Active Critical Engagement (ACE): A Pedagogical Tool for the Application of Critical Discourse Analysis in the Interpretation of Film and Other Multimodal Discursive Practices

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Active Critical Engagement (ACE): A Pedagogical Tool for the Application of Critical Discourse Analysis in the Interpretation of Film and Other Multimodal Discursive Practices

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a pedagogical framework for applying a critical discourse methodology in the analysis of film as a multimodal, narrative construct of social discourse. This orientation is grounded in a cultural studies perspective that recognizes the significance of popular culture and allows me to situate film as a discursive practice, pedagogical resource, and (re)producer of social knowledges. Once situated, the need arises for a systematic method of critical analysis that controls for the rich, discursive landscape of multimodal artifacts without succumbing to over-reduction. My original contribution - the Active Critical Engagement (ACE) framework – addresses a gap in methodological applications for scholars interested in using critical discourse analysis and visual artifacts.

The ACE framework builds on multimodal critical discourse analysis to structure the interrogation of three films: My Name is Khan, Bhaji on the Beach, and The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel – films chosen because they allow for transnational considerations of Othering, orientalism, and situated experience. The key modal elements of text, imagery, and narrative are used to control for the semiotic richness offered in films. These elements are then filtered through analytic foci to identify and interrogate primary and secondary narratives for problematic iterations of power and marginalization. Finally, a post analysis functions as a reflective practice to allow for deeper interrogation of the interpreter’s experience.

The analysis generated by application of the ACE framework demonstrates the possibilities for facilitating a critical orientation - an orientation that questions dogmatic constructions of social knowledge that (re)produce discriminatory social practices. As a pedagogical tool, ACE finds its theoretical support in both critical and semiotic pedagogical methodologies. This reflects the
centering of social justice issues and the impact of social discourses on the (re)production of social knowledges. This type of transformative teaching does diverge from most methods of standardized education and several practical concerns are considered. It is hoped that this research provides additional support for teachers incorporating critical analysis in their courses.
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Chapter 1: Toward a Framework for Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Throughout film history in America, films have often been recognized as being informed by specific social discourses and are often acknowledged as a medium through which society can debate, critique, or champion issues or events. The film, *Philadelphia* (1993), brought the discussion of HIV/AIDS into the public sphere in the guise of a well-liked everyman, actor Tom Hanks, challenging middle-American values and stereotypes. Director Spike Lee sat at the forefront of mainstream films that tackled issues of violence, marginality, and racism from within the Black community (*Do the Right Thing* 1989, *Crooklyn* 1994). Through film, women have contested male domination of genre (2008’s *The Hurt Locker*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow) and role (Sigourney Weaver as Ripley in *Alien* 1979, Angelina Jolie as Evelyn in *Salt* 2010). As we experience these films, understandings we have about an Other are engaged, reinforced or contested by both producers and receivers of the social text. Othering – the process by which we Other - is a socially enacted phenomenon, enacted by and on individuals and groups, defined through social discourse and often characterized as a problematic practice\(^1\). Othering is a product of powerful hegemonic discourses that influence which identities a society normalizes or ostracizes, legitimates or disciplines. In the films mentioned above, hegemonic discourses on sexual orientation, marriage, masculinity, femininity, and gender are constructed in a public space where they can be (re)produced and/or contested.

\(^1\) I will return to this subject in the section titled, Conceptualizing the Other (p. 10)
In this research, I follow in bell hooks’ (1996) footsteps, reluctant to dismiss the integrative presence films have in our social lives and critically cautious of those films that are presented as models of resistance and empowerment. The lessons we encounter in films can be deliberate or subtle. Often, after analysis we find that they can be both simultaneously. As an educator, what I seek is an analytical framework that will help instructors guide undergraduate college students through the multilayered construction of social discourses embodied in films – the intertextual elements the narrative weaves together; the deliberate choice of music, actors, dialogue, and location; the social context, history, and perspectives from (and into) which the film emerges. This framework should be grounded in theoretical considerations of power, discrimination, and social justice. This framework should also be deliberate and provide students with reliable scaffolding that allows them to interrogate the sometimes unsettling relationship between personal biography and social discourses (to borrow from C. Wright Mills, 1959) and to challenge the (re)production of those social knowledges that work to obfuscate the problematic iterations of power.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to develop a pedagogical method for applying a critical discourse methodology in the analysis of film as a multimodal, narrative construct of social

\(^2\) I use the terms social knowledge and knowledge(s) to refer to bodies of socially constructed reference (re)produced by societies in an historical context. These social knowledges are not the truth claims of philosophy but instead emblematic of a “system of principles and rules governing the production of all sociological propositions scientifically grounded” (Bourdieu & Zanotti-Karp, 1968).
discourse. For this purpose, I recognize film as a cultural product, pedagogical tool, and discursive practice useful in discussions of power, discrimination, and social justice. In the immediate sections that follow, I explain why a critical investigative model for analyzing film is needed for educators exploring popular culture and social discourse, and introduce the method I am utilizing to address this issue. Then, I will expand on several key concepts that extend from my methodological perspective and will be used to frame the analysis of three films.

In *Orders of Discourse* (1971), Foucault asks “What is so perilous, then, in the fact people speak, and that their speech proliferates?” (p. 8). This is the question that ultimately drives my analysis. When a discourse is packaged as a moral statement, critical analysis is too often foregone in deference to an “it’s the message that counts” attitude. As an educator engaged in critical pedagogy, I argue that this is when we need to be most vigilant. Failing to do so, we risk implicitly reproducing the same detrimental discourses that a so-called progressive film is assumed to challenge – just on other bodies. The point of my analysis, therefore, is to impress the need for a vigilant, multilayered, critical reflection of social phenomena like films. bell hooks (1996) writes that:

> It was the use of movies as a pedagogical tool that led me to begin writing about films as a cultural critic and feminist theorist. Centrally concerned with the way movies created popular public discourses of race, sex, and class, I wanted to talk about what these discourse were saying and to whom. Particularly, I wanted to interrogate specific films that were marketed and critically acclaimed as progressive texts of race, sex, and class to
see the messages embedded in these works really were encouraging and promoting a counterhegemonic narrative… (p.3)

The pedagogical value of films, therefore, is a factor of the way modern societies interact with and interpret these discursive products. We view films not just to be entertained but to experience something of the Other – be that place, time, culture, embodiment, or action. Film holds a special place in discursive production as it combines written text, verbal and visual speech, images, aural components, innuendo, allusion, myth-making, subliminal messages, reading, listening, imagination, deliberate falsification, exaggeration, physical interaction, acts of trust, investments of time and money, emotional commitment, politics, ideologies, culture, power plays, ego manipulation, and the promise of threat…all in a rather neat package with assorted resources (both biological and technical) available to help the viewer (de)contextualize the experience.

Is there any wonder then that hooks (1996) calls film a pedagogical tool and stresses the need for cultural studies scholars to engage the discourses produced through film? Equally important is the need for American educators to be aware of their own relationship to powerful discourses about the Other. We are not immune to the socially constructed and embedded knowledges that inform social discourses. Films offer us an opportunity to continually challenge ourselves and our students about those grand narratives that we take for granted, to recognize those silenced marginalized spaces we inhabit, to speak out about the disjuncture between reality and so-called truth, and to dare to ask new questions.
I have chosen *discourse* as my framework because it best encapsulates my inclination to wonder about “the unwritten rules that guide social practices, produce and regulate the production of statements, and shape what can be perceived and understood” (Johns & Johns, 2000). My own experience as a social actor and critical scholar has made me aware of the hidden complexities that lurk just behind and to the side of what we say and what we do. This awareness occurs at the disjuncture of reality and knowledge; more often than not, assaulting my consciousness with the “conflicts, triumphs, injuries, dominations and enslavements that lie behind” much of the phenomenon I take for granted (Foucault, 1971, p. 8). Discourse takes on the role of silent producer in the social drama - appropriating the power to create knowledge, limiting what gets to count as knowledge, and excluding that which has been denied the power to speak knowledge. Foucault (1971) writes:

I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (p.8)

*Discursive practices* are the articulation of knowledge and are in turn defined by that knowledge. Films are always products of their sociocultural environments – no studio, director, actor, or screenwriter produces in a vacuum. Films exist as an intertextual practice where not only narrative but also aesthetic references, audience participation, technological skills, and
distribution activities are influenced by and representative of social discourses we often take for
granted (Turner, 1999). Social discourses, however, are not value-free formations. Few other
social products come as richly textualized and culturally embedded as film. There is always a
take-away when we watch a film, something we learn. In addition, the unique formation of
viewer as spectator/participant/interpreter opens up untapped spaces for creating new dialogues.
Films enter into everyday speech and thought, often acting as cultural reference points, and
producing artifacts that extend well beyond the actual film-going moment and have relevance
even for those who may have never actually viewed the original film. As such, films easily
become part of our social experiences and our public discourses about truth and knowledge.
Questioning those products and practices that intersect with the construction of social
knowledges becomes the role of critical scholars.

Specifically, I situate myself as a cultural studies scholar. Cultural studies is a theoretical
perspective that recognizes, in part, the importance of popular culture in understanding the
relationships between social discourses (ideologies), institutional structures, and the lived reality
of individuals as social beings (Hall 1980). Often mass produced and mass consumed, artifacts of
popular culture reflect the everyday lives of a society and tell us a lot about how we interpret our
worlds and interact with each other. As a result of this orientation toward lived realities, cultural
studies scholars have questioned the arbitrary divide and privileged construction of high and low
cultural artifacts as representative of true, lived culture. The artificial division of so-called high
culture over low-culture (popular) works as a reflection of power dynamics within the social
fabric - privileging those artifacts and productions that (re)produce social inequalities and
marginalize others (Barker, 2008; Hall, 1980; hooks, 1996).
Using film to demonstrate the workings of social discourses and ideologies in a popular medium requires that a link be made between the film as product and its context (Aufderheide, 1991; Chacko, 2010). Films may reflect/deflect a particular social discourse but they rarely create self-contained discourses. A cultural studies scholar may introduce a film like *Alien* (1979) to discuss issues on gender and patriarchy but the path to a “conclusion” is never predetermined or without contestation (Rushing 1989). Fundamentally, my perspective as a cultural studies scholar recognizes how issues like intersectionality, personal narrative, multiculturalism (among others) complicate knowledge claims. It is from this frame of reference that I proceed with this research to stress continued diligence and provide a methodological tool for scholars who engage with film.

**Why Critical Discourse Analysis**

Having situated film as a discursive practice, I turn to *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) as my method of analysis. CDA shares a theoretical perspective with cultural studies as it focuses on issues of power, discrimination, and social justice in the production and distribution of discursive practices. The specificity of CDA is bound in this perspective. In the opening lines of his article, “18 Critical Discourse Analysis,” van Dijk (2003) writes that “Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social political context” (p. 352). As such, a focus on issues of dominance and resistance are central to the conceptualization of CDA. Due to this theoretical orientation, CDA has been appropriated by a broad range of disciplines that differ in their methodology and orientation. For example, CDA is used to analyze rhetorical devices in campaign speeches (political science),
social positioning in therapist/client relationships (psychology), and discrimination in the grammar of school discipline (education). This appropriation, however, is not a weakness - *interdisciplinarity* simply reflects the connection between text and social practices. What CDA brings to my analysis is a concentration on the production and intertextuality of textual artifacts that can act as a bulwark against easy assumptions based on prior knowledge or experience.

