on her reflection of the Muslim identity as she has experienced it, and the portrayal of the hybridity of a fused identity using stereotypes.

Morey & Yaqin (2011) have also analyzed CBC's *Little Mosque on the Prairie* in their work on framing and use of stereotypes in the media. Morey & Yaqin (2011) emphasize the way Zarqa Nawaz, the Muslim producer of the show, foregrounds stereotypes and kinds of misrecognition as **central** to its interpretations of Self/Other identity formation. Every character in the show at one point has stereotypes about others, and they misread one another. For example, the white male talk show host misreads the Muslims; the Muslims misread one another, and misread other racialized groups. Misreading and miscommunication take place regardless of race, gender, age or background (2011). The result is a comedy that according to Morey and Yaqin (2011) can be seen as "deploying its fair share of clichéd situations and stock figures, but presenting Muslim life in the round and not set against a 'normal' majority population from which Muslims represent some kind of deviation" (2011, p. 208).

3.3 Ethnic Comedy/Racial Humour

Morey and Yaqin (2011) emphasize ethnic or racial comedy shows and performance work for the presence of stereotypes, and how these performers utilize the "comedic potential of crude stereotypes" (p.203). It is necessary not to simply reverse stereotypes and create positive representations, but also to challenge the existing stereotypes and the conventional wisdom upon which they depend (2011, p.204). By using parody, or comedic forms, Morey and Yaqin (2011) argue that you can do just this, and they point out inconsistencies or absurdities, while forcing viewers to shift their focus from the 'normalized' discursive stereotype to "looking at things

from the *Other* side” (p.204). Comedy is then an important tool in combatting stereotypes and depictions of immigrants, the immigrant narrative, and racialized groups. Through comedy, you can “portray existing serious prejudices and stereotypes about different groups in society and then directly frustrate or confound them...and can play a role in loosening the grip of reductive images” (p.209). Comedy can offer a space to blow down narrow, serious, ignorant constructions of different groups that fall outside the normative discursive depictions of what it means to be Canadian for example.

Rossing (2016) refers to ethnic or racial comedy as “emancipatory racial humour” which works to subvert not just stereotypes against people of colour, but subvert hegemonic racism and dominant oppressive structures that silence racialized bodies (p. 614). In his essay, he argues that producers, writers and comedians who create racial humour in their work are “critical humourists” who confront hegemonic racism and engage in sociopolitical and cultural transformation (2016). It is emancipatory because it exposes dominant discourses, and injects counternarratives that subvert normalized racial meanings and privileges (2016). As Rossing argues, “it brings to the forefront perspectives and knowledge that challenge dominant realities, and bears potential for promoting critical questioning and reflection about racial oppression” for those watching (p.615). Humour can work in ways that help viewers identify, criticize and ultimately transform their understanding of race and race relations. Rossing reviews several stand-up comedies, late night talk shows, sketch comedy and movies written or performed by predominantly Black artists, and analyzes the ways in which they utilize humo to critique oppressive racist structures in society (2016).

Rossing theorizes *emancipatory racial humour* as a form of critical public pedagogy (2016). Critical public pedagogy recognizes performers, artists and cultural workers as individuals who create “new and imagined possibilities through art and other cultural practices to bear witness to the ethical and political dilemmas” in their everyday lives (Giroux 2001, p.8). Through performance, artists, producers, performers, and cultural workers critique dominant hegemonic discourses, and create sites for oppositional education to imagine new possibilities for the future (Dimitriadis, 2001; bell hooks, 1995). Thus, critical public pedagogy goes beyond the study of popular culture as a site for interrogating social knowledge and goes beyond the traditional classroom. Critical public pedagogy recognizes performers, artists, producers, and cultural workers as critical educators themselves who educate viewers.

Boskin (1997) writes about African American humour, and claims that racial humour raises consciousness about oppression, and provides strategies for resisting oppression. His analysis specifies three important functions of racial humour that are neither exhaustive nor exclusive, but rather work together simultaneously. First, by “revealing the character of the oppression”, critical humor exposes dominant meaning-making practices that legitimize existing power relations as common sense (1997, p.146). Second, counterhegemonic racial humour provides a space for counternarratives to be heard (1997). These counternarratives talk back to and resist dominant discourses. Marginalized voices utilize their own space to assert their own experiences and experiential truth, since most dominant media spaces privilege White experiences (1997). Also, since viewers are often engaged with humour more quickly than other forms, there is a relationship between artists and audience that “allows people to receive the artist’s view of one or another fragment of reality... [in order to] catalyze new awareness” of

reality (Olsen, 1988, p.110). Third, emancipatory racial humour involves cunning, inventive retaliation by interrogating existing tropes, racial stereotypes, the assumptive, normalized racial constructions (Rossing, 2016). Racial humour recontextualizes existing dominant narratives by using assumptive elements of racial hegemony as part of humour, to subvert the same elements (Rossing, 2016). Rossing (2016) refers to this strategy as “comic jujitsu”; “a technique by which artists leverage an opponent’s power in order to neutralize or defeat that opponent” (p.625). Instead of focusing on positive representations, or directly attacking the oppressor and the dominant discourse, humour seeks to manipulate the same forces against the oppressor and the dominant discourse.

My analysis will seek to deconstruct and analyze the use of comedy to integrate stereotypes in *Kim’s Convenience* as a way to subvert and resist stereotypes while being a tool to educate and understand differences. *Kim’s Convenience* may have considerable success in revealing something valuable about the immigrant experience in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Instead of just offering positive representations and steering away from stereotypes, integrating stereotypes in the presentation of the Korean Canadian immigrant family and other marginalized groups allows viewers to revisit their first encounter of certain stereotypes about these groups, and create new understandings of these groups. These new understandings imply a “recognition of the ubiquitous cultural interpenetration” or the hybridity of different cultural identities between the West and immigrant and/or racialized groups, rather than viewing the representation of two separate identities, in other words, the portrayal of a clash between cultures (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p.207). In studying *Kim’s Convenience*, a comedy TV sitcom that has also been showcased on CBC, it will also be important to analyze the ways in which Choi used comedy

form to engage with stereotypes as a tool to confront and subvert dominant hegemonic racial discourses, meanings, and identity constructions. It also creates space for counter narratives as “real and imagined alternatives” (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p. 215).

Another crucial element in my analysis of stereotypes is the use of accents in *Kim’s Convenience*. The presence and performance of racialized accents is increasingly apparent in North American media, specifically in representations of Asian and South Asian Americans (Davé, 2017). Does the use of racial accents reinforce racial hierarchies in society often presented in and by mass media? Should the use of accents and minority languages in immigrant narratives then be seen as a form of stereotyping in media? If so, in what ways is the use of accents and minority language in an immigrant narrative useful in subverting negative portrayals with the use of accents in the media? I will now review existing literature on the use of racial accents, specifically in the performance of such accents and dialogue on screen to help in my analysis of racial accents on *Kim’s Convenience*.

3.4 Use of Racial Accents on Television

Racial accents have been used to categorize and differentiate people of different races as a readily identifiable physical trait, especially in live and recorded dramatic performance (Pao, 2004). These traits are often also the basis for making casting decisions on actors in film, theatre, and television genres to reproduce “*real authentic dialects*” (Pao, 2004, p.353). Language, speech, and accents become one of the most important defining features of an ethnic group next to physical appearance, and it becomes the dominant indicator of cultural identity (p.355). In *English with an Accent, Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States*,

Rosina Lippi-Green (1997) examines the way in which Walt Disney's animators have exploited accents to create characters. They have used language "as a quick way to build character and reaffirm stereotype..." and teach children to "associate specific characters and life styles with specific social groups, by means of language variation." (1997, p. 85) Thus, the argument can be made that media portrayals of language, are, in fact stereotypical in nature.

In the article, *Racial Accents, Hollywood Casting, and Asian American Studies*, Shilpa Davé analyzes the use of racial accents of Asian Americans in Hollywood. She reviews the Netflix comedy series, *Master of None* (2015-present), a show portraying the life of an Indian American man, Dev Shah, played by Aziz Ansari, who is also a co-creator of the show. Davé, (2017) argues that for Asian Americans, particularly Indian Americans, the presence and performance of vocal and racial accents is an important factor involved in the representation of Indian Americans in the media. Most of the time, these accents are given as an expected trait for all Indian Americans, as sometimes, the actors playing the role do not have an accent themselves, but are requested to fake an accent to play the role of an Indian American character. Thus, it often reproduces the assumption that all Indian Americans have an accent, and can contribute to the maintenance of existence language-based stereotypes. The use of accents creates assumptions about what is normal, and what is not, or in other words, we come to associate inferiority with the use of accents in media (Mastro et al, 2007).

The performance of racialized accents in the representation of Indians and South Asians on North American TV and film is referred to as "*brown voice*" (Davé, 2017) Brown voice is the act of speaking in accented English associated with Indian nationals and immigrants. Davé

analyzes the use of brown voice in the film and television industry, and argues that it is most often used in conjunction with comedic narratives and representations, and in progressive sitcom TV series that feature Asian American families or Indian American families in central roles (2017). In many of these shows that feature the Asian American or Indian American families, such as *Master of None* (Netflix, 2015-Present) or *Fresh off the Boat* (ABC, 2014-Present), accents are utilized but they are not the center of the comedy story line, nor are they used as a form of comedy.

However, Davé argues that using the stereotype of accents in the portrayal of Asian Americans in the immigrant narrative is essential for subverting the negative to create alternative understandings of the stereotype. There is often the portrayal of a multigenerational family and the use of racialized accents to depict immigrant grandparents or parents, while the children speak fluent English with use of cultural slang (2017). However, the use of racialized accents in itself should not be looked as *racist*, or just as a form of stereotyping; rather, as Davé argues, it should be seen as essential to the narrative, as it becomes representative of the different kinds of accents and genealogies that exist in a multigenerational family. When exploring this stereotype in narrative form we are able to see dialogue in real contexts, a realistic depiction of many Korean immigrant parents who do not achieve full proficiency in English because they do not attend school in Canada. Instead they learn English just through conversation and by working in Canada (Winsler & Kim, 2014). This realistic depiction also speaks to the barriers many immigrants experience daily. Through her analysis of *Master of None*, Davé finds that as these shows are produced by racialized individuals; they chose to showcase stories that contemplate

how their own cultural heritage and ethnic background inform everyday life, decisions, relationships, and professions (Davé, 2017).

There is also a trend towards the idea of a neutral accent with representations of Asian Americans and South Asian Americans in lead roles to achieve the appearance of ‘racelessness or a race-neutral position’ for lead roles. However, Davé argues that by sticking to universal dialogue and allowing characters to all speak with one universal, “neutral accent”, the “plotlines erase or bury racial and ethnic markers that include family, friends, cultural practices and holidays” (2017, p.370). The “neutral accent” takes away from the real portrayal of a multigenerational family, or immigrant narrative. Character roles that represent Asian/Indian Americans that have no accents could “obfuscate or bury the racial backstory in favour of an assimilated story line” (p.320).

In *Kim’s Convenience*, a comedy TV series based on an Asian Canadian family, with all central roles played by those of Korean descent, there is use of racial accents to portray certain characters, such as Mr. & Mrs. Kim, the immigrant parents portrayed on the show. As informed by Shilpa Davé through her work on racial accents in the media, especially in immigrant or ethnic narratives, the use of racial accents is significant and essential to the portrayal of the racial or immigrant experience in America or Canada. Racial accents make up a large part of an individual’s identity as much as language makes up an individual’s identity. Racial accents inform viewers of the day-to-day experiences with accented speech, and how characters display their cultural identities and how these identities inform their everyday choices and decisions. Thus, the use of racial accents in *Kim’s Convenience* will be analyzed to see to what extent Choi

uses the accents as a form of stereotype, and the ways in which these stereotypes are subverted and/or resisted to create new alternative representations of accents for viewers. I will analyze the use of racial accents on *Kim's Convenience*, not for the central roles alone, but for a wide array of characters displayed on the show.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Choosing the Method

In this section of the MRP, I will first explain the objectives for the study. Second, I will justify the use of qualitative methods more generally, and provide a rationale as to why Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was chosen as the most appropriate research tool for this project. I will then elaborate on the CDA method as an approach in research, why it is used, and the advantages and disadvantages of using this research tool. I will then provide a detailed description of the transcribing, coding and analysis process used to explore my thesis.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the portrayal and re/presentation of Korean Canadians and the immigrant experience on *Kim's Convenience*, a televised comedy series that ran on a national broadcasting channel from October 2016 to December 2016, with exposure to a large, diverse audience in Canada. There are several portrayals of Asian Canadian characters and other immigrant or ethnic groups in the news, in movies, and television, but are often portrayed through the lens of mainstream white society that involve negative stereotypes. For example, in 2010, *Maclean's* magazine published an article "Too Asian?" which reproduced problematic assumptions of Asian students as having a high rate of acceptance to Canadian

universities, creating competitiveness for admissions, and creating problems such as segregation and exclusion by creating their own ethnic student groups and refusing to socialize with students racialized as white (Cui & Kelly, 2013, p.158). These stereotypes are constantly reproduced, and influence social attitudes and understanding of the immigrant or ethnic groups (Stricker et al, 2008). The portrayals of Korean Canadians as a group are also generally shown on Korean ethnic media programs, which are tailored to Koreans who can speak and understand Korean. (2008). However, while written for a broad audience in Canada, this show provides perspective from an immigrant writer who is of Korean Canadian descent describing the Korean Canadian immigrant experience. It would be illuminating to analyze if and how stereotypes are used in the representations of Korean Canadians and other immigrant groups, the use of accents and the Korean language on the show, intergenerational conflicts, and intercultural dialogues that take place on the show. I would specifically like to analyze the ways in which these elements inform viewers of the Korean Canadian immigrant experience as unique from that of other immigrant groups while subverting from fixed stereotypes, images and understandings of racialized bodies and immigrant groups in Canada.

Initially, I wanted to engage in a mixed methods approach, which included a qualitative and quantitative method. Since there is only one season released on CBC to date, I was not able to quantify significant data to strengthen my analysis. Thus, I decided to conduct only a qualitative analysis using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the tool to analyze the meanings behind the dialogue presented on *Kim's Convenience*. I viewed all 13 episodes of *Kim's Convenience* that aired on CBC from October 2016 onward. I transcribed every single episode as close to verbatim as possible. The episodes were easily accessible online at www.cbc.ca, and

as reruns on television. I was able to transcribe the script as close to verbatim as possible by using the closed-captioned (CC) option while watching the shows. I extracted and coded key themes that were similar and related to racial stereotypes in all 13 episodes that were transcribed. First, I organized each episode by theme and organized the various passages transcribed from that episode by theme. Then, I gathered all passages that corresponded to a theme from all 13 episodes in one document. I did this for the three main themes I found, and discarded themes that were not as significant. I was able to determine themes to be discarded based on the fact that they were less frequent in terms of number of scenes and underdeveloped. From this point, I was able to analyze the content.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a theoretical and methodological tool for revealing how power functions within language and dialogue (Fairclough, 1995; Bell and Garrett, 1998). The primary goal of CDA is to analyze how power is diffused through “semantic and linguistic moves and positioning within media” (Cho, 2001). Media discourses construct “common sense” understandings that can reinforce racial stereotypes, manufacture consent, legitimize dominance, and naturalize unequal power relations (Kelly 1998; Henry and Tator, 2010, p.71). CDA provides us with a theoretical tool to uncover social and political inequalities that are reinforced by media discourses. As explained by Fairclough, we must study discourse as 1) text, 2) discursive practice, and 3) social practice. Bell and Garrett (1998) argue that CDA assumes that “media use can tell us a great deal about social meanings and stereotypes projected through language and communication” (p.12). CDA is a tool for deconstructing the ideologies of mass media, and helps to “identify and define social, economic, and historical power relations between

dominant and subordinate groups” (Henry and Tator, 2002, p.72). For this project, I will use CDA by analyzing and coding all 13 episodes of *Kim’s Convenience* to elucidate the representations of characters, narrative, and dialogues. As a result, I will create central themes surrounding the representation of the Korean Canadian identity and immigrant experience in Canada. These themes will be analyzed to reveal the portrayal of power relations and deconstruct the use of dominant discourses, ideologies, and stereotypes formed against immigrants in general.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

5.1 EMERGING THEMES

5.1.1 Use of the Stereotypes in *Kim’s Convenience*

I have identified several stereotypes on *Kim’s Convenience*, which can fall into larger themes for analysis. These stereotypes did not specifically apply to the Korean Canadian community; instead, they were identified as dialogue from various racial and marginalized groups in the community. I looked for common elements of a stereotype as identified by Lepore & Brown (1997), which include generalizations about different groups, and its use as a tool to process information about the social environment and different social groups (Lepore & Brown 1997, p.52).