The dynamic relationship between individuals and social institutions expands the boundaries of textual analysis to facilitate a variety of perspectives: society and power (Fairclough, 2001), cognition (van Dijk, 2010), historical-intertextuality (Wodak, 2001), and multimodal communications (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The analysis is purely textual. CDA shares the same epistemological roots as linguistic analysis – elements from social theory provide the lens through which we see the change in perspective and expansion of scope. However, the work of many of the pioneers who established scholarship around CDA is very specifically grounded in the linguistic structuring of written and oral communication. This orientation seeks understanding of the structures that are used in the production of text and speech, the rules that guide what is said and how, and how these systems are applied in different contexts (i.e. political arenas, popular media, family situations).

Therefore, although methodologically compatible, CDA alone does not offer analytical frameworks necessarily adaptable to a moving medium such as film. *Multimodal discourse analysis* provides for a more systematic analysis of the way language and images combine to create meanings and (re)produce ideologies by applying analytical tools used in CDA (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, 2001; Machin, 2007). The approach focuses on the prevalence of multimodal formats in contemporary social communications and allows for the incorporation of
the totality of semiotic resources brought to bear in a film – language, sound, and images – in the production of social discourses. In developing a visual grammar that would be applicable across different modes of visual communication, Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) rely on two key principles: provenance and experiential meaning potential. Provenance recognizes the idea that “we constantly ‘import’ signs from other contexts (another era, social group, culture) into the context in which we are now making a new sign” in order to create new associations between ideas (p. 10). Experiential meaning potential refers to what we do with a text – how we extend its construction, create knowledge from it, and communicate a shared understanding. For example, director Jonathan Demme (Philadelphia, 1993), set his dialogue about civil rights and HIV/AIDS in Philadelphia, a city that resonates as the birthplace of American freedom from foreign tyranny. The movie’s theme song, “The Streets of Philadelphia”, won the Academy Award in 1993 for Best Original Song and became an international hit for, Bruce Springsteen – an entertainer often associated with American working class values (Cullen, 1997). In this example, the film’s message (discourse) is reinforced by importing signs from social history to create an association between individual freedom, national freedom, and an ideal of mainstream American values. These associations then become key factors in how the film’s discourse enters into social spaces (i.e. which theaters feature the film), influences social discussions (does the association with issues of freedom, change the interpretation?), and constructs social identity (what does it say about me if I like the film and song?).

Yet, while film-as-discourse is often mentioned in research using multimodal discourse analysis, very little research is actually done using film. With my focus on method, I was drawn
to research conducted in critical film studies and social semiotics. However, scholarship done in these fields of study proved to be instructive yet problematic for the pedagogical applications I envisage within cultural studies. Scholars in critical film studies share an interest in the connections between film and social discourse yet the research does not reflect a systematic method compatible with multimodal discourse analysis. Research done in social semiotics provided some analytical structures similar to those used in multimodal discourse analysis; however, I found these structures to be too reductive and isolating when applied to larger multimodal facets of discourse (Halliday 1978; Metz 1974; Tseng 2013; Tseng & Bateman 2012).

In the closing pages of their book, *Multimodal Discourse*, Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) write that in visual modes like film, television, and computer games “(t)he potentials of narrative are remade in ways which are not fully knowable at this stage” – a statement that points toward the dearth of film studies in CDA (p. 133). Therefore, the need for this work is determined by my inability to find a methodology already available for my use that combines: a) a critical approach to discourse as constructed by/of relations of power; b) a systematic framework for multimodal discursive analysis that centers film as a discursive practice; and c) a method that lends itself to general pedagogical practice. In the end, I found myself taking up the task of trying to develop a methodology or framework that addresses these needs. Thus, in recognition of the importance these visual phenomena have in our contemporary milieu, this research is an attempt to address a

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3 Social semiotics draws most heavily from applications of Hallidayan models of functional semiotics to analyze multimodal communicative artifacts – specifically how what semiotic options are available, how semiotic choices are made, and how discourse units are constructed within system networks. See Bateman (2013), Halliday, M., Matthiessen, C. M., & Matthiessen, C. (2004), Metz (1974).
significant gap in methodological application for scholars interested in using critical discourse analysis and visual artifacts.

In the sections that follow, I define the theoretical lenses I use to conceptualize the Other, filter that conceptualization through analytic foci, and explain how a transnational perspective applies to this research. Finally, I introduce the three films I will use in an application of this new method and provide a brief description of the remaining Chapters.

**Conceptualizing the Other**

As mentioned in the introduction, I conceptualize Othering initially as a social phenomenon, enacted by and on individuals and groups, yet squarely defined within larger paradigms of social discourse (Barker, 2008; Gramsci, 1995; Hall, 1980; Kearney, 2003; Ogbu, 2007; Sawicki, 1986;). Specifically, Othering is characterized as primarily a discriminatory and problematic practice (Alexander, 2010; Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Halstead, 2012; Hamdi, 2013; Inden, 1990; Romany, 1996; Said, 1979). When we Other, we employ multiple social references and knowledges in order to make hierarchical judgments about an Other individual or group.

This conceptualization recognizes that Othering is a product of peoples’ interpretations and behaviors whose origins exist outside of essentializing factors like biology or psychology (Smith-Rosenberg, 2010). Much of the discourse associated with the concept of Othering is reflective of disconcerting and problematic practices. It is emblematic of ironies in the American social consciousness that such large and enduring ostracizing phenomena like racism and sexism are officially relegated to the realm of the individual. Functionally, this ‘understanding’, this
social knowledge, allows us to dismiss any social awareness or responsibility for reproducing these practices. Othering, when we acknowledge it, becomes the pathology of the individual removed from social space. Once safely removed, we don’t have to talk about the issue (i.e. race) anymore. Using this individualistic line of rationalization, I might argue that perhaps there are racist people, but they are mostly a product of their own individual pathologies. Don’t blame society. This rationalization, however, is illogical. No one exists within a society without being affected by it, influenced by it, shaped by it.

_Django Unchained_ is a 2012 film by Quentin Tarantino, a director noted for pushing against and skewering social conventions. In _Django Unchained_, the characters of Calvin Candie and Stephen are racist, classist, and misogynistic. To separate these individual pathologies from the influence of a social milieu based on institutionalized slavery in the context of the ante-bellum South is both counterintuitive and counterproductive. Both men are complicit in and reproductive of social practices. What is most informative about this pairing within the context of this research is how the character of Stephen, a slave, reflects his master’s persona and detours from recognizably acceptable patterns of marginalized Otherness. Stephen uses the same structural racism that Others him to terrorize and dominate the other slaves on the plantation.

Both characters function as mirror images of each other - productive of social discourses that have constructed the domination of an Other as the embodiment of power. We expect Stephen to understand this and become benevolent. However, contrary to popular belief, extricating oneself from a milieu in which one is intricately embedded requires explicit acts of
critical awareness and resistance. Not everyone escapes the matrix⁴. Most people are not even aware that it exists.

Having set parameters that distinguish between the individual and the social, I find it theoretically judicious to conceptualize Otherness as a social fact. Social Facts are “manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control” (Durkheim, 1982: 52). Othering is inclusive of identifiable actions, patterns of thinking, and attitudes that are manipulated by non-static structures of legitimization and censure. The practice of Othering is therefore untethered from individual creation - a social fact generated instead by the network of interactions and relations between individuals en masse. Therefore, my conceptualization of Othering is composed of two facets:

- Othering is articulated as both a discriminatory and problematic function in social discourse and practice.
- Othering is a social fact created by a web of relationships and interconnectivity which exists outside of individual expression.

**Analytic Focus**

In order to understand the complex construction of the Other in film, I will focus on two complimentary contexts: East looking West and West looking East. Specifically, this orientation will facilitate a critical analysis of three contemporary films that share a South Asian connection

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⁴ This is a reference to the 1999 film, *The Matrix*, by the Wachowski Brothers. The film’s narrative is built around the idea that consciousness exists within an overarching structure where we are both pawn and player.
in an effort to examine how constructions of religion, race, gender, class, and place/space - the analytic foci - are moderated in transnational contexts. In choosing these themes, I recognize certain limitations and make no claim that these are the only themes depicted. They do serve, however, to highlight important issues of problematic Othering and, when possible, other observations may be discussed as they intersect with these themes in the Chapters that follow.

The three films selected for analysis are: My Name is Khan, directed by Karan Johar (2010); Gurinder Chadha’s (1993) film, Bhaji on the Beach; John Madden’s (2011) The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. The first two selections represent successful films directed by Indian directors where the narrative takes place in western settings (the U.S.A. and England, respectively). The final selection represent a film directed by a Western director (British) where the narratives are centered in eastern space. The selection of these particular films also situates the analysis in a nexus that reflects the influence of globalization on the (re)production of social discourses. In particular, I aim for a transnational perspective in my investigation.

In his book, Strangers, Gods and Monsters, Kearney (2003), a philosopher, crafts a very detailed dialogue about how we engage with notions of Othering and Otherness. He writes that “We find many popular media narratives promoting paranoia by anathemizing what is unfamiliar as ‘evil’. These narratives reinforce, once again, the idea that the other is an adversary, the stranger a scapegoat, the dissenter a devil” (p. 65). In other words, social discourses can function to craft the Other as evil or dangerous. This idea of narratives reinforcing social practices speaks to the socially constructed nature of knowledge discourses and the construction of Otherness. Kearney traces the construction of the problematic us/them dialectic in a line “running from
Plato and Aristotle to Hegel and the modern philosophy of consciousness” (p. 16). And, he asserts, this Other is not a benign alter ego – it manifests as absolute Other.

This turn in meaning is also reflective of the dialogic nature of language (Todorov 1984). The lived experience of Muslim and Black is reflective of the dialogic construction of what the terms mean in a particular space and place within an ongoing dialogue among different sets of speakers. Muslim as Other-as-threat is a very functional discourse in the U.S (and India) only heightened by the events of September 11, 2001. In February 2014, the U.S. also marked the second anniversary of the Trayvon Martin shooting in Miami Gardens, Florida – an event which rekindled public debate about the threat to society embodied by Black bodies. With the film, My Name is Khan (2010), I look at how discursive constructions of religion and race are replicated in the way characters are constructed and interactions depicted in relation to religion and racism.

My Name is Khan (MNIK5) is a highly successful film, produced by an Indian film studio, starring Hindu and Muslim lead actors, presented in Hindi and English. Filmed mostly in the United States, it stars Indian mega stars, Shahrukh Khan and Kajol as an Indian couple living in America before and after the events of September 11th. The titular character, Khan, is Muslim and through his narrative we can see him both disempowered and empowered as Other as he travels across the U.S in search of justice. In his journey, he embodies what it means to be seen as the religious Other and how the marginalized often take up dominant scripts in their interactions with other marginalized Others.

5 For this research, I will be using the commonplace practice in India of using a film’s initials as quick reference.
The female/male dialectic is also based on the idea of an absolute Other – explaining why issues of gender and sexual orientation are problematic. As an often essentialized grouping, women are generally Othered en mass. In public discourse, this silences the complexities of being female and ignores what happens at the intersections of class, racism, age, marital status, sexual orientation – among other things. Using the film, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), I focus on how these intersections create and modify Otherness to both empower and disempower those involved. *Bhaji on the Beach* (BotB) is a multi-layered portrayal of a group of disparate Indian women living in London. Through the film, we can see how a gendered Othering is further complicated as it intersects with issues like age, class, and married status. These intersections complicate and reaffirm what it means to be female in a male dominated space.