Korean Canadians are often referred to as *Asian-Canadian*, an umbrella term used to designate anyone who can trace their ancestry to the continent of Asia. A common stereotype that depicts Asians as “model minorities” constructs Asians in general as a highly successful and well-adjusted immigrant population characterized by supportive and intact families that promote

Confucian cultural values such as respect for education (Lee, 2005; Maclear, 1994). Although this is relatively positive, such a stereotype portrays immigrants outside this group as unsuccessful or as lacking a good work ethic. It can “divide and conquer minorities, preventing them from forming coalitions” (Hartlep & Ellis, 2015, p.336). This stereotype is also used as evidence that society is colorblind and meritocratic, to present the ‘ethnic gloss’ which is the erasure of the diversity and heterogeneity found within and outside Asian Canadian groups and “presents the illusion of homogeneity where none exists” (Trimble & Dickson, 2005, p.413; Hartlep & Ellis, 2015, p.336). Most importantly, this stereotype implies that Asian Canadians all experience the world in the same, singular way, and that this experience is problem-free (Hartlep & Ellis, 2015). Korean Canadians experience migration in different ways than Chinese Canadians or South Asians.

I bring this up in my analysis of stereotypes as Choi resists the model minority stereotypes by displaying alternative representations on the show. As Bates (2016) argues, immigrant writers like Choi are not “simply victims or passive consumers of the “cultural products imposed on them”, but are “producers of new meanings and identities that are fluid and hybrid, and defy traditional notions of identity as sameness or as fixed” (p.19). This space allows for Choi to engage in sites of resistance against dominant narratives of Asian immigrants as model minorities (Bates, 2016; Hartlep & Ellis, 2015). The Kim family owns a convenience store, which may speak to the hard work, and success they have experienced as an immigrant family in Canada. However, in the portrayal of Janet and Jung, both second-generation Canadians, Choi steers clear of the model minority stereotype. Janet is a 20-year-old photography student who studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD). Her choice

of career and education is not the choice typically assumed under the model minority stereotype. The model minority stereotype in media today perpetuates the impression that Asians in North America go to elite or private institutions, and focus on careers in finance, law, and engineering (Assalone & Fann, 2017; Chang, 2008; Wang & Teranshi, 2012). Janet chooses photography as a career, and pursues it at an all-arts institution, which is in opposition to typical choices prescribed to the model minority stereotypes. Research however suggests that many Asian American college students have a broad range of academic abilities, achievements and aspirations, and many chose to attend community colleges and institutions that contradict stereotypes (Escueta & O'Brien, 1991; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus & Vue, 2013). Janet is shown as excelling in her academics with high grades and awards, which makes her parents very proud, despite her choice of an education in photography at OCAD. Here, we see the model minority stereotype displayed as ambivalent, diverse and contradictory, consistent with Bhabha's definition of the stereotype in general (1994).

Choi attends to the multiplicity of representations and stories that can be told in the model minority stereotype in a way that allows viewers to engage in a "play of difference"; in other words, to see various forms that exist in a stereotype (Bhabha, 1994; Ricoeur, 1985). Choi reconstructs the stereotype in narrative form as informed by Ricoeur in his concept of stereotypes as narratives (1985, p.357). Janet is portrayed as a hard-working, intelligent art student, pursuing photography as a career; this contrasts with common notions of intelligence as being attached to prestigious career choices like law, science, and engineering (Museus & Vue, 2013). Similarly, her brother Jung is 24 years old, working at Handy Rentals, never having pursued post-secondary education. Jung had parted ways from his family after running away from home. Jung ventured

into petty street crime, even went to juvenile jail, and tried to put the past behind him (CBC, 2016). This representation does not fit the model minority stereotype and in fact depicts the character negatively. Despite his failure to go to university or pursue a prestigious career, Jung is alternatively portrayed as a well-liked, confident hard worker, and a born leader, which helps him advance at work (CBC, 2016). Through his portrayal of Jung, Choi inserts an “oppositional gaze” to resist and contest dominant representations of Asian Canadians in Western media (bell hooks, 1992, p.115; Chao, 2015, p.27). This allows us to dismantle the model minority stereotype altogether, and create a Korean Canadian character that is neither good nor bad, but fraught with flaws and unique in his/her own way, rather than as a model, homogenous representation of second-generation Korean Canadians.

There are also stereotypes about other racialized and/or marginalized groups portrayed on the show. Similar to CBC’s *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, *Kim’s Convenience* also “foregrounds stereotypes and kinds of misrecognition as central to creating alternative interpretations” and educating the characters as well as the viewers (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p. 203). For example, in the first episode, Roger, a gay customer, visits the store with his boyfriend promoting their band which will be performing for Pride Week. Mr. Kim refuses to put up their poster in the store. When Roger’s boyfriend assumes it is because he is gay, Mr. Kim responds:

I have no problem with the gay, but I have problem with the Parade. If you is gay, why can’t you be quiet, respectful gay. Like Anderson Cooper or Neil Patrick Harris you know? They is the gay, but they don't yelling me that they is the gay...Some

people don't like Korean people, but we don't make big parade yelling we is Korean?

We are Korean” (CBC, 2016, Episode 1).

Here, Mr. Kim states that Korean Canadians are quiet and calm, but makes assumptions of those attending the Pride Parade in Toronto as loud and wild. He makes assumptions about the Pride Parade as being just another place for more garbage, traffic, and noise without realizing the true struggles and resistance faced by LGBTQ members who are historically marginalized and discriminated against because of their sexuality. He even makes note of two celebrity figures that he knows are gay, and forms his understandings of ‘gay identity’ from them, assuming that all gay men should be like them. When Roger’s boyfriend claims Mr. Kim is being homophobic, Mr. Kim cannot understand this term or its implications. Mr. Kim offers a 15% discount to all “gays”. Here, when Mr. Kim refers to “the gay”, he is grouping all different sexualities including gays, lesbians, queer, transgender, transsexual, and so on. We can understand this well later on in the episode, as Mr. Kim seeks to educate himself about different forms of sexuality with Mr. Chin and customers who visit the store. Mr. Chin, a friend of Mr. Kim has a conversation on the “*confusing*” aspects of the LGBTQ community. Although Mr. Kim groups all members in the term “the gay” Mr Chin and Mr.Kim have a conversation on the differences between gay, transgender and transsexual members. By engaging in such a conversation, Mr. Kim informs and educates himself about the differences amongst members of the LGBTQ community and learns the importance of not grouping them all as ‘gay’.

In another instance on episode one, Mr.Kim meets Therese, who appears to be a man dressed up as a woman. Mr. Kim asks, “*you is what kind?*” to ensure Therese receives her

discount, but he is confused to what Therese's sexual identity really is (CBC, 2016, Episode 1). Contrary to Mr. Kim's initial, stereotypical assumption of LGBTQ members, Therese is portrayed as calm and collected, quiet and peaceful. She smiles at Mr. Kim and explains that she is a drag queen. Mr. Kim questions her by saying, "Why you do like this?" Therese explains that it makes her feel herself, feels like home, and always has. Thus, these conversations allow Mr. Kim to break stereotypes about the LGBTQ community he may have once had, and provide space for him to engage and educate himself on the various sexual identities held by those in his own community. This narrative is often presented with humour. Mr. Kim explains to his customers that he has "GAYDAR, 100% GUARANTEE!" With Enrique, a Latino customer who frequently visits the store throughout the show, although he is gay, Mr. Kim thinks Enrique pretends to be gay, and refuses the 15% discount. Enrique tries desperately to prove he is gay. However, in this same scene, I have identified another stereotype of "the immigrant", in the case, Mr. Kim—the one holding stereotypical assumptions. Meyer & Stern (2007) have identified Korean immigrants as often holding to strong traditional conservative values that could have potentially influenced Mr. Kim and the assumptions he initially held. However, the stereotype of the immigrant with traditional conservative values is broken and altered when we see Mr. Kim educating himself and learning about various LGBTQ groups, and coming to know individuals who belong to this social group as all unique in their own way. Mr. Kim learns and educates himself that there are many sexual identities, and it would be hard to really ever put a label on how someone who says they are queer would look.

These stereotypes are presented with humour; however, the insertion of dialogues and conversations to educate and inform the characters in the show as well as viewers about the

LGBTQ community as all composed of unique individuals who cannot be all labeled with the same negative tropes associated with the media. Morey and Yaqin (2011) identify humour as beneficial to point out inconsistencies while shifting focus from normalized discourses to alternative ones. Rossing (2016) refers to the use of “comic jujitsu” to subvert naturalized stereotypes, which is a technique by which “artists leverage an opponent’s power in order to neutralize or defeat opposite” negative, normalized assumptions of racialized groups (624). In this scene, although the depiction of Mr. Kim’s stereotypical assumptions seemed humorous, viewers were able to contrast these interactions with their own normalized stereotypical assumptions while enjoying the scene’s humour. Viewers can engage with the plot, while simultaneously noting inconsistencies and shifting their focus from normalized to alternative understandings of the LGBTQ community. Humour plays an important role in engaging with critical public pedagogy, as viewers can educate themselves with alternative representations and narratives of the LGBTQ community, one that differs from the current negative stereotypes that exist in the media.