In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Tuan (1977) asks “In what ways do people attach meaning to and organize space and place?” (p. 5) Our relationship to space and place is wrapped up in cultural perceptions and reflective of how we orient ourselves in a setting. For the British Commodore in the Indian film, *Lagaan* (2001), organizing a civilized game of cricket on Indian soil, the space (and his place within that space) is reflective of his position as colonizer. The power of position can be muted – but not negated - by the lack of history, language, and culture that separates him from the Indian villagers. Through reference to the monolithic construction of the Orient, I examine how relations of space, place, and class manifest as Othering in the film, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (BEMH) portrays a group of English retirees drawn to India by a mix of nostalgia, economics, and opportunity. These elderly characters, themselves, Othered by an ageist society, carry their power with them in a space (im)permanently stamped by colonial
history. Outsiders to India, they nonetheless exhibit an agency and domination in relation to the people, land and customs surrounding them.

**A Transnational Perspective**

It is very important that researchers who consider themselves to be critical scholars stay vigilantly aware of their own relation to socially constructed knowledges and challenge the lure of dogmatic interpretations. Cultural studies scholars, in particular, have to be careful of unintentionally reifying the marginalized populations they seek to give voice to. Additionally, we must recognize the complex, unstable nature of Otherness and how it can be inscribed on the body in different manifestations and varying levels of awareness. These are the ideas I try to encompass in imagining my transnational perspective as an analytical tool.

A transnational perspective allows me to build a relationship between the three films: *My Name is Khan*, *Bhaji on the Beach*, and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Referring to the blurring of borders between what is global and what is local, transnational is a problematic concept (Higbee & Lim 2010). It is used to create space for identities and voices no longer bound by old colonial legacies and to demonstrate the multi-directional flow of cultures. Even so, transnational retains the imprint of power imbalances left by old colonial legacies and new global economics. The three films reflect the positives and negatives of a transnational perspective in the global relationship shared by India, England, and the U.S.

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6 A question arises: If I mean to claim that we are all embedded in social discourse, how do I bracket the discourses the teacher/scholar brings to the analysis? A critical pedagogue, by definition, should be constantly vigilant about the discourses that influence their version of knowledge and the social practices that follow. Having said that, however, I am working on a “Pre-Analysis” that will help to interrogate and bracket the world view the instructor carries into any analysis.
In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978), explicates the existence of power and dominance manifested in discourses of “east-looking-west”, establishing his argument about the production and reproduction of an enduring imperialist discourse designated as knowledge about an Oriental Other. One of the most significant factors in orientalist discourse has been the extreme disparity between cultural movements – “the crucial index of Western strength is that there is no possibility of comparing the movement of Westerners eastwards (since the end of the eighteenth century) with the movement of Easterners westward” (p. 204). The monolithic presence of the West in the East and its imperial power (inclusive of armies, colonial governors, scientists, scholars and merchants) to claim authority over knowledge, have impeded the ability of the Orient to speak as itself – when we talk about the people who inhabit this colonially defined region, “the Orient is all absence” (p. 208).

In order to address this absence, I pull on research into the use of counter-narratives to empower the lived experiences of marginalized voices working in mainstream dialogues. Counter-narratives often serve to defy conventional stereotypes (Chapman, 2006), bring attention to misrepresentations of equality, and shatter the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In this way, the directors and actors in the films (particularly the Indian films) included here become as important as the product itself. Intentionally or not, they serve as producers of knowledge from an Othered position and construct a type of representational counter-narrative through the depictions on screen.

However, in establishing a transnational lens for this research, it is necessary to recognize that Othering, as a practice bound in cultural representations and knowledge, is a hegemonic practice. Thus, while Said (1978) offers a searing history of Western imperialism in the Orient, I
am cautious of a Western-centric domination of Othering. This cultural “knowledge” (a monolithic West always in the position of power) privileges a dominant discourse on who Others and who gets to Other, as well as when and how this Othering happens. This type of discourse, often presented as enlightened, shuts downs avenues for recognizing the responsibility we all have in (re)producing destructive forms of Othering as reflected through malicious social practices defined by discrimination, inequality, marginalization, and injustice.

In particular, I recognize the polysemic nature of experience and interpretation. By challenging the static nature of social identification, a transnational perspective reflects not only the multiple ways we decode experiences, but acknowledges the influence of world views, ideological frameworks as well as the possibility of disruptive, emancipatory readings (Hall, 1980; Rockler, 2001). Therefore, I craft a transnational perspective that situates people (characters) in a multiplicity of social positions in search of silenced discourses within the taken-for-granted. Specifically, in this research, I conceptualize transnational to refer to a perspective that challenges the representations of knowledge we all create about ourselves, especially in those spaces we have not historically occupied, in order to see how/when/where we construct, engage, and perceive the Other. This is a critical turn that allows me to: a) center the recognition that we must be careful about accepting anyone’s story as truth because we are all embedded in discourse, and b) understand that Otherness is often multilayered and non-static.

**Coming Attractions**

In Chapter 2, I step through the development of a multimodal critical discourse method for analyzing films: the Active Critical Engagement (ACE) framework. First, I define the key
concepts used as scaffolding for the framework. In particular, I explain the modal elements that are used to help control for the complexity of film, how the application of an analytic focus (such as gender) provides bracketing, and the importance of centering the interpreter in the contextual experience through a post-analysis. Throughout the Chapter, I use the film, *My Name is Khan (MNIK)*, as the main artifact of analysis, occasionally pulling in other multimodal references to help illustrate the contextual nature of the process.

Chapter 3 provides two complete exemplars of the ACE framework in practice. In Exemplar I, I apply the analytic foci of gender and sexuality in Gurinder Chadha’s 1993 film, *Bhaji on the Beach*. My analysis is intended to complicate both the label of “the Other” and the idea that marginalized groups occupy a static, monolithic, depowered Otherness. Then, in Exemplar II, the analysis focuses on representations of sexuality, age, and privilege in John Madden’s 2010 film, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Here, the analysis complicates the idea of western privilege, love, and identity in a space where the status of marginalized becomes untenable. Both films present narratives of migration, adaptation, and globalization involving characters in Othered spaces. As such, the juxtaposition of these perspectives offers the opportunity to question the origins and transmutability of representational Othering in contexts where Otherness is multi-faceted, open for contestation, and omni-directional - shaped by sociocultural perspective and the effects of globalization.

Chapter 4 turns the critical lens inward – to identify and address several possible tensions to be found in the design and conceptualization of the ACE framework. In section 1, I return to my conceptualization of discourse - from CDA/MMDA, through Foucault to explorations of popular culture - to expand on the way it is framed in my research and supported by cultural
studies. Then in section 2, positionality and the western gaze are reimagined by centering the concept of an immersive interpretive experience, challenging the binary construction of the west/east binary, and exposing the absences in the discourse.

Chapter 5 returns to pedagogical considerations in order to discuss the implications of building the ACE framework on theoretical foundations from critical pedagogy, semiotic pedagogy, and critical discourse analysis. Then, I address several pedagogical issues and concerns emblematic of a critical teaching practice. Finally, I consider what has been accomplished by this research and future research possibilities.
Chapter 2: The Active Critical Engagement (ACE) Framework

In the previous Chapter, my intention was to set the scene – clarifying the foundational elements that not only drew me to pursue this research but also the theoretical influences that explain how and why my perspective has been shaped. In this Chapter, my purpose is to turn to the method I have developed as an application of multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA). Making this turn requires an understanding of the key modes of interpretation I use as well as how these modes serve the purpose of developing a critical lens through which issues of social justice can be interrogated. Keeping in mind my intention that this be viewed as a pedagogical tool/application, the next two Chapters can be read as an instructional manual.

In Chapter 2, I present a detailed description of the genesis of a method - supported by an embedded example that demonstrates how each mode is applied and analysis is developed. First, I give a synopsis of the film used for analysis, My Name is Khan (MNIK). Then, using MNIK, I step the reader through the process of applying this particular example of MCDA to a film. Following the outline presented in Figure 1 (all figures are also included in Appendix A), Section 1 explains how I conceptualize and operationalize the key modes: text, imagery, and narrative. Section 2 explains how the application of an analytic focus works to provide direction and set up

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7 I have included in Appendix C a summary of a pilot version of the ACE framework used as part of a course module on international discourses on education.
parameters during the analysis process. In Section 3, I explain the relevance and necessity for building in a process for critical self-reflection and contextualization – the post-analysis.

**Synopsis: My Name is Khan (MNIK)**

*My Name is Khan* (2010), is a modern discursive product, produced by an Indian film studio, directed by an Indian director, starring Hindu and Muslim lead actors, and presented in Hindi and English. The film begins in India, in the aftermath of the Hindu/Muslim riots that occurred in 1983, and transitions to a post-9/11 American cultural and political landscape to present an alternative telling of what it means to be variously Othered in a specific historical moment. The titular character, Khan, is Indian, Muslim, speaks with an accent, and begins the film with an undiagnosed Asperger’s Syndrome. Khan’s othering does not begin upon his arrival in America – as a child in India, he is othered both as Muslim and as a ‘special’ child (both positively and negatively). Standing on his balcony in India, he listens in to a group of men discuss the Hindu/Muslim riots that occurred in 1983.

Although the film uses circular sequencing, a feature typical of Bollywood productions, there are still two distinct narratives created: Khan’s life before the events of 9/11 and his journey afterward. The initial narrative replicates a typical ‘coming to America tale’ familiar to, and generally accepted by, most western audiences. A poor, but industrious, immigrant from an impoverished third world country makes it to America. Khan has been primed for this dream

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8 An analytic focus reflects a specific area of inquiry for the social justice researcher. I use race, gender, religion, disability, and space/place as areas of inquiry particularly relevant to the films analyzed in this research - but it is important to note that these are by no means exhaustive nor exclusive.
Figure 1. Developing the ACE Framework

- **Mode**
  - Text
  - Imagery
  - Narrative

- **Analysis**
  - Analytic Focus (e.g., race, gender, religion, disability, place)

- **Discourse**
  - Montage/Discourse Streams
    - Primary Narrative(s): text, imagery, narrative
    - Secondary Narrative(s): text, imagery, narrative

- **Post-Analysis**
  - Discourse, design, and production
  - Positionality
  - Power relations and social practices
fulfillment – speak English to Mr. Wadia! Zakir, his younger brother has established himself in San Francisco after getting a scholarship to an American university. Upon arrival, Khan’s American indoctrination begins immediately – delivered by none other than his brother, Zakir: What did I have when I came to America? Nothing. But this is America. Here, the harder you work, the more successful you get. Equipped with that mandate – which one is to assume is a purely American thought – Khan cloaks himself in American capitalism/consumerism and hits the streets of San Francisco. Almost predictably, boy meets girl. Mandira is pretty, hard-working, outgoing – more American than stereotypical Indian, devoid of some of the more obvious cultural trappings we have seen in other diaspora films, like Bhaji on the Beach (1993) or The Namesake (2006). She has white friends who believe in her potential and offer support and patronage. Moving to Banville – population 30,000 – Khan, Mandira and her son, Sameer, achieve the American dream – a house in the suburbs, a family business, carpools, soccer, and an Xbox.

From this narrative, we get to see what discourses are used to define Khan and his family in American space. The American ideology of hard work = success is unchallenged and appropriated. The trappings of middle-class success are rapidly accumulated and fused into identity. We notice that in Banville, there is little if any interaction with others who are not white American. Actually, in this half of the narrative, all non-white ethnicities (the few that are shown) serve only as generic backgrounds in busy public spaces. This serves to reproduce the marginalization of non-white ethnicities perpetuated in imperialist discourses – what place would they have in a story about success? All of the whites encountered are friendly, supportive, and accept the Khans without pause. Although the Khans speak mostly in an interwoven mixture of
Hindi and English, there is no reaction by those around them. The Khans have risen above issue: of ethnic and racial division by acclimating to the logic and reason of the west. The Khan’s are passing (Khabeer, 2011), having slipped into that pre-9/11 space where American interests felt little need to separately identify its middle-eastern/Indian population, allowing those with the economic means to pass socio-culturally as white. They have left India behind – including most of what that means – and have achieved the good, westernized, white life.

Figure 2. The Khans at home.

The events of 9/11 decenters Khan’s successful American immigrant story and ushers in the second narrative. Passing is no longer an option as America’s undifferentiated knowledge of the Orient is summoned to the fro, painting in broad ideological strokes anyone who vaguely presents as Muslim. In this instance we see two important phenomena: the power of discourse as social knowledge and the way some discourses do not need to be actively engaged in to be adopted. Post-9/11, the Orient and all that it historically had come to represent, reemerged in the American psyche. In MNIK, we see both the unconscious manifestation of this discourse and its
intentional reproduction. In one montage, Sarah and her family sponsor a candlelight vigil to raise money for victims of 9/11. Surrounded by his suburban neighbors and friends, Khan, dressed in his Muslim attire – hands over his zakat, the traditional Muslim tithe. Moments later, from within the crowd, we hear Khan softly chanting a prayer in Arabic. Suddenly, in a community that has never reacted to Khan’s use of something other than English, people frown, whisper to their neighbors, back away – propelled by a full blown awareness that this is dangerous. We see the literal divide between us and them as the space around Khan and Mandira empties.

During the first narrative, Khan as Muslim is only an issue for other Muslims and other (Hindu) Indians. In fact the most telling identifier he has (which Western audiences would most likely miss), is his name. The name, Khan, easily identified by another Indian as Muslim (note the expression on the motel owner’s face when Khan says his name out loud), is initially played for laughs (its Khan…with the epiglottis). Yet, as the second narrative builds, the adoption of that name gets blamed for the film’s greatest tragedy.

Four teenagers surround Sam, hurling epithets – “Osama’s son!”,”Bloody Paki!”, fists, knees, and feet: “C’mon, guys, this is gonna be fun!” Moments later, Sam lies dying on a soccer field. It is the 27th of November 2007. He was 13 years old.

Khan: “He was a Muslim so he was killed. I don’t understand. Being a Muslim is not a bad thing.”
Mandira: “We killed him. I thought…what difference would it make if his name was changed? But I was wrong. He was a Khan so he died.”

Figure 3. Time of death...8:05pm.

Mandira’s grief is shaped by the hatred she knows surrounds them. She tells Khan that everyone in Banville hates him. Nothing will be alright until Khan can let them know he is not a terrorist. Not just Banville but the world: “Tell every person in America” that you are not a terrorist, she cries.

Mandira: “Why don’t you tell the President of the United States then? Mr. President, my name is Khan and I’m not a terrorist! So he can tell all these people that my Sam was not the terrorist son of a terrorist father.”
In the wake of this singular violent event – a terroristic act, a hate crime - Khan’s journey unfolds. Sam’s death tears the nuclear family apart and casts Khan out into the world alone - where the rules regarding acts of ethnic discrimination and persecution, racism, religious intolerance, profiling, and state sanctioned torture have become more porous. The name Khan (note that he is rarely referred to as Rizvan, even by those closest to him) becomes a signifier in and of itself – a stand in for a monolithic, dangerous Muslim presence for *them* but a singular, heroic individual for *us*.

From there, Khan’s journey unfolds in ways reminiscent to Forrest Gump’s heedless happenstance (*Forrest Gump*, Zemeckis & Finerman, 1994): he stumbles upon a terrorist cell, gets tortured, highlights America’s racial tensions, and, finally, meets the president. A key discourse is framed around Khan’s interaction with a small community of Black people in rural Georgia. There, in the wake of a devastating storm (a veiled reference to hurricane Katrina’s devastation of poor Black communities in New Orleans in 2005), Khan becomes savior, highlighting his singular humanity – serving to both demonstrate and shame. Gradually, we become clearly aware of a theme: Khan as hero, Khan as messenger.

*MNIK* is clearly trying to say something about the injustice of essentializing a group of people under a flawed social construction of Muslim. However, by building the narrative on the back of Khan’s staunch fight for individualism, the film actually (re)produces the same us/them divide that fuels problematic constructions of the Other: Khan is not a terrorist but the other Muslims are – so is this message just about one individual? He’s not violent…but all the other Muslims are? Is the fact that his declaration is “I am not a terrorist” instead of “I am an
American” indicative of his priority to distance himself from an orientalist knowledge of 
Muslim-as-violent? Why would he not be able to embody being American?

In the end, MNIK provides American viewers with an alternative reading of post-911 
American society, questioning stereotypes and the essentialization of identity, static domains of 
power and marginalization, and the truth claims of good/bad. These characteristics position the 
film as a progressive text – one that supports counter-hegemonic narratives. Yet, as I have 
already demonstrated, there still remains the tale-tell signs of problematic discursive structures 
that should be addressed.

Throughout the next sections, I will focus on several problematic discursive structures as 
I step through the construction and application of this methodology. Each section begins with an 
explanation of the mode under discussion (Text, Imagery, and Narrative). This details how the 
particular mode is conceptualized and operationalized for this method. Then, referencing MNIK, 
I demonstrate how the interpretation of each mode is applied in an analysis.

**Section 1: Mode**

One of the difficulties often encountered in film analysis is the multiplicity and 
complexity of communicative modes in use. A mode is the articulation of an available resource 
in a familiar way in the production of discourse to construct meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 
2001). Modes – audio, spatial, visual, spoken, gestural, and written – use available resources to 
construct meaning and “the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of (inter)action” 
(Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 21). In discursive practices, discourse is directly realized 
through the selection, inclusion, and manipulation of these modal elements. In a single scene, we 
can experience the swell of the musical score, feel the claustrophobia of a tight camera angle,
hear the wobble in a character’s voice, and recognize HELP! scratched in the dirt. Meaning can be articulated through a single mode – a romantic musical score swells during a love scene – or through the layering of several modes as we take in the curves of the Champaign bottle and see the words *honeymoon suite* written over the door. While this layering of multiple modes can provide emphasis and complexity, certain modes individually “impart certain kinds of meaning more easily and naturally than others” when weighted with cultural significance (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p.229). For example, for much of American cultural history, the obvious way to identify the good guy from the bad guy was simple: the hero wore white. The color white is a mode that evokes a subjective yet recognizable discourse that equates white with conceptions of good. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) This provenance explains why, for many, the comic book character, Batman, exists as a transgressive superhero: he is the Dark Knight, clad in all black. Nevertheless, old habits die hard – Batman may be in some ways transgressive, yet, in most other ways, his alter, Bruce Wayne, presents as a stereotypical elite white male.

To control for the messiness this complexity might produce, I situate my analysis very succinctly within the framework I am using to conceptualize films. For this research, a film, as a discursive practice, is composed of many different modes which I interpret through the intersections of three main categories: text, imagery, and narrative. These categories do not represent solid delineations: modes used in films can and often do take on properties that cross these fluid boundaries – providing an audience with a richer multimodal experience. I expand on each category below.

**Text.** I use the term text in the Hallidayan (Halliday, 1978, 2004) interpretation – as composed of both spoken and written language, whose function and meaning are informed by
the context of the situation. For Halliday, text is language that has meaning or function in the context of a situation. Text is language that is dialogic, social. It can be spoken or written. This conceptualization recognizes the dialogic nature of text, its socially constructed nature, and ability to function as discourse in and of itself. Text does not function as isolated words or sentences divorced from context.

This broader understanding of text is useful in expanding beyond simple concepts of conversation and signage in isolation in order to recognize the variety of ways in which linguistic elements are used to convey meaning in a film. As an element of production and design, written text or signage focuses our attention in the predominantly aural context of most films, compounds attention, and assists narrative pacing. In *Fists of Fury* (Chow & Wei, 1972), Bruce Lee’s character pauses at the gates to a park in front of a sign that reads “No Dogs and Chinese Allowed”. Presenting this message in written form takes on an aura of institutionality and legitimization that the words, spoken alone, could not convey and reinforces Lee’s reaction as revolutionary. In silent films, the usage of intertexts (the cutaway from an action shot to a text only screen) serves several purposes: setting tone, monitoring pace, distilling meaning, and adding interpretive commentary (Chisholm, 1987). Often, the very presence of subtitles in a film leads to discourses of class (it must be an art film) and Othering (it’s foreign).

The same situation occurs in conversations when a character’s accent, word choice, and intonation trigger discourses of place and power. In a 2014 commercial aired during the American Superbowl, British automobile company, Jaguar, uses the interplay of discourses over accent in a wonderfully duplicitous manner. On the one hand, the commercial - titled *Good to be Bad* (Hooper, 2014) - would seem to be creating a link between a product to be sold and a
negative foreign characterization: Have you ever noticed how in Hollywood movies, all the villains are played by Brits? Maybe we just sound right. However, this same dialogue brings with it connotations of wealth and power – two discourses likely to find a sympathetic ear among an American audience. I would argue that the American discursive relationship to things British – compounded by colonial legacies and monarchical fetishism – is what made this commercial most affective.

Text cannot be understood without context. Whether spoken in dialogue or written onscreen, the selection of text expresses characteristics of the product (the speaker or material form of the text) and the audience, while referencing interpretive frameworks for meaning making. As mentioned in the previous section, even a single word – a name – can be a powerful discursive tool.

As a poignant example, I reference a scene in MNIK where Khan finds himself at a motel late one night – it is 2008, Bowling Green, KY. He walks in to find a dark skinned man behind the desk, watching television. The man is uninterested in his late night visitor, not even bothering to turn around as he states that the motel is full - until he hears Khan speaking in Hindi. Sensing common ground, he is immediately attentive, graciously accommodating, even offering to share his own room with his late night visitor.

Suddenly, the scene is punctuated: we see a white male hurling a brick through the motel’s front window. The motel owner reacts instantly, running out into the night and firing a shotgun after a speeding car.
Motel Owner: “All this is because of the lousy Muslims! Six years ago they blew up the World Trade Center and today we bear the brunt of it.”

Motel Owner: “And these white folks? All blind donkeys. Can’t you make out the difference between a Ghandian Indian and a violent Muslim?”

Motel Owner: “I’m going to put a board out here. No Muslims allowed!”

And, then, as the motel owner is trying to coax his compatriot back to the safety of the motel, he asks for a name: *My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist.*

![Figure 4. I am not a terrorist.](image)

For many international audiences, the name Khan, in and of itself, immediately marks Khan as Muslim and layers the expression of this character (and the audience’s relation to him)
with sociocultural knowledges about *Muslim* - subjectively drawn across an array of personal and sociocultural interpretations of this discourse. In the film, after Khan is named, the motel owner is left speechless, a close-up giving us a glimpse of the emotions playing out across his face – because he realizes (an audience might surmise), with just the utterance of a single name, the thin line between us and them. The scene is able to draw its power from the discourses tied up in a single piece of text: the motel owner is revealed to be complicit in the blind stereotyping that ravages his world and marks the actions of the *blind donkeys* even as the mirror is turned on the film’s audience. This scene is one of several that highlight the ease with which even targeted, marginalized groups get swept into hegemonic discourses of discrimination, legitimized violence, and racism (the fact that MNIK ardently exposes this attitude yet nevertheless allows Khan to commit the same injustice *as a positive* will be explored in an upcoming section).