In *Kim’s Convenience*, stereotypes were also presented from the dominant, white, hegemonic narrative with the intention of displaying alternative understandings from the voices of racialized bodies. In Episode 6, Janet’s teacher at OCAD, Mrs. Murray, assigns all students a personal photography project. Janet completes the assignment and receives a bad mark, so meets Mrs. Murray to discuss her grade. The conversation is as following:

Mrs. Murray (S1): Your photos were technically good, very good even.

Janet (S2): This mark doesn't say very good.

S1: This assignment was about using a specific filter, and that filter was you.

S2: Were these supposed to be self-portraits?

S1: Not you, YOU. Where was your family's journey to Canada? Where was the refugee experience?

S2: My parents aren't refugees.

S1: Well...boat people.

S2: My parents flew here.

S1: You mean fled.

S2: No flew. Air Canada, probably.

S1: Doesn't your family own the convenience store down by Sherbourne?

S1: I am going to give you some more time to consider what I am saying

Mrs. Murray leaves immediately thereafter. (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 6)

Mrs. Murray presents the common, dominant stereotype of all racialized bodies as immigrants, more specifically refugees. She *assumes* Janet is a refugee without knowing much about her as a student. She generalizes Janet's own experiences to common portrayals of the immigrant family. Although immigrant families can arrive in Canada through different means and be of different immigration categories or classes, there is a common stereotype to assume the immigrant is a refugee, seeking refuge or fleeing from danger. Even after Janet explains to Mrs. Murray that nor herself or her parents were refugees, Mrs. Murray continues to assume that they were "boat people".

Ultimately, these assumptions were made simply due to Janet's race. Mrs. Murray's assumptions could have been easily tied to negative depictions of Vietnamese emigration to Canada in the 70s, and Mrs. Murray could have assumed that all Asian ethnic groups were the same. Mrs. Murray dismisses Janet after this conversation. Janet could have perceived this photo project differently, in a way that may have not included her family's journey to Canada, or her family's own immigrant experience. However, Janet faced barriers in school alone due to negative stereotypes held about her Korean Canadian identity. This scene portrayed dominant, white, hegemonic discourses and tropes commonly held regarding immigrants in Canada.

Although Janet does not display apparent anger or frustration, we can see how Janet resists the stereotypes by responding with answers quite opposite to Mrs. Murray's assumptions. Another way in which immigrants and racialized groups are stereotyped negatively in the media is through their accents. We will now analyze the use of stereotypes displayed through racialized accents on the main lead actors, Mr. Kim and Mrs. Kim, and several racialized characters that make an appearance on *Kim's Convenience*.

5.1.2 STEREOTYPES: USE OF ACCENTS

In *Kim's Convenience*, both Mr. and Mrs. Kim are portrayed as having a heavy Korean accent. Various other accents are portrayed on the show as well; this includes Mr. Chin (Chinese accent), Mr. Mehta (Indian accent) and certain customers of *Kim's Convenience*. An interesting interaction portrayed on the show is one between a black female customer and Mr. Kim. She speaks to Mr. Kim in Patois and Mr. Kim fails to understand her due to her accent.

Customer (S1): Excuse me. The word pon di street is that you havin' 15% discount. Fi true?

Mr. Kim (S2): What?

S1: Wha-What?

S2: No, Sorry I don't. I can't catch hear what you talking.

S1: What I talkin'?

Mr Chin: No one can understand what you both talking about it!

S1: Lord a mercy. Me just want to know if the 15% discount fi true?

S2: Yeah, its true but only for the gay.

S3: What? That's illegal. Anti-straight.

S1: Well, when me get me discount then?

S2: Uh. February. Black History Discount Month (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 4)

Here we see a fusion of three different accents in one conversation. It speaks to the variety of accents used by those in the community. It is humorous to watch three people who speak different languages, with different accents being unable to understand each other, yet

trying their best to understand each other. According to Dragojevic et al. (2016), non-standard American and foreign accents rarely appear on television, and are grossly under-represented. When they do, they are portrayed less favorably on status-related traits and physical appearance. These findings provide insight into the potential influence of media consumption on consumers' social perceptions of different linguistic groups (2016, p. 59). They argue that in the case of accents, the media could be the first and only exposure to particular accents especially for young children. It is a primary agent of language attitude socialization (2016, p.54). Thus, media representations of a variety of groups can be an important source of information for young ones, and people engage with media to gratify their social identity needs by seeking out portrayals that confirm or maintain a positive social identity (2016). However, since this is considered a minority based ethnic comedy; there were occasions where Mr. Kim or Mrs. Kim would say things that come across as funny due to their accents and lack of proficiency in the English language. For example, in a scene in Episode 3, when Gerald, Janet's friend asks to take pictures of Mr. Kim, Mr. Kim exclaims, "HE DO ME NEXT!" at which point Janet and Gerald laughed because these words carry sexual meaning, even though Mr. Kim really meant that Gerald would take photos of Mr. Kim next. Obviously, in this scene from Episode 3 Mr. Kim was clueless and did not understand why they were laughing.

There are several times in the show where Mr. Kim mispronounces or struggles to pronounce certain words. The portrayal of Mr. and Mrs. Kim with a heavy accent allows for a realistic depiction/representation of many immigrant parents who have never achieved full proficiency in English, while their children have been acculturated and accustomed to learning English through schooling. The children compartmentalize their Korean linguistic abilities to

minimal conversations with their parents, siblings and family. In a scene from Episode 3, Mr. Kim has a conversation with Janet about a car parked on the sidewalk where it should not be parked. He tells Janet to call the police to tag the vehicle. She refuses and does not want to call the police. Mr. Kim responds by saying, “Police hear accent, they don't take serious!” In another instance, Mr. Kim is speaking to an egg supplier over the phone, and gets irate because the person on the phone does not understand what Mr. Kim is saying. We do not hear what the person over the phone is saying but we can get a sense of it by assessing Mr. Kim’s frustration and anger.

Mr. Kim (S1): ...and 12 egg. Yeah I say like that. I say “dozen.” Look, if I only want 12 egg, I say “12 egg.” If I want 12-dozen egg. Easy. “Egg” means “dozen.” What’s your problem? Hello? Hello? [the person on the phone hangs up] (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 3).

We can see with Mr. Kim’s loud voice and the frustration that shows on his face, that he is upset when the person on the phone is trying to correct him and struggling to understand him. He lets out a big sigh after the end of the phone conversation, which communicates his frustration when others could not understand his heavily-accented English. Mr. Kim’s accent created barriers for him in his daily interactions as a shop owner. Language related barriers affect many immigrants who have lived in Canada for years. In Khan and Watson’s study (2005), Pakistani women believed that their accents and fluency in English could be a barrier to their ability to advance their socio-economic status in Canada. Cresse and Kambere (2003) studied Africa immigrants in Canada, and the relation of accent to stereotyping; the participants reported a measure of discrimination and stigmatization because they spoke English with an African accent even though they had high levels of education. Most commonly, many of the participants

reported that they found it distracting when they continually had their pronunciation corrected. This was similar to how Mr. Kim felt when he was being corrected over the phone.

The portrayal of accents on *Kim's Convenience* is positive, as first they are given to the main characters themselves. The entire show is dedicated to these characters and highlighting their life, thus the accents are perceived in a largely positive manner. By showing more than one kind of accent, this program can inform and educate viewers about the variety of accents in Canada, and allow them to attribute positive attitudes about the variety of accents they may have never been exposed to, and normalize these identities. Secondly, *Kim's Convenience* does not only portray the stereotypical humour found in those that speak accented English, but also the real barriers immigrants and people of colour who speak with an accent face in their everyday mundane activities and conversations. As Shilpa Davé (2016) argues, the portrayal of accents is essential to the narrative, because it becomes representative of the different kinds of accents and genealogies that exist in a multigenerational family as can be seen in the Kim family (p. 144). The portrayal of accents also becomes representative of communities and shared multicultural spaces, which carry different ethno-cultural histories (2016). Although language accents are often a stereotype in the media, Choi subverts negative associations by portraying language accents and allowing viewers to see a more nuanced image from the perspective of the one with the accent, thus creating alternative associations to language accents in the media.