**Imagery.** Imagery alludes to the whole of the visual experience a film and its related materials produce. The first stills of a new film are leaked online soon followed by the first official trailer. Promotional posters are released. Imagery may draw on more concrete aspects that directly reflect a specific cultural knowledge or expectation – for example, a rainbow flag sticker on the back bumper of a Toyota Prius leading to generalizations about liberal politics - as well as more fluid aspects where a connection is made yet filtered through individual historical contexts – the site of a torn flag waving in the breeze may be interpreted generationally as either a symbol of national pride, a representation of disillusionment and counterculture, or a reflection of fear and insecurity. Imagery becomes part of the context for the discursive landscape the film creates.
A film’s design and production include the weaving together of specific visual elements to support the overall narrative direction. These images are seldom neutral – either intentionally or unintentionally. For example, simple images of domesticity can convey complex discourses of class, gendered power, morality, ethnicity and religion (to name a few). We observe a selection of people sitting down to eat a meal. Sans dialogue, we register the décor of the room, its arrangement and contents; the organization and spacing of the people, their ages and sexes; what they are wearing; who is serving or eating first. We recognize (or don’t) the food and the way it is eaten. We make note of seasonal and environmental clues through the window. Most of this observation is done passively, without reflection, yet, in those moments when we absorb the scene, we automatically register assumptions and make judgments – creating connections to larger discourses that help us to relate and make meaning of what we see. This, in and of itself is not new and some would argue that it is a necessary factor of meaning making in complicated societies (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2002).

This observation is based on “preferred readings embedded with a set of meanings, practices and beliefs, rank of power and structures of legitimization, limits and sanctions” that help us to decode and categorize the experience (Hall, 2009, p. 169). What my research attempts to do is develop a framework which supports the conscious awareness and interrogation of the discursive dialogues we access through images (and other multimodal representations) and the impact they have on our perception and construction of knowledge.

The cover of my DVD copy of the film, MNIK, tells several stories. Centered are the two faces of the film’s central characters, Rizvan and Mandira Khan, connected yet staring off in different directions. The background is foggy, evoking images of a smoke filled landscape. Out
Figure 5. My Name is Khan (DVD cover).
of this fog, we can almost make out several smaller images along the left side: a lone male, holding a large sign over his head; Rizvan and Mandira clinging to each other, dressed in black, screened behind an image of the red and white stripes of the American flag; a bus on an urban city street. At the bottom of the cover is a dark stretch of landscape, with the U.S. capitol building clearly visible in the mid-distance. A silhouetted image is frozen mid stride, deformed by the large pack on his back. And above all of this stretches the film title: MY NAME IS KHAN. The first three words are in white. The last word is in a bolder font and it is red.

Coming to this image without any foreknowledge about the film, what do I make of this? What sociocultural dialogues does this representation evoke? Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) write about the dimensions of visual structuring. The choice about which collection of images are used to represent an idea are seldom value-free. Not only do images attempt to convey, in the case of a film poster, what the story is about, but they also work to produce a connection to larger social knowledges. In other words, they “produce images of reality which are bound up with the interests of the social institutions within which the pictures are produced, circulated and read” (p.45). A visual structure is a reflection of ideology and in turn produces a discursive product.

More importantly, how is provenance - the invocation of “mythical signifiers” – referenced by the selection and juxtaposition of these images? Is Khan’s story – especially to an American audience – made stronger (and complicated) by textural connections to discourses surrounding war (the Vietnam War in particular), the Civil Rights Movement, American counterculture, and the American flag? I provide a simple comparison of three DVD covers – MNIK and two American products – to illustrate how provenance works here to invoke specific
Figure 6. Born on the 4th of July (DVD cover).
discursive elements and build the contextual landscape surrounding MNIK for American audiences.

*Born on the 4th of July* (Stone & Ho, 1989), is an Academy Award winning film directed by Oliver Stone (himself a Vietnam veteran) and based on a best-selling autobiography. The film’s protagonist, Ron Kovic, is a disabled American vet who becomes disillusioned by war and becomes a human rights activist. The film begins with Kovic’s experiences as a young soldier in Vietnam where a shockingly personal death acts as the catalyst for his impending confusion and feelings of betrayal. The film then follows Kovic as he journeys across America, makes a significant stop in Georgia, and speaks up for the immorality of war and the dignity of the “enemy” — in this case the Vietnamese people.

The similarities to the MNIK narrative are obvious: a pivotal, emotionally devastating death; a transformative, reaffirming visit to Georgia which establishes an important connection to another disenfranchised group; a special message delivered on a national stage — all connected by Khan’s documented journey across America. But here, I focus on the imagery. The lone silhouetted figure (a blank stand-in for “everyman”) - body burdened and distorted by the weight that it must carry - transverses a dark and shapeless landscape, with no discernable beginning or end. The stars and stripes of the American flag, faint yet imminently recognizable, help focus our attention and apply another layer of relevant discourse: the American flag as a symbol of freedom and democracy.

This same imagery is reflected in the DVD cover for *Eyes on the Prize* (Hampton, 1987), a fourteen part documentary developed by the PBS network, which documents the American Civil Rights movement beginning with the landmark Supreme Court ruling in Brown
Figure 7. Eyes on the Prize (DVD cover).
v. Board of Education in 1954 and concluding with modern re-conceptualizations of the movement in 1985. Here, we see the same dark, formless landscape, the blank figures, and the over-riding presence of the Stars and Stripes.

Additionally, it shares a key narrative element with MNIK: the invocation of a well-known Black spiritual strong identified with the American Civil Rights movement. In fact, the title of the documentary is drawn from an old folk song, *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize*, which has its roots in Black spirituals of the early 20th century whose lyrics reference injustice and imprisonment. In MNIK, we first hear Khan and Mandira break into a Hindi version of *We Shall Overcome*, another well-known Black spiritual, in a sequence that serves to show how they are overcoming the challenges of building a relationship for their new mixed family. Then, we hear the song again – in a small, rural Black church, Khan’s ears pick up the familiar melody and buoyed by the voices of the surrounding parishioners, he joins in.

In the above comparison, we can see how imagery is able to create a discursive landscape for MNIK that elicits cultural knowledges about the Vietnam War, the American Civil Rights movement, attacks on civil liberties, religious freedom, and freedom of speech to position the film’s message as a social justice issue and a transgressive narrative. We can also see narrative similarities that join the films through discursive modes of reference. This type of critical analysis requires us to understand the ability of discourse (in part or whole) to be communicated in imagery (and text, sound, etc.) and by extension, the ability of imagery to facilitate subjective positioning toward the object.

**Narrative.** Narrative refers to the structural arc of a film, its organization and purpose, and includes the particular way text and imagery interact within the film. However, the function
of a narrative is not confined to simple exposition – it is a representation of both individual and intersecting discourses which reflect relationships to cultural knowledges in order to facilitate meaning making. O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2002) write that:

narrative is instrumental in our efforts to make sense of the world: it is a mode of explanation that assists our interpretation of the world by providing temporal order, describing interconnections and rendering complex casual relationships intelligible.

(p.19)

Interrogating both the discourses that are implicated in the production of narratives (discourses of production) and the discourse-as-knowledge (discourses of interpretation) spectators use to interpret narratives is the focus for this research. This double perspective is actually two sides of the same coin: both are necessary for a critical understanding of the pedagogical role films can have. For example, it is not enough to recognize the ideal of hyper masculinity being (re)produced in films like the James Bond (Eon Productions) or Dabangg (Arbaaz Khan Productions) franchises - we must also be able to recognize the sociocultural discourses that allow us to contextually legitimize (and sanction) the extreme levels of violence and misogyny that often attend this genre.

For the analysis being developed here, I find it necessary to identify primary and secondary narratives. Discourses of production and interpretation intermingle in these narratives. The primary narrative aligns with the “official” narrative – what story the film overtly proposes to tell. This corresponds to what we see on the movie posters, view in the trailers, and hear
during promotional interviews. These representations - actually, carefully constructed montages – are designed to present the official narrative in encapsulated form. Through the official narrative, we are guided to an understanding of the movie context – information like: the intended audience, the general message, who is important, and whose narrative requires our attention. Broad connections to social discourse are quickly made: is it a chick flick? A remake? A Black movie? Here, in this initial encounter, these selections and the construction of the primary narrative serve as an experiential scaffold – influencing our perception, judgment, and relation to a film – before we have even seen it. Additionally, seemingly external factors like the selection of actors, when the film is released, and which cities and theaters it premiers in all influence the narrative perceptions we make. Is the lead actor known to expose controversial or extreme political ideas? Is their sexuality a matter of some public debate? Is the release date set for summer or fall? Will the film be screened mostly in areas with a large ethnic base?

The secondary narrative(s) often reflects a more revealing articulation of the way social knowledge is (re)produced. In the secondary narrative, we are more likely to encounter the hidden discourses that engage troubling manifestations of Othering, power and discrimination – the unspoken knowledges we create about a phenomena. In the secondary narrative, we often encounter hidden representations of sociocultural assumptions which direct issues of design and production, character construction, narrative direction, etc. Often, it is in the juxtaposition of primary and secondary narratives that we find powerful discursive landscapes – especially when the secondary narrative works to counter, disrupt, or erase perceived challenges to social justice issues. In these discursive landscapes, ideologies collide and conflict, audiences struggle over meaning, and the interpretive outcome is not always predetermined (Morley, 1980).
In the opening sequence of MNIK, we follow Khan into an American airport, San Francisco International. His attention is everywhere and nowhere – bouncing off walls and people. We watch him awkwardly navigate the escalator, taking two careful steps off. In the security line, he worries the small stones in his hands like prayer beads, and rocks, slightly back and forth, mumbling a prayer to himself. Slowly the heads of people in the line with him begin to turn, noticing the odd posture, the rocking, the arc of his nose, the color of his face. Two security guards approach: *Would you please come with me, sir? Would you come with me, sir?* Quick cut to a small, dark interrogation room. Khan stands in the middle of the room in his underwear surrounded by three security guards. His backpack is opened and his belongings lay scattered across a metal table. Latexed fingers probe his mouth, his body. The faces around him are closed off, alert. Moments pass. Khan’s passport is finally flipped open and the camera tightens in on a shot of an I.D. card.

![Figure 8. Khan's autism ID](image)

The mood in the room begins to change. The search is wrapped up and Khan begins to retrieve his belongings. He speaks out loud to himself: he has missed the last flight to Washington, D.C. and will now have to take a bus. The lead guard asks him why is he going to
Washington, D.C. and Khan replies that he is going to meet the president of the United States. The security guards react immediately - yet, it is not quite the reaction we might expect.

*Why’s that? Is he a friend of yours?*, a guard teases.

*Oh, no no, he’s not a friend. No, no. I have something to say to him.*

*Oh, yeah?*, the guard grins. *Well, tell the prez something for me, too, then. Tell him I said… ‘howdy’*. The guards share a laugh, jokingly asking Khan if he knows *“where Osama is”*. 

And, then, they let him go. At the moment in the search and detention where a legitimate concern about Khan’s intentions and purpose might be justified, the introduction of Autism as a secondary narrative creates a conflict that not only derails the focus of the security guards but the film’s audience as well.

Why do we often see powerful social messages through the eyes of disabled characters? Khan, following in the footsteps of an iconic American film character, Forrest Gump (*Forrest Gump*, Zemeckis & Finerman, 1994), engages with controversial aspects of American culture and politics, shining a critical lens on issues from civil liberties and religious intolerance to racial stereotyping and discrimination. Yet, the inclusion of the discourse of “disability” into the characters’ makeup invokes a countering discourse of paternal benevolence, dismissal, and pity which strips the characters of actual power (Hayes & Black, 2003). The presence of a disability
allows spectators to assume a discourse that includes the application of child-like attributes like naivety and purity and paves the way for a sort of benevolent tolerance bestowed upon the character. This fabrication of qualities work to qualify the depth of experience these characters have – like a child stumbling about in the adult world, encountering phenomena that seasoned, knowing adults no longer have time to acknowledge or worry about.