5.1.3 STEREOTYPES: INTERCULTURAL/RACIAL CONVERSATIONS

This show provides representation to a wide array of groups to underline the racial and ethnic diversity of the community. Regent Park is home to many immigrants and racially diverse

groups, which can be one reason that there were many intercultural/racial interactions portrayed, specifically in Mr. Kim's convenience store. We meet Enrique, a Gay Latino customer who frequently visits the store and gets into small arguments and fights with Mr. Kim but becomes the one to urge Mr. Kim to visit the hospital when he hugs Mr. Kim and feels a large lump on his back. We meet Roger and Kevin, two gay young males. We meet Reshma and Naya, two Muslim twin sisters. We meet Frank, a long time friend of Mr. Kim's who fixes Mr. Kim's air-conditioning system. We get to know Janet's quiet friend Gerald who works in the store briefly, while Janet becomes employed at Handy Rentals. In Episode 12, Mr. Kim goes in for a surgery to remove the lump, and Janet stays back to watch the store. When Mr. Kim comes back to the store, he finds the front desk filled with flowers and cards from people in the community.

The show represents various groups in the community, but most importantly portrays the existing communal support and unity among different racial members in the community. In the media, there is often a tendency to highlight residential segregation and the formation of ethnic enclaves in a negative light (Myles & Hou, 2003). This is the stereotype that immigrant communities are closed, not mixing with other ethnic groups, and consequently, failing to adapt to Canadian society (Phinney, 2001: 503). Choi focuses on intra-group relationships and dialogue over intergroup relationships between Korean Canadians, and does not choose to set the show in Koreatown, an ethnic enclave in Toronto, Canada mainly known for its Korean businesses.

Two characters frequently shown are Mr. Chin and Mr. Mehta. Mr. Chin is Chinese, and runs a convenience store. Mr. Mehta is Indian, and runs his own local Indian restaurant. Both

characters are Mr. Kim's longtime friends. Although never mentioned specifically in the show, from conversations they had with Mr. Kim, it is easy to understand that Mr. Chin and Mr. Mehta are immigrants who had arrived to Canada years ago and established their own businesses. When they come to visit Mr. Kim, they always engage in long, thoughtful conversations about sexual identities, immigration, children, and their childhood. In the very first episode, Mr. Chin visits the store, and they discuss those who identify as belonging to the LGBTQ community. During this interaction, Mr. Kim and Mr. Chin have a conversation about transsexual and transgender identities and in the process, they both teach each other about what they know. Mr. Mehta, an Indian man who owns a local restaurant, visits Mr. Kim often on the show, and during his first appearance on the show, they discuss childrearing and their own childhood memories while playing cards. In this scene, we can see Mr. Mehta and Mr. Kim pondering their own childhood and how they were raised, and complaining about the way kids are being raised in Canada.

In the case of Mr. Kim and his friends, they all shared many commonalities, having come to Canada as immigrants, having had to navigate life on their own and experience the difficulties of raising children with frequent cultural clashes amongst them. They all had common goals of starting their own businesses in Canada, being self-employed and working hard to manage their businesses. These friendships portrayed on *Kim's Convenience* are essential to understanding the immigrant experience, specifically in this community of Regent Park, as these strong friendships help immigrants create their own support systems outside their own ethnic group, especially with other immigrants and ethnic groups that face common struggles, barriers and challenges in Canada. These friendships help with the integration and success of immigrants, and

promote a positive outlook and sense of belonging in Canada. The media can also have an influence on viewers' intergroup attitudes by providing individuals with an avenue for contact with members of another group (Lienemann & Stopp, 2013). More than 50 years of research on the extended contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) has found that increased contact with a member of an out-group (a group of which we are not a member) is associated with greater empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), intergroup trust (Paolini, Hewstone & Cairns, 2007), intergroup forgiveness (Tam et al., 2008), positive intergroup attitudes (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and a decrease in intergroup anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Thus, the portrayal and presentation of intergroup relations in *Kim's Convenience* can also influence viewers' perceptions of out groups they do not necessarily associate with, and can impact their dealings with out-groups.

Kim's Convenience portrays representations of interracial romantic relationships as can be seen between Janet and a black police officer, Alex, who is also Jung's childhood friend. Alex encounters Janet in the store when there is an attempted robbery. As Jung was in the store, the police officers assumed it was Jung that attempted robbery and they handcuffed him, at which point he meets Alex, one of the police officers who identifies Jung as a childhood friend and immediately removes the handcuffs. Alex meets Janet and recognizes her from childhood as well, and strikes up a conversation with her. They instantly connect with each other. Janet asks for Alex to grab coffee with her, and eventually they start dating. However, much of the relationship is only shown in Episodes 7 and 8, and does not appear later on in the show. It is possible that the producers did not choose to focus too much on this relationship.

Interracial couples are susceptible to the ambivalence if not the hostility of society and to negative relationship outcomes such as increased divorce rates as often expressed in the news media (Gaines & Leaver, 2002; Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Portrayal of positive interracial relationships on screen can influence negative attitudes and views on interracial relationships. In *Kim's Convenience*, Alex and Janet are seen as having natural chemistry and instantly bonding regardless of their racial or ethnic differences. The portrayal of an interracial relationship seems fitting in a show that focuses on intercultural friendships especially in Toronto's racially diverse neighbourhoods.

Another important intergroup relation that can be examined from watching *Kim's Convenience* is the argument over parenting between Mrs. Murray, Janet's school professor, and Mr. Kim. Mrs. Murray can be seen as a privileged character in the show, as she is white, educated, and well off. The media tends to frame Western parenting styles as effective and worthwhile, while constructing immigrant parenting as authoritative, violent, barbaric, and backwards (Chao, 1994). Asian parents or other immigrant groups are invariably categorized as more authoritarian (a high level of controlling and low level of loving their children); while European-centered, white, middle class parenting styles are described as more authoritative (a high level of loving and low level of controlling) and are accepted (Baumrind, 1971). In Episode 6, *Rude Kid*, Mrs. Murray visits the store with her son after her conversation with Janet regarding her poor marks on her project:

Mrs Murray (S1) : Hi, I am Janet's professor, Mrs. Murray

Mr. Kim(S2): Ya. Your kid is making a big mess [agitated look on his face].

S1: [Shrugs her shoulders] He's five.

S2: Ya! Ya! This is not a playground. No running in the store.

S1: We don't use the "N" word.

S2: I not use the “N” word.
 S1: Oh, the other “N” word. NO!
 Child (S3): Mom!
 S1: Yes, Oliver, you can move your body. But why don't you show us how you can hop like a bunny instead?
 S3: [hops and throws all the chip bags on the stand]
 S2: No. No. No. No. No. No. No! Stop doing like that.
 [Packets crumbling]
 S2: [Grabs Oliver by the shoulders, and flicks him on the forehead with his fingers]
 S1: [Gasps] Oh, my... Negative! Negative! You must apologize immediately.
 S2: He not respecting my store. He need to apologize to me!
 S1: Are you serious?
 S2: This is my serious face, and you pay for chip.
 S1: He's five!
 S2: Nip in bud. You have to be better parenting.
 S1: I hardly think that it's my behaviour that needs improvement.
 S2: So, you do not discipline your kid?
 S1: NO! I am sorry you had to hear that bunny. Come on.
 S1: You're angry
 S2: You're angry! (Choi et al, 2016, Epsiode 6)

This is later continued on in the same episode as Mrs. Murray visits the store again.

Mr. Kim (S1): Can I help you find anything? New chamomile ice tea? Very calming.
 Mrs. Murray (S2): I'd like you to apologize to Oliver.
 S2: I don't think so. It is important for my son to see that adults can also make mistakes.
 S1: Then you say sorry.
 [Olivers opens a chips bag]
 S1: You gonna stop him?
 S2: Are you going to apologize?
 S2: I am sorry Oliver, for invading your personal space.
 S1: I'm sorry Oliver, that you having mommy who is spoiling you!
 S2: What is that supposed to mean?
 [Janet walks in]
 S2: Your father is just giving me parenting advice. This coming from a man who thinks that corporal punishment is de rigueur.
 S1: What is doo-ree-ger? What she talking? (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 6)

I think this is an important dialogue as it displays two very different parenting styles and different cultural upbringing. Being in a position of privilege, it is very easy for Mrs. Murray to shut down Mr. Kim's feelings and parenting methods as wrongful and incorrect. Mrs. Murray

assumes that her parenting methods are the only effective method to raising children, dismissing Mr. Kim's requests for her to ensure her child doesn't run in the store. Of course, Mr. Kim really has no right to flick the child in the forehead, but he has raised his own children using discipline, specifically physical discipline. Mrs. Murray concludes based on Mr. Kim's disciplinary methods as a parent, that he is abusive towards Janet, which Janet herself explains is absurd and is far from the truth at the end of this same scene. Mrs. Murray dismisses Mr. Kim and any cultural influences that are important and significant to the ways Mr. Kim raises his own children. These are portrayed as barbaric and backwards. However, these are just different methods of parenting, not necessarily wrong.

Asian parents are often referred to as *tiger parents*, which is a stereotypical image of all Asian immigrants in Western media (Deater-Deckard, 2013). This is a term attributed to Asian parents who apply classic authoritarian (high level of control) parenting and psychological control in their child-rearing practices (Kim et al., 2013). However, according to Garcia-Coll et al (1996), the determinants of parenting in immigrant and racialized families are multifaceted, including influences of heritage culture, race/ethnicity, immigrant and minority status, social position, and ecological context. Garcia-Coll et al (1996) created the adaptive culture framework that integrates heritage culture and social position factors in shaping parenting. Cultural influences may interact with current demands on how immigrant families predict behaviour and discipline their children (1996). Towards the end, Janet resists Mrs. Murray's characterization of her father as abusive and responds by saying that her father is far from abusive, and has raised her quite well. In this scene, we are able to see the ways in which the stereotype of immigrant

parenting is portrayed. This stereotype is subverted on *Kim's Convenience* where Janet engages in resistance against claims made against Mr. and Mrs. Kim, as Janet does in this case.

Morey and Yaqin (2011) argue that immigrant writers perform a form of “hyper performativity” which allows racialized bodies to play around with the stereotype and challenge the expectations of the interlocutor, in this case, in the portrayal of Mr. and Mrs. Kim and their parenting styles (p.89). When Mrs. Murray accuses Mr. Kim of abuse toward Janet, Mr. and Mrs. Kim appear very upset. We can see a side of them that is not applicable to the stereotypical assumption of a tiger parent, someone who is strict, non-emotional, and unloving. Janet and Jung have also never been pressured by their parents on the show to change career choices and pursue higher education, but there is an assumption that all Asian parents pressure their children to pursue higher education and control their children’s decisions on schooling and work. In the show, we see an alternative narrative of Mr. and Mrs. Kim as parents who try to be involved in the lives of their children, but provide them with the independence and autonomy to make decisions about their own life on their own, and maintain healthy communication with their children. In this way, as Morey and Yaqin (2011) argue, Choi has challenged, confused and frustrated the simple operation of stereotyping by challenging binary stereotypes of good/bad, and creating a ‘third location’ in the presentation of the stereotype. Mr. and Mrs. Kim do not fit into a fixed category of Asian parenting or Western parenting, as authoritative or authoritarian, but rather a balanced mix of both warmth and discipline for their children.

In this episode, viewers are able to see a different perspective. Mr. Kim was not portrayed as an abusive monster but as someone with a different parenting style. It also makes viewers

think about Mrs. Murray, and even though she believed her parenting style was effective, it was not effective when it came to Oliver's behavior in the store. At the end, when she tells Oliver to "YES" put the chip bag away, and "YES" we have to go home, he screams and runs the opposite direction. Mrs. Murray finally screams and says, "if you come home with me I will give you iPad time!" This time the boy leaves the store, but we can see she had disowned her own parenting style by yelling at the boy and asking him to leave immediately; in fact, as a parent, she even had to bribe her child to leave the store. This perspective allows viewers to steer clear of negative representations of immigrant parents as cruel and abusive to their children. However, in the same way we can see Mrs. Murray's parenting style is well-meaning, but clearly ineffective. In examining these instances of intergenerational conflict, both Mr. Kim & Mrs. Murray have flawed parenting styles, although they both mean well.

5.1.4 STEREOTYPES: INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Intergenerational relationships refer to the interpersonal conflict that occurs between parents and their children (Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998), and in this case specifically I will examine the relations and conflicts that can happen between first-generation immigrant parents and second-generation Canadian children. In *Kim's Convenience*, there are numerous scenes of intergenerational conflict amongst Mr. and Mrs. Kim, and the children Janet and Jung. As discussed earlier, *Kim's Convenience* takes us beyond the stereotype by subverting the stereotype of *tiger parents* and challenging assumptions that Asian parents require submission and obedience from their children as part of the show to subvert these negative assumptions by creating alternative narratives to portray Mr. and Mrs. Kim as parents who have eventually learned to negotiate with their children and sustain healthy relationships.

Research has shown the cultural significance of respect to parental authority in Korean culture, and that parents hold strong expectations that their children will respect their authority at all times (Lee et al, 2016; Kim, 2006). The typical traditional Korean family system is patrilineal and patriarchal (Oak and Martin, 2000). The father has authority in the household, whereas the mother is expected to be the housewife, emotional provider, and healer (Kim & Kim, 1995). Children regardless of age are expected to be submissive and obedient to their parents (Kelly & Tseng, 1992). With parenting, Korean parents assume full responsibility for their children's behaviour and outcomes (Kim, 2006). Thus, they become extremely involved in family decision-making for their children's daily routines, choices of school, choices of profession, and choice of spouse (Lehrer, 1996). For Korean parents, a high level of control, parental authority, and extensive involvement in their children's daily lives is a sign of parental love and interest (Kim, 2006). In *Kim's Convenience*, Mr. and Mrs. Kim frequently displayed their parental authority, and in some instances, Mr. Kim tries his best to impose his authority despite it being constantly challenged by Janet and Jung.

Negotiation is a fundamental aspect of intergenerational relations amongst first-generation immigrant parents and their children (Yu, 2017). The concept of negotiation is often used in sociological research on intergenerational families, where it refers to the work of balancing ideals, practices and situational demands concerning young people's issues which takes place between second-generation Canadians and their parents (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). It is in this stage that intergenerational conflicts come to an end and instead, common ground is found between both parties (Tyskkä, 2005). Although there are popular images of

second-generation children as distancing themselves from family, research has shown that most young people from immigrant families value their familial relationships, regard them as positive resources, and thus engage in the process of negotiation between the parents and children (Irwin, 2009; Lahelma and Gordon, 2008). In sociological family studies, the concept of negotiation is used widely, and plays a central role in explaining the nature of family relationships because they are often viewed as negotiated and changing over time (Finch and Mason, 1993; Morgan 1996). However, the stereotype of the *tiger parent* in Asian Canadian families assumes no space for negotiation, but rather indicates the need to control and make decisions for their children. Although several aspects of Mr. Kim's dialogue make him seem like a tiger parent, he is not bound to the tiger parent stereotype in his relationship with Janet and Jung. According to Finch and Mason (1993, p.60-61), "negotiation may be explicit—expressing opinions, discussing and arguing—but also implicit, when opinions concerning preferred ways of acting are communicated to others in non-verbal ways".

In Episode One, Mr. Kim accuses Janet of stealing money from the store, and Mrs. Kim realizes that it was the Gay Discount that accounted for the missing money, not Janet. Once he realizes he is wrong, he understands that Janet is extremely upset, and Mrs. Kim urges Mr. Kim to say sorry. She realizes that Jung left because they were pushing him away and they do not want to make the same mistake with Janet. Mrs. Kim apologizes and she negotiates with Janet by telling her that who she "hooks around with is up to you". Mr. Kim has an extremely difficult time apologizing for his mistakes, but he does try to make amends with Janet by standing at the front of her room with Mrs. Kim. Janet knows very well that it will kill Mr. Kim to apologize, so instead she asks Mr. Kim to return the rental car and that would make it even. Regardless, Janet

and her parents have learned to negotiate common ground between both parties, to enable common understanding and a shared perspective on the conflict that took place.

In Episode 3, there is another conflict between Janet and Mr. Kim because he sells the photographs that she took for school. He gets defensive with Janet, and tells her that everything she has is because of her parents. Despite her attempts to make Mr. Kim understand, he cuts her off when she has something to say, so Janet gives up and storms off. However, he discusses it with Mr. Chin and does genuinely feel bad for selling these photos as she needed them for a school exhibit. Mr. Kim sees Janet after the exhibit, and explains to her wholeheartedly that her pictures are very good, and finds her a good camera stand as a gift to make up for selling the photos. He realizes that although she is pursuing an arts degree, which he may not have been in favour of, and studying photography which is often seen as a hobby rather than a career, she is a good photographer, and her talents will take her far.