Through Forrest’s eyes we huddle in the mud of Vietnam and see the war reflected through the eyes of young men thinking of home. We see Khan shivering in a bare detention cell, nearly naked, held without formal charge. The primary narrative purports to encourage a visceral experience of an injustice. However, it is important that we not lose sight of the secondary discourse of disability – especially, disability related to mental abilities – that may actually serve to soften the nature of the injustice. These experiences, after all, wouldn’t happen if someone smarter/more capable/more skilled where in this situation. The juxtaposition of discursive elements from the primary and secondary narratives creates a tension between discourses – repositioning the audience’s relationship to the characters and their experiences while mitigating the overall effect of any official narrative.

Figure 9. Khan
Section 2: Analytic Focus

Once a basic understanding of how the modes of text, imagery, and narrative apply in this methodology, the next step in the process is analysis. In order to give direction and provide instructional purpose, an analytic focus is applied to guide the discourse analysis of primary and secondary narratives. An analytic focus names the social justice issue that will guide your analysis. In the following sections, I will be interrogating a host of issues that often find expression in social justice research: race, gender, religion, disability, and space/place.

To restate, the juxtaposition of primary and secondary narratives allow for a more in depth critical analysis that works past assimilated (and unquestioned) constructions often found in expressions of race, gender, religion, disability, and space/place. This juxtaposition also helps to trouble problematic reifications of discourses that either originate in the margins or claim to represent/be representative of marginalized positions. Here, Othering is recognized as a social fact with practices embedded in both dominate and marginalized positions. However, the static nature of either of these positions – dominant or marginalized - must be brought into question as either is open for multiple interpretations and performances. If we assume the legitimacy of a
discourse as delivered by a marginalized source just because it comes from that marginalized source, we can miss the (re)production of problematic discourses.

Figure 11. from The Kids are Alright

For example, American director, Lisa Cholodenko, has a reputation for making films that confront sexuality and identity and provide a mainstream platform for the LGQBT community. Her 2010 film, The Kids are All Right, portrays a lesbian couple struggling with the sudden presence of their children’s sperm donor in their lives. Cholodenko who with her life partner, Wendy Melvoin, also has a child by an anonymous sperm donor received praise for the film. However, many critiqued the nascent heteronormativity layered onto the lesbian couple, Nic and Jules (Eaklor, 2012). Additionally, Jules affair could be interpreted as either questioning the concept of a “real” lesbian or simply reinforcing her positioning as the “female” of the couple. This deeper critique of secondary narratives pushes past unchallenged discourses which may be “protected” by their provenance by critical scholars. Although the embedded positionality of researcher/student can make identification of problematic discourses challenging, by identifying
key scenes, montages, or collections of practice represented by the film we can take a first step toward isolating phenomena for analysis.

**Identifying key discourses: montages and discourse streams.** Film is not a sequence of still images that can be read individually or reduced to constituent parts – the sum is greater than the parts (Banks, 2001). Although images may be powerful in isolation, distinct sequences of images – montages – often serve to reinforce a narrative focal point, redirect an audiences’ engagement, or adjust the pacing of a film. Especially taken as a narrative arc, including all modes in use, montages cue audience connection to particular discourses. In Sergei Eisenstein’s silent film, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the Odessa Steps sequence is an example of the ability of montage to draw power from a variety of referenced discourses. The montage carries with it a wealth of textual information as the frame switches between the images of the black-booted Tsarist soldiers marching down the Odessa Steps, firing indiscriminately into the crowd and the singular shots of men, women, and children. In searing detail, the audience gets pulled into the sequence, experiencing the deaths of the old woman and the young boy, the wrenching roll of the abandoned baby carriage down the steps, the disorganized struggle of the crowd. Discourses of class struggle, power, and bureaucratization are reflected here: The cold mechanical nature of bureaucracy and unchecked power are echoed in the faceless, mechanistic precision of the soldiers advancing down the steps while the ability of the collective to respond is crushed, even as the revolutionaries celebrate in the harbor.

Focusing on the narrative structure of a film, it is possible to identify a unique pattern through which particular montages link together to reinforce and legitimate a particular discourse. These patterns or *discourse streams*, connect imagery and text to invoke discursive
tropes accessible by the film’s audience. Disconnected in a narrative timeline, these discourse streams are effective and even draw power from their seeming disconnection. When frames that share a discursive connection are separated and isolated in a film, the disruptive narrative structure helps to fragment or delay critical engagement while reinforcing the naturalness of the discourse. Whereas, a longer unified experience facilitates more intense audience engagement, leading to reflections and critique.

As previously stated, MNIK works diligently to create a connection to the American civil rights discourse though text (Khan and Mandira singing We Shall Overcome), imagery (the dark figure surrounded by the Stars and Stripes) and narrative (similarities between the journeys of Khan and Kovic). Dispersed throughout the film, these elements create the discursive stream, Civil Rights, allowing for a particular audience access to the narrative and interpretation of how that discourse names this narrative.
As a powerful secondary narrative, this discourse stream provides political gravity and cultural resonance to Khan’s plight for both native and foreign audiences. However, one key component of this discourse cannot be overlooked – the narrative of marginalized Southern Black people. Although Black faces are conspicuously absent for the majority of the film, MNIK reaches for this most visual representation of the American civil right discourse and (with the introduction of the character, Funny Haired Joel) crafts a discourse stream that welds Khan’s journey to the plight of American Black communities – or at least an ahistorical, stereotypical, essentialized, and racist version of one.

**Discourse stream: civil rights.** Khan sits wearily in a bus shelter on the side of a long expanse of dusty, empty road. Suddenly a boy on a bike appears. He crashes and falls down hurt. Crying out for help, Khan responds. In this his way, we meet Funny Haired Joel.

*Figure 13. Funny Haired Joel*
Funny Haired Joel takes Khan back to his home and introduces him to Mama Jenny who welcomes Khan, offering clean clothes and food. The house is plain and small, with unpainted, clapboard walls, two small sleeping cots, packed with keepsakes and supplies. We see the jovial, heavy-set woman glance up to see Khan enter the room wearing an old garment of hers – he is swallowed by the drape of fabric. Mama Jenny laughs soothingly, her dark, round face beaming under the faded scarf wrapped around her head. She lays out a plate of food for Khan and urges him to sit.

Mama Jenny: “Oh, you are an angel! You saved my baby! He could have been out there lying, bleeding. Oh, thank you, thank you!”

Khan: “Please don’t hug me!” [Khan calls out from within the folds of Mama Jenny’s embrace]

Funny Haired Joel: “That’s my Mama Jenny…always trying to hug everybody.”

Khan: “Mama Jenny, please don’t hug me.”

*Figure 14. Khan and Mama Jenny*
This discourse stream works to cement an identification between Khan and the Black community. They share deep personal losses perpetuated by the chaotic forces of war and racism: Momma Jenny cries over the loss of her son, a U.S. soldier killed in the Iraq war as Khan continues to process Sameer’s murder. Later, in the path of a dangerous hurricane, the waters rise in Wilhelmina – seemingly abandoned by official resources and eerily reminiscent of hurricane Katrina which devastated the poor, mostly Black sections of New Orleans in 2005. Hearing about the danger heading toward Mama Jenny and Funny Haired Joel, Khan heads back to Georgia. Seeing him working tirelessly to keep the waters from rising, the audience can’t help but flashback to a similar scene: a teenaged Khan, soaking wet, peddling furiously on his homemade siphon, as the waters recede from the courtyard near his teacher’s house. As the hurricane reaches its peak and it looks like even Khan won’t be able to save Wilhelmina and its people, a crowd crests a hill. A multitude of faces, Indian and Caucasian, appear – wading slowly through the flood waters surrounding the church, weighed down by the packs of supplies they carry on their shoulders. In the crowd, the faces of Khan’s estranged brother and sister-in-law stand out. In Wilhelmina, there is no color, no race, no Christian, no Muslim. There are only people who do good things.

**Secondary narratives.** These montages do more than introduce us to new characters and locales. Viewed as a discourse stream, they create connected narratives aimed at eliciting an emotional connection, (re)producing a set of cultural assumptions, and building political legitimization. But, they also (re)produce problematic discourses about what it is to be Black in America for both domestic and international audiences.
This narrative becomes problematic when positioned as a subversive discourse because – on the surface – this discourse stream invokes what are often categorized by many as harmless, supportive images that in reality actually reinforce a tacit knowledge of Black communities as helpless, dependent, poor, and unsophisticated. Into this contested space, the people of Wilhelmina embody a manifestation that is simple, spiritual, and wise. Mama Jenny presents as what Hughey (2009) calls the “magical negro” (MN) who “often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers” and helps transform the main (non-Black) character (p. 544). As Hughey explains:

What makes this form of racism distinctive and semi-autonomous is that it occurs within a context in which racist representations are obscured by the cinematic rhetoric of: (a) numerical increases in nonwhite representations, (b) interracial cooperation, (c) the superficial empowerment of historically marginalized subjects, and (d) movies themselves as a cultural phenomenon, which audiences want to believe reflects progressive race relations within the larger society. (p. 551)

Although Hughey’s primary concern is the perception and construction of the MN within the dialectic of the Black/white binary, it is easy to see its application here. Khan’s assumption of “whiteness” is apparent in his arc from lost and helpless to savior – a position that usually accompanies the presence of the MN. Additionally, he and his family pre- 9/11 enjoy an assimilated existence in Banville. I would argue that “assimilation” in America is code for
acquiring the sociocultural trappings of mainstream white identity. In MNIK, we have a product with an increased presence of non-white (though also non-Black) bodies, interracial cooperation (or at least interaction) between Indians and Blacks, temporarily (and problematically) empowered marginalized populations, in a film set to present a transgressive counter-narrative to normal discourses on the immigrant experience. The qualifications in the preceding sentence are disruptive yet completely necessary – reflecting the tensions to be found when primary and secondary narratives are juxtaposed.

Figure 15. Singing in the church

In the end, the Black community - wise, generous, and God fearing as it might be - does not have the power to save itself. In MNIK, Wilhelmina and its people stand frozen in time, completely divorced from the modern context of America in 2010 that the rest of the film embodies, marking Blacks as an extreme Other in both space and time. Wilhelmina’s salvation comes from outside, first in the person of Khan and then in the wave of people inspired, not by
the plight of Wilhelmina per se, but by the image of Khan’s dedication and selflessness. The rescuers arrive en mass – a crowd conspicuously (once again) devoid of Black faces. In the end, Wilhelmina serves not so much as a reflection of Khan’s marginalization but as a pointed example of how he, the new immigrant, has worked hard to overcome his disadvantages and deserves to be granted his full civil rights – it’s a power move made on the backs of a racist narrative that supports the rhetoric of the immigrant and the American dream.

In this example, we can see how an analysis focused on the primary narrative (Khan’s journey toward redemption for self and family) - without critical interrogation of the discourses that help to interpret and give power to that narrative – can mask and legitimate problematic discourses. In addition, when associated with a social justice theme or received as a progressive product, such a film serves as a particularly rich example of the way problematic discourses are embedded in social constructions of knowledge and the taken-for-granted understandings that go unchallenged in everyday practices.

**Section 3: Post Analysis**

The purpose of the post analysis is to further situate the film within the student’s experience. In the post analysis, I move from theoretical interpretations of how discourses are realized in a particular artifact to situated experience. Additionally, the post analysis directs the interpreter to confront the intersection of their world view and the film. The individual’s world view consists of a dynamic set of core beliefs and ideological narratives that inform their interactions and relationships to the social (Paul, 1984). This world view feeds our perception of common sense assumptions about various sociocultural phenomena – and may function to obfuscate deeper realities.
For example, traditional discourse in America often positions women as the “fairer sex”. Surface interpretations of this discourse (primary narrative) are positive – the fairer sex is sweet, innocent, gentle, fragile, emotional and beautiful. A deeper interpretation marks how these characteristics are also a reflection of a child and carry intimations of immaturity, irrationality, and the need for outside guidance and protection (secondary narrative). Holding this common sense world view of the fairer sex works to silence critical challenges to patriarchal practices and discourses. The film, *My Fair Lady* (1964), is a beautiful romantic narrative of a poor girl (Eliza) transformed into a high society beauty under the tutelage of a raspy, confirmed bachelor (Henry). As a member of the fairer sex, Eliza understandably needs to be rescued and protected by Henry, who teaches her how to speak, walk, and dress. He also occasionally needs to reprimand and punish Eliza for misbehavior. Then they fall in love. Much has been written about the beautiful love story but very few critiques focus on the fact that the main events of the film – teaching someone to speak, walk, dress and punishing for misbehavior – are the actions of a parent (someone in power) to a child. As a result, Henry’s rather harsh treatment of another adult is never truly challenged. This secondary narrative remains unchallenged and legitimized through a reliance on a specific world view.

In this way, the post analysis serves as reflective practice for the viewer. Connections to world view and sociocultural space are made through examinations that bring to the fore three key threads: (1) discourse, design, and production; (2) positionality; and (3) power relations and social practices.
Discourse, design and production.

The fact remains that the commercial and cultural realities of filmmaking that largely overpower the desire to be an individual creator with a subjective style and a personal, passionate worldview can be overcome, even if only once in a while. (Kolker, 2002, p.169)

Technological realities disconnect films from their historical placement in two ways: in general, we have access to films made since the technology was developed in the late 1800’s; also, film-makers are under no constraints of time and space, able to (re)represent or (re)imagine any period in time. As such, our sociocultural context may be vastly removed from that in evidence during the production of the film or of the historical moment depicted in the film. Nevertheless, since films are constructed within sociocultural contexts by social actors, any critical analysis may be improved by an interrogation into the relevant contextual phenomena in play at the time of the development of the particular discursive product under review. This section of the post analysis should provide a brief overview that focuses on the historicity at play during the conception of the film. Specifically, this section asks the interpreter to consider the following questions:

1. How do the principle actors (this includes studios and directors) involved in this production influence the discursive representation?
2. Are their elements of design and production that influence how discourse is structured?
3. Who is the intended audience?
MNIK went on to be one of the highest grossing films of the year in India. The film’s success was in no small part due to the celebrity power of its director, Karan Johar, and the superstar couple, Shah Rukh Khan (known as SRK) and Kajol. Johar, son of renowned Indian filmmaker, Yash Johar, has been a popular and powerful force in Bollywood cinema since the immense success of his directorial debut in 1998, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. The film also was notable for being the much anticipated fourth pairing of SRK and Kajol, known as Bollywood’s golden couple. Before the film’s premiere, comments by SRK (an Indian Muslim), made in support of allowing Pakistani players into an Indian cricket league led to demonstrations and arrests as a Hindu nationalist group, Shiv Sena, demanded an apology from the international star and directed its followers to disrupt the opening of the film. In 2009, after being detained by airport officials in Newark, NJ, SRK remarked that the stop was related to him having a Muslim name (incidentally the same as his fictional character). The actor was detained again at a New York airport in 2012.

Although technically a Bollywood production, MNIK was positioned more as an international product due to its subject matter and setting. Both Johar and SRK made comments about wanting the film to be about the global impact of tolerance and humanity as antidotes to terrorism (Smith, 2012). As if to support the global orientation, over 90% of MNIK’s gross revenue ($38,326,589) was from the foreign market. Additionally, the film received substantial marketing and distribution support from western studios. Reviewing the film, The Times of India declared “My name is Bollywood and I’m not just an entertainer. I have a whole lot to say and I’ll say it in style....” (2010).
MNIK can be contextualized as a discursive product influenced by a myriad of factors: a popular director challenging the boundaries of traditional Bollywood productions; a popular actor challenging perceptions about his own faith in the face of international and nationalistic prejudices; and international partnerships vying to benefit from the economic potential of a global distribution.

**Positionality.**

None of us is ever an interpreter and nothing more, “an ideal spectator who comes to the film innocently cleansed of the contagion of other films and other practices…subjects other than the purely textual subject – social subjects, sexual subjects, historical subjects – subjects who are constituted in a plurality of discourses (in an intertextuality of other texts) of which the single text is only one moment” (Caughie, 2013, p. 205-206)

Boyd (1989) writes that “we can attempt to disown those other selves, those social, sexual, and historical subjects” in order to pretend that we can act as objective interpreters but this orientation is only “a temporary fiction” (p. 202). As socially constructed actors we bring to the act of interpretation our beliefs, assumptions, and judgments about various phenomena we encounter in a film and necessarily make connections to our own personal discourses. I make this point in order to stress that the purpose of this type of analysis is to actively engage with our interdependence on a store of sociocultural knowledges that we use to interpret - and ultimately judge - the various phenomena we encounter. How does my position as a social, sexual, and historical subject, frame the way I interpret the various discourses a film brings to bear?
This section of the post analysis requires the interpreter to critically confront their own positionality in relation to the discourses observed in the film. Specifically, this section asks the researcher to consider the following questions:

1. When applying the analytic focus to the analysis of this specific film, what assumptions and social knowledges did you use as interpretive frames?
2. How did the analysis act as a reflection of previous knowledge and highlight your assumptions about the discourses under discussion?
3. Did your interpretation and analysis of secondary narratives legitimize or diverge from previous assumptions about the discourse under discussion?

In my analysis of MNIK, two analytic foci were applied to interrogate primary and secondary narratives: race and disability. Although there are a number of other discourses that could be positioned for analysis (i.e. religion and the absence of American Muslims), I chose to focus on these two because they represented what - in my viewing experience - felt like jarring disconnections. For this post analysis, I will attend to the analytic focus of race.

MNIK is a transgressive product, pushing against one-dimensional constructions of the post-9/11 experience for people in America, challenging stereotypes of the marginalized Other, and promoting personal responsibility and reflection. Khan’s intimate connection with the Black Other was a positive move in a discursive field where Black characters remain marginalized. As an avid viewer of international films, I was additionally pleased to see a positive portrayal of a relationship between Black and non-white immigrant communities. However, the introduction of Funny Haired Joel, Mama Jenny, and Wilhelmina, GA presents as a jarring disconnection from the flow of events in the rest of this modern filmic landscape. Two montages bracket this
juxtaposition: Khan sits in a bus shelter along a highway. We can imagine the modern modes of transportation that transverse this technical space, the smell of exhaust fumes, the hustle and bustle of interstate commerce, etc. Next, Funny Haired Joel arrives riding a bicycle - curiously out of place on a highway and apparently a dangerous alternative as Joel immediately has an accident and falls down.

The entire Wilhelmina discourse stream is ahistorical and decontextualized. Referencing my own positionality as a Black woman born and raised in Georgia, I can attest to the fact that there are a multitude of Black communities in the state that in general reflect differing levels of modernity. As such, my reaction is not to say that it is entirely impossible that such a community as Wilhelmina still existed in 2010 but that this is a problematic depiction on two accords: (1) it is the only fully engaged representation of Blacks or Black culture in the film; and (2) it presents itself as racist within a discourse that purports to align with civil rights issues. The first concern aligns with my social awareness of both a problematic representation of Blacks in film and the media driven assumptions about Blacks and Black culture often (re)produced in international discourses. If, for example, there were other developed depictions of Blacks in the narrative, this might not have resonated. The only other Black characters given any screen time are the Black teen-ager involved in Sameer’s death and President Obama. In the course of the narrative, the insertion of a Black antagonist in the group of teenagers who attack Sameer feels more like an attempt at a politically correct stance that challenges the assumption that it was only white people behind the personal attacks after 9/11. However, instead of a recognition of Black inclusion in the American identity, it comes across as mollification to white sensibilities about their role in prejudicial acts of violence.
The meeting with President Obama highlights the second concern and reinforces why the Wilhelmina discourse is so problematic. In President Obama, we have the ultimate manifestation of a modern America: post-racial and democratic. Yet, even as an important Black character, the president presents as disconnected from the discourse of Blacks represented by Wilhelmina. In effect, he reprises a representation of the Magic Negro as he generously makes space for Khan to take center stage and helps him fulfill his mission. As Hughey writes, “the MN is disconnected and segregated from other African Americans, thus disallowing the use of morality lessons in black, intra-racial interactions.” (Hughey, p. 563) This apparently strong Black character is allowed to help Khan but is absent when Wilhelmina faces the flood waters that threaten to destroy everything. My positionality – my personal experiences, world view, and self-identity – influences not only why this specific focus caught my attention but how I develop an interpretation of the associated discourse streams in the film. My interpretation both confirms and challenges beliefs I hold about the (re)production and representation of Blacks/Black culture in international spaces.

**Power relations and social practices.**

What seems to be at stake is to what extent discourse is constrained and determined by social structures, but at the same time, to what extent discourse can contribute to build up, reproduce, maintain, reinforce, but also to question and challenge, a particular status quo, social order, or social relationships. (Martin Rojo, 2001, p. 50)
Ultimately, what affect does discourse have on social relations and practices? While the ACE framework attempts to guide new interpreters into critical engagement with a variety of multimodal artifacts, its presentation as a pedagogical tool should not be viewed narrowly. ACE necessarily facilitates a critical orientation not bound by context. A critical orientation is formed through a heightened awareness of how discourses construct social relations and practices – as well as a tendency to seek out those disjunctions and sublimated narratives that give power to problematic discourses (Ennis, 1982). Thus, the post analysis is designed to function as a loop. The loop begins with the analysis of the film (or other discursive artifact), processes through the intersection of interpreter and world view, and is finally extended and reconnected to social relations and practices.

In this section of the post analysis, the interpreter makes connections between how discourse (re)produces or challenges the status quo and is ultimately realized in social practices. Specifically, this section asks the researcher to consider the following questions:

1. How are problematic discourses realized in unchallenged social practices?
2. How do problematic discourses inscribe and depower marginalized subjectivities?

In her article, “Both Edges of the Margin: Blacks and Asians in Mississippi Masala, Barriers to Coalition Building”, Banks (1998) uses the concept of simultaneous racism to explore historical barriers to coalition building between subordinated groups in America. Simultaneous racism occurs when “one ‘racially’ subordinated group simultaneously subordinates another racial group.” (p. 2) Focusing on events in the state of Mississippi, she examines simultaneous racism in both fictional (in Mira Nair’s 1991 film, Mississippi Masala) and non-fictional (among Chinese and Asian Indian immigrants) narratives. The problematic juxtaposition of the primary
and secondary narratives in MNIK surrounding Khan and the Black community of Wilhelmina lend themselves to considerations of simultaneous racism. In assuming the outward trappings of middle class America in a predominantly white neighborhood, Khan occupies what Banks calls a middle racial space between whites and Blacks (1998). In this racial hierarchy, Khan then becomes susceptible to - and implicit in – prevailing discourses on Black culture. Even within the civil rights discourse, which MNIK appropriates to strengthen Khan’s cause, Khan positions himself above and against the Black community – reminiscent of the fabled white savior who steps in to rescue a community incapable of helping itself (Cammarota, 2011; Meyer, 2015).