Although most of the show portrayed conflicts among Janet and her parents in Episode 9, Jung reappears with his mother at the church bazaar and tries to build a good relationship with his parents again. However, at church Mrs. Kim finds Jung in a room with Jeannie, Mrs. Park's daughter. Jung has a flask of alcohol in his hands and both Mrs. Kim and Mrs. Park misunderstand the whole scene quite quickly. In anger, Mrs. Kim locks Jung inside the bathroom. Mrs. Kim feels as if sometimes Jung will never change from the past. However, Jung confronts his mother so he can have a chance to explain his side of the story when he explains the story.

Mrs. Kim (S1):Why you don't tell to me?

Jung (S2): Because you walked away and locked me in the chair room.

S1: Mrs. Park would never believe

S2: Mrs. Park has been waiting for me to make a mistake ever since I was in the 7th grade. Maybe, she not the only one.

S1: Sorry, Jung.

S2: I don't care what church people think, they are going to think what they are going to think. But I do care about what you think.

S1: I think you is a good boy.

[hugs] (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 9)

Here, Jung is able to renegotiate his relationship with his mother. For the longest time, he thought that his parents had never given him the benefit of the doubt, and always knew he would get in trouble or “make a mistake”. Mrs. Kim does acknowledge that she did. She realizes this, and says sorry to Jung. They are able to negotiate a new perspective of each other.

The last most important scene not yet been discussed in my analysis on intergenerational conflict also speaks to the process of negotiation; this scene presents Janet’s choice to live alone, away from her parents. She had lived with her parents since she was born. As we discussed earlier, Korean values include family ties, bonds, and relationships, thus being with family is always considered the norm for Korean Canadians. However, Janet’s decision to move out of the family home goes against these values, parental expectations and parental authority. Janet has such a hard time that she wants to do the church family singing contest before she tells Mrs. Kim about moving out because it is a difficult topic to discuss in the intergenerational context. In the end, Mrs. Kim ends up seeing the lease agreement before Janet is able to tell her. When Mrs. Kim tells Mr. Kim, he does not believe her, but Mrs. Kim does not want her to leave at all. Janet confronts her father right after the concert to tell him about her moving out. She immediately negotiates her plan with her father.

Janet (S1): I’ll just be a streetcar ride away. I’ll be here all the time. I’ll still be working at the store. You’ll barely know I’m gone.

Mr. Kim (S2): I will know.
S1: Appa?
S2: [Cries and hugs Janet]
S1: Lets go have some hot chocolate.
S2: Pay utility bill. Wash dish after you finish eating.
S1: Yeah I will.
S2: Yeah and uh, don't be late for work or I cut your pay and you have to move back home. (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 13)

Janet loves her family as much as they love her, and she does not want to leave them aside for good. She wants to continue to build a relationship while moving out. She negotiates how things will be when she moves out. This is one of the very few scenes in the season where Mr. Kim is calm and collected. He listens to Janet and gives her an opportunity to speak. This is the very last scene of the entire season, and it is quite fitting because it portrays how long they have gone, from fighting and ignoring each other to listening to each other carefully and negotiating intergenerational conflicts that arise due to parental expectations, parental authority, and cultural clashes between values.

As expressed earlier, a part of the tiger parent stereotype is to assume that it is Confucian culture and values that guide Asian parents in forcing their children to choose prestigious academic and career goals. This is under the assumption that parents will also expect their children to excel in school, receive many awards, and attend the most prestigious schools. However, we see a portrayal of Mr. Kim and Mrs. Kim as vastly different from the type of parents that would be prescribed under the tiger parent stereotype. In a scene from Episode 2, Mrs. Kim has conversations from the members of her church, when an older lady asks Mrs. Kim about her children:

Mrs. Kim (S1): Oh, Janet just get very high mark in photography class. Top of class!
 Mrs. Park (S2): At College
 Korean Church Friend (S3): So, not university?
 S1: no, OCAD is a university
 S2: Then why is it called Ontario College of Arts and Design
 Black Church Friend (S4): I've heard OCAD is amazing!
 S1: Yeah very amazing You get university degree, but also very practical.
 S2: Janet is so brave. It is so hard to make a living as a photographer. But then again, where will we be without our starving artists.
 S1: Who said Janet going to be starving? Maybe she is an artist who eat eat and eat.
 (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 2).

Although the two members at the Korean Church try to put down Janet's career goals and choice of schooling, Mrs. Kim is proud of her daughter's accomplishments in taking photos, and attending OCAD. Mrs. Kim believes her daughter's choice to attend art school is very practical, and is a good choice. She is proud of her daughter, regardless of the dominant discourses and perception that all Asian parents cultivate and instill values for children to attend prestigious schools, and choose prestigious careers that typically have higher salaries. Choi has shown how the tiger parent authoritarian stereotype does not fully capture the 'essence of [Korean] immigrant parenting' because news media and popular culture fail to consider their lived culture context, experiences, and social culture (Deater-Deckard, 2013, p. 32). He inserts the tiger parent stereotype within scenes of intergenerational conflict between the parents and the children; however, he does so with the intention of subverting negative assumptions about Korean parenting styles as cruel and abusive, and resists fixed notions of parenting practices. He portrays parenting styles as fluid, and as always changing based on lived experiences.

Choi defies traditional notions of immigrant parenting styles as fixed for everyone regardless of race or ethnicity, and produces new meanings that are hybrid and fluid (Bates,

2016). He also inserts an “oppositional gaze” against normalized stereotypes about Korean immigrant parents by depicting the perspectives of the parents themselves, and the complexities associated with their parenting style (bell hooks, 1994). This allows for resistance against negative stereotypical assumptions about Korean immigrant parents as abusive or dismissive, and creates opportunities for educating viewers. Choi does this by highlighting the ways in which the family members negotiate problems and issues amongst themselves, especially when it comes to parenting practices and decision-making. The practice of negotiation does not fit in with the *tiger parent* stereotype portrayed in popular culture and media.

5.1.5 STEREOTYPES: THE SETTING – REGENT PARK

Regent Park is Canada’s oldest and largest public housing project, built in the late 1940s years ago in the east side of downtown Toronto from Gerrard Street East to the north, River Street to the east, Shuter Street to the South, and Parliament Street to the west (Sahak, 2008). Regent Park was developed post World War II to provide better housing to the nation’s poor. Slum clearance plans were made, and run-down housing was removed (Laughlin, 2008). It was replaced with high-volume, low-income housing projects. The space was solely public housing until recent efforts starting in 2005 were undertaken to revitalize and redevelop the space due to widespread stigmatization of the community as unsafe and filled with crime. The revitalization initiative has been criticized for the failure to create new rent-geared to income housing units, and instead moving gentrification of the space (Laughlin, 2008). More recently, Regent Park has been undergoing a \$1 billion process of transformation from an exclusively low-income public housing community to a mixed income neighbourhood (Toronto Community Housing, 2012).

The producers' choice of visual cues in breaks between the scenes allows viewers to visualize the diversity and sense of community found in the space. There are frequent shots of Regent Park, the Toronto cityscape, Ontario College of Arts and Design (OCAD), Koreatown, and racialized people. CBC location managers and producers of *Kim's Convenience* chose a real store in Toronto, *Mimi's Variety* near Queen St. East near Sherbourne Street for exterior shots, and the store was renamed *Kim's Convenience* (CBC, 2016). Choi searched dozens of stores in Toronto to find the right fit. According to Owens & Millerson (2011), in their book *Television Production*, the choice, setting, and backgrounds are crucial to the success of the show, and viewers' understanding of the show. The background is always carefully designed and controlled to have a considerable influence on how we feel about what we are seeing and hearing (2011). In fact, Rooney and Belli (2016) argue that "location is a character in the same way an actor is a character" (p.215). Location backgrounds bring context to the production, and make it look real and genuine in a way that is hard to imitate in a studio (2016). As Owens & Millerson (2011) explain, in order to ensure a good use of location background, producers must ensure there are sufficient visual cues for people to view. In *Kim's Convenience*, the producers effectively utilized their location background by providing sufficient visual cues of Regent Park as explained earlier.

The choice of location is crucial to Choi's subversion of stereotypes in *Kim's Convenience*, since Regent Park is negatively portrayed in the news media. Sean Purdy (2005) analyzes Regent Park as constructed as an "outcast space" in popular culture and news media (p.530) The space is often constructed as "crime-filled", a "working-class slum", and as "deviant spaces" (Purdy, 2005, p.532). The mainstream media tends to cover poor working-class,

immigrant and/or black neighborhoods in a way that runs counter to the accepted social, economic and moral order (Entman, 1992). Regent Park is characterized in local and national media as a deviant space and site of poverty, behavioural problems and crime (Purdy, 2003a). Richardson (2014) analyzes media on the Jane-Finch area, another inner city neighbourhood in Toronto, and argues that the majority of Canadian newspaper readers would have trouble picturing anything but an “immigrant ghetto synonymous with poverty, violence and crime” (p.79). This stereotype constructed around Regent Park is harmful, because as Venkatesh (2000) argues, such portrayals reinforce stigmatization of the space, and silence the voices and experiences of those living amongst these spaces. People outside the space, or privileged bodies, often make negative depictions of the space. It also proves harmful, as viewers and readers of mainstream media construct their own understandings of the space without really knowing the space, and those who live there. Choi utilizes the opportunity given to him on CBC to subvert these negative assumptions of Regent Park, and create alternative narratives of the space as represented by those living there. Choi resists fixed constructions of the space, and depicts Regent Park as a safe, inclusive, diverse community in Toronto.

There was a gradual increase of immigrants in Regent Park from 1961 to 2001 (Bouchard, 2008). From 1981 to 2001, of the total population in Regent Park, 88% had migrated to Canada. As Sahak (2008) finds in his research on Regent Park, it is home not to just one dominant ethnic group, but to a dynamic mix of racial backgrounds. Researchers who have explored the experiences of community members and children in Regent Park have often provided alternative representations of this space (Laughlin & Johnson, 2011; James, 2010; Jackson et al, 2003). The youth participants in Laughlin and Johnson’s (2011) research refer to

Regent Park as “easily accessible, providing a sense of belonging, and a place to hang out or communicate and socialize with friends” (p.445). Henri Lefebvre’s theory of spatial representation can be used to conceptualize the ways in which space is negotiated amongst those living in those spaces (1991). In his book, *The Production of Space*, he makes it clear that social space does not just exist on its own, but is created through everyday social interactions, and “works as a network between many spaces, and the subjects who inhabit such spaces.” (293) The space holds historical significance, and it would be naïve to ignore all the complexities that go into the history of producing space (1991, p.234). Lefebvre emphasizes the need to include an analysis of “everyday movements” (internal factors) and history (external factors) as influencing the space (p.235). The lived experiences of those in Regent Park are quite distinct and opposite from the negative depictions in the media. Choosing Regent Park as the setting for Kim’s *Convenience* shines a light on the positive features of Regent Park, portraying the “lived spaces of representation”, which can be seen as a “counter space”, or a space of resistance to the dominant rhetoric, or negative representations of Regent Park (Lefebvre, 1991, p.235).

Johnson & Schippling (2009) found in their research on youth experiences with Regent Park revitalization that many youth viewed Regent Park in a positive light because there was a strong sense of community among residents. Many recalled memories of the close-knit community where neighbors knew each other (2009). Even those who had left the community still came back to revisit their family and friends. All participants emphasized this sense of community experienced over the common depictions of Regent Park as a “ghetto” or as crime-filled (2009). It is important to note that the choice to have *Kim’s Convenience* situated in Regent Park, Toronto, could have been influenced by Choi’s desire to specifically highlight the

sense of community found in Regent Park, rather than the usual depictions or images of Regent Park as a slum, ghetto, or vandalized crime-filled space in mainstream media. Throughout the show, Regent Park is displayed in a positive light.

Shannon, Jung's manager at Handy Rentals, is a white woman portrayed on the show. Initially, when she hires Jung, she holds many assumptions about him. For example, when Janet visits Jung at work, Shannon explains to Jung, Kimchee and Janet that non-employees (in reference to Janet) are not allowed in the garage. She states, "I know you grew up inner city and so you're rebellious by nature, but rules are rules" (Choi et al, 2016, Episode 1). She then goes on to remark, "understood in the hood?" as a joke, and Jung, Kimchee and Janet look confused. These assumptions could have been made due to Jung's criminal past. However, it could also very well be that she held stereotypes about the neighbourhood in which Handy Rentals was located in Regent Park. Regent Park is historically known to be a social housing unit that was portrayed negatively in media as a "ghetto" (Laughlin, 2008). Since Jung and Janet grew up in Regent Park, Shannon made these remarks seeing herself as an *outsider* to this neighborhood; while assuming that Jung and his friend were "rebellious" which is a common stereotype held by those who live outside Regent Park (Laughlin, 2008). In this scene, Jung, Kimchee, and Janet are shown as confused and Shannon is put in a very awkward, uncomfortable position when her comments are met with silence. This silence and confusion make it seem as if they do not know what Shannon was referring to, and make it clear that Jung, Janet, and Kimchee do not see Regent Park as a ghetto, or a crime-filled space.

Using humour, this scene engages in resistance against “hegemonic racism and dominant oppressive structures that silence racialized bodies” (Rossing, 2016: p.61). The negative stereotype constructed around Regent Park in the media silences voices in the community and sustains hegemonic racism about the people that live in the space (2016). Using “emancipatory racial humour” as conceptualized by Rossing (2016, p.615), Choi works to confront hegemonic racism upfront, expose dominant discourses, and inject counter narratives to subvert normalized racial meanings and privileges. As Rossing (2016) argues, inserting humour in a scene it can help viewers identify, criticize, and ultimately transform their understanding of race relations.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Kim’s Convenience (CBC, 2017) ran successfully on CBC in October 2016 and will run a second season on CBC starting September 2017. *Kim’s Convenience* features an all-Korean cast and is a television comedy sitcom that focuses on the Korean Canadian Kim family that operate a convenient store in the local neighbourhood of Regent Park in Toronto, Ontario. Choi (2011) bases the show on the original play written and directed by him. This show focuses on a range of different issues and topics that includes the LGBTQ community and homophobia, intergenerational conflicts, Korean culture, interracial relationships, parenting, the role of religion and the Korean Church, and interracial relationships.

This sitcom is one of the very few shows that are written by a minority writer focusing on the portrayal of the immigrant experience in Canada on CBC, a national television-broadcasting network. This is quite surprising considering that Canada is a country that prides itself on

multiculturalism and celebrates diversity, even though it lacks adequate representation of racialized and/or immigrant groups (Murray, 2009). Although there is a presence of racialized bodies as actors playing roles in Canadian television, it is rare to find a lead role played by a person of colour, or even more so rare to find an all-racialized cast (2009). The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is an independent public authority that is in charge of regulating and supervising Canadian broadcasting and telecommunications (2009). The Commission's approach, as well as that of many broadcasters, to accommodate ethnic minorities and promote multiculturalism on television, runs the danger of "creating *alternative* broadcasting services for alternative Canadians" (Thomas, 1992, p.17). As members of Canadian society, all ethnic and racial groups should be able to see their lives reflected on mainstream television programming (Thomas, 1992). This paper advocates for the increased presence and representation of racialized and immigrant groups through shows similar to *Kim's Convenience* on mainstream television networks.

This MRP analyzed the ways in which stereotypes are presented in *Kim's Convenience* to subvert naturalized dominant negative discourses and tropes of racialized bodies, while simultaneously being used as a tool to produce counternarratives. This paper explores the portrayal of the immigrant experience and Korean Canadians in *Kim's Convenience* using Critical Discourse Analysis as the theoretical lens to unravel stereotypes portrayed on this show, particularly those related to accents, intercultural/interracial conversations, intergenerational conflict and spaces negatively associated with immigrants, in particular, Regent Park. I used Bhabha's theory of stereotypes, Puxan-Oliva's theory of stereotypes in narrative form, Stuart Hall's theory of representation and identity, and Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity as

theoretical frameworks to deconstruct the themes I had identified and ultimately to examine the various stereotypes portrayed on *Kim's Convenience*. My analysis demonstrates how Choi, through *Kim's Convenience*, uses stereotypes as a tool in a comedy-based television series to resist against “hegemonic racism and dominant oppressive structures that silence racialized bodies”, (Rossing, 2016, p.62) and engage in an “oppositional gaze” by using space on CBC to inject counter narratives that subvert normalized racial meanings and privileges (bell hooks, 1994).

Future direction for this paper could include input from viewers who have watched *Kim's Convenience* in the form of surveys, questionnaires or even interviews. By doing this, I would gain a more complete understanding of motivations behind choosing to watch the show, the extent to which extent viewers can identify with the cast or issues portrayed, and the extent to which *Kim's Convenience* has influenced their attitudes and existing knowledge about immigrants, particularly Korean Canadians. This would strengthen my discourse analysis of the presentation of stereotypes in *Kim's Convenience*. It is also essential to get input from Choi himself as the author to understand his perspectives and experiences that ultimately influence what is portrayed on the show. Nonetheless, *Kim's Convenience* is a televised series that is clearly rich in content, allowing for an in-depth critical analysis on the presentation of stereotypes.

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