What we see is how problematic and unchallenged discourses can disrupt true coalition building between marginalized groups and how this plays out detrimentally in social practice. What may be missing is the concept of interracial justice. Interracial justice writes Yamamoto (1995):

…means understanding the influences of dominant, mostly white institutions in the construction of interracial conflicts. It also means understanding ways in which racial groups contribute to and are responsible for the construction of their own identities and sometimes oppressive inter-group relations. It thus acknowledges situated or constrained racial group agency and responsibility. (p. 38)

Interracial justice would require critical engagement with dominant discourses about the Other and an earnest challenge to the idea that marginalized groups cannot themselves
appropriate racist practices. The continued segregation and insularity of marginalized communities in America are descriptive of this disjuncture. Solutions to this rift are not located in either neoliberal ideologies that stress assimilation nor in ascribing all responsibility to a fixed white power structure. Instead, interracial justice situates “racial group agency and responsibility within the tension between continuing group subordination and emerging group power” (Yamamoto, p. 38). In the case of MNIK, a fully realized representation of the civil rights discourse could have made connections to the Black Muslim community wherein members from that group could be included in the larger dialogue on discriminatory practices and negative stereotyping while building true coalition by including Black Americans on equal footing with Khan. In the end, MNIK promises coalition between marginalized groups in America yet gets detoured by aligning with prevailing discourses of Black communities as helpless, simple, and deficient.

ACE: the Wrap Up

In this Chapter, I develop a framework for approaching filmic artifacts using the ACE framework. I began by providing a detailed synopsis of the film, My Name is Khan (MNIK), which is used as an exemplar for the majority of the process that follows. Next, I introduce mode as a unit of analysis that allows me to approach the complexity of multimodal artifacts with a semblance of order. I step through detailed explanations that show how the key modes of text, imagery, and narrative are conceptualized in this framework. Text functions as a contextualized expression of both spoken and written text, seldom neutral, always socially constructed. Imagery expands the visual spectrum to include recognition of the discursive dialogues embedded within
visual phenomena. Finally, narrative demonstrates how the juxtaposition of primary and secondary narratives can provide for important critical discussions.

Prior to the actual analysis, an analytic focus is selected as a thematic lens in order to address specific issues important in social justice scholarship. For the analysis of MNIK, the analytic foci of race and disability were selected. The identification of montages and discourse streams are key to a thorough analysis: both highlight the construction, organization, and manipulation of sequences within a film which function to support different discursive strategies. Through interrogation of a key discourse stream I label civil rights, we see how disjunctures and juxtapositions in discourse reveal secondary narratives.

Finally, in the post analysis we turn to the reflective process, directing the interpreter to examine the intersection of their world view and the film. The post analysis is guided by considerations of three main themes: (1) discourse, design, and production; (2) positionality; and (3) power relations and social practices. Discourse, design, and production examines the contextual conception of film, its historicity, key players, and influences. The purpose of positionality is to provide space for the interpreter to interrogate the construction of their world view and how it interacts with the interpretive process. Extending this reflective process, the last theme, power relations and social practices, looks at how discourse is used to (re)produce or challenge social assumptions, the status quo, and cultural knowledges. In practice, the process is envisioned as shown in the Figure 17.

In Chapter 3, I will apply this framework to two films that embody the East looking West and West looking East paradigms: Bhaji on the Beach (1991) and The Best Exotic Marigold
Hotel (2001). The Chapter will be structured to present a streamlined application of the ACE framework as it might be articulated in practice.
Figure 16. the ACE Framework

- **Synopsis**
  - Discursive artifact

- **Analysis and Discourse**
  - Analytic Focus 1
    - Primary Narrative(s)
    - Secondary Narrative(s)
  - Analytic Focus 2
    - Primary Narrative(s)
    - Secondary Narrative(s)

- **Post-Analysis**
  - Discourse, design, and production
  - Positionality
  - Power relations and social practice
Chapter 3: ACE in Practice

In the previous Chapter, I developed the components and analytical structure that constitutes the ACE framework. Analysis of the film, MNIK, provided detailed insight into how interrogation into primary and secondary narratives through the lens of an analytic focus can provide for critical discursive engagement with multimodal artifacts. In this Chapter, I provide two exemplars of the ACE framework in action. These exemplars follow the outline developed in Chapter 2 (see Figure 17 below). First, using the analytic focus of gender as a guide, I provide a critical review of the film in question. Next, I interrogate key representations of text, imagery, and narrative to uncover the primary discourse aided by key montages and discursive streams. Making note of disjunctions and problematic juxtapositions in the narrative, I then identify secondary narratives. Finally, in the post-analysis, I contextualize the analysis by examining the context of the film’s production, the influence of my (the interpreter’s) world view, and connections to social practice.

The organization of this Chapter is as follows:

Analytic Focus: Gender

Exemplar I: Bhaji on the Beach (1993)

Exemplar II: The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2012)

Analysis and Discourse

Analytic focus: gender. Important to the selection of gender as the analytic focus is the necessity of being critical of essentializing conceptions that flatten out the multilayered
experience of women and girls. The female experience of gender must be contextualized as it intersects and is influenced by issues ranging from class to sexual orientation. Additionally, the reality of this experience is historically situated and changes over time (even in the life of one individual) and should not be dismissed. In reality, gender is rendered as performance across a continuum regardless of biological considerations. Equally important is to recognize the power in being absent from characterization. In this case, I do not confine gender to issues associated with women because this construction positions men both as above/outside of gendered issues – leaving them as the unspoken standard against which all other is measured. This representation is similar to race studies which exclude white studies – in this situation, whiteness becomes the accepted standard and all others become the difference that must be understood. Even more importantly, this construction belies the fact that men are also affected by issues of gender in their life experiences (Barker, 2008).

Deconstructing gender – unbinding it from simplistic binary considerations – allows for a deeper investigation of available discourses. The idea of a deeper investigation combines with an understanding of the modal complexities offered by film. In constructing a feminist framework for analyzing horror films, Freeland (1996), writes that she pushes past traditional feminist ideology critique that centers a “images of women” approach to include both the contextual elements related to the film (i.e. in what ways do historical precedents for the narrative structure constrain the current artifact) and a “deep interpretive reading” that considers disjunctions and presumptions in the narrative (p. 207). With these considerations in mind, I situate gender as the main analytic focus for the two exemplars presented here. The analysis for each film will identify primary and secondary narratives that interrogate several themes: traditional discourses about the
construction of gendered expectations; the problematic confluence of feminist and lesbian identities; fetishism and the post-colonial imagination; and attitudes toward sexuality.

Exemplar I

Synopsis: Bhaji on the Beach (BotB)

_Bhaji on the Beach_ (BotB) is a 1993 film directed by Gurinder Chadha considered to be the first commercial main stream British Indian film. Chadha, born in Nairobi, Kenya of Indian descent is known for directing films that deal with the experience of British Indians, including the international hit, _Bend it Like Beckham_ (2002). The plot of BotB revolves around the intersecting narratives of nine Indian women who set out from Birmingham on a day trip to the seaside resort area of Bristol. The outing, organized through the Saheli Asian Women’s Group is a chance for the women to get away from the responsibilities and pressures of everyday life.

The opening montage is striking. The god, Rama, backed by thunder and lightning, chastises a middle aged Indian woman, Asha, peppering her with visions of attending to her husband and children. Trying to get away, she stumbles through the detritus of her life as a shopkeeper’s wife: bits of newspaper, candy wrappers, DVDs, and soda cans. Several montages follow – forming a discourse stream of motherhood - showing different women dutifully cleaning, preparing food, and looking after husband and children. In her role as center director, Simi functions as the feminist tent pole for the group (and audience), naming the –isms that plague women and taking a stand – even if no one else on the bus really is buying into the message. Nevertheless, she is resolute: the purpose of this trip is simple: “This is your day – have a female fun time.”
Simi’s character reads as a concession to the audience-at-large who will enter this narrative (a film about women directed by a woman) with pre-conceptions about what will happen and why. Simi’s feminist stance is the recognition of a discourse already in play before the film even starts: eastern women don’t know that they are being discriminated against. This discourse assumes two problematic knowledges: it essentializes the needs and perceptions of all women and it legitimizes women’s rights only as defined through western ideologies (Bulbeck, 1998; Zimmerman, 2014). A westernized audience knows that these Indian women are casualties of a backward patriarchal system that strips them of rights and agency – as defined by western conceptions of equality and modernization. This problematic knowledge is a monolithic discourse that director Chadha both challenges and (re)produces.

Accompanying Simi are four older aunties: Pushpa, Bina, Rehka and Asha. Pushpa and Bina in their saris represent old country tradition, highly judgmental of these young women and their modern attitudes. Rekha, a sophisticated woman from Bombay, has ditched her workaholic husband and is looking forward to seeing a bit more of England. Asha, a shopkeeper’s wife, is experiencing a crisis of faith and confronting the loss of self-precipitated by the demands of being wife and mother. The other women in the film are: Ginder, living in a women’s refuge center with her five year old son, Amrik, is still trying to decide if the ostracism that comes with being granted a divorce from her husband, Ranjit, is worse than being in an abusive relationship. Perfect daughter, Hashida, months away from starting medical school, has just found out that she is pregnant – by the Black guy she’s been secretly dating for a year. And, teenage sisters, Mahdu and Ladhu, are on the prowl for a little romantic adventure away from parental scrutiny.
Situating the main narrative in the resort area of Bristol has important ramifications for understanding the discourses at play. It is a place away from home, which both opens up space for transformation (even temporarily) and reminds us that we always/are parts of social discourse. Transformations are physical (Madhu and Ginder get make overs, changing clothes and make-up) and psychological (Hashida and Ginder make life-changing decisions). As a third space, it operates outside everyday reality and experience. As if to drive this point home, two montages act to sever the women from the perceived insularity and protection of their communities on the drive to Bristol. These breaks are perpetrated by the most obvious threat to any notions of retaining cultural cohesion: young white males. In both instances, a pack of white males break into the women’s space, their actions overtly sexual and threatening. In one, the windows of a passing bus are suddenly plastered by white bottoms as a group of boys moon the women. Then, at a rest station, Simi and Hashida reject propositions by a couple of young white males – a rejection which escalates into taunts and an attack on the women’s bus. Even the characters recognize this break as when (in the penultimate scene) Balbir, Ranjit’s older brother, screams at the women: “Just you wait til we get back!” Yet, while Bristol serves as third space, the women’s narratives seem to skim the surface – more overlay than integration. Their narratives play out in front of larger social discourses (i.e. the racism of the café owner, the socioeconomic pandering to America iconography, the ethnocentrism in the camel race arcade) yet, Chadha declines overt comment. It seems that while Chadha recognizes the larger social context, she wants the audience to stay focused on the specific experiences of these nine women – it is their narrative, on this day, in this place.
On the beaches and boardwalks of Bristol, the narratives of these nine women collide, exposing conflicts – generational, gendered, raced, and cultural – that morph and restructure themselves as the day goes on.

Character list

Simi: organizer, director of the Saheli Asian Women’s Group

Asha, Pushpa, & Bina: matriarchs in the group

Rehka: modern, wealthy woman from Bombay

Ginder: recently divorced, mother of Amrik

Hashida: future med student
Mahdu & Ladhu: teenage sisters

Ranjit: Ginder’s ex-husband, Amrik’s father

Balbir & Manjit: Ranjit’s older and younger brothers

Olliver: Hashida’s Afro-Carribean boyfriend

Wellington: English actor

Analysis and Discourse

Primary narrative. Following Ginder’s primary narrative offers us a stark example of experience marginalized by gendered practices and beliefs. When we meet Ginder, she is living in a women’s refuge and has just received her divorce papers. She is trying to placate her son, Amrik, while dealing with the guilt of isolating him from his father and the world. Next, we see her having a painful conversation on the phone with her mother – seeking some sort of support, she fends off repeated pleas to go back to her husband. When she admits that it is too late – the divorce papers have gone through – her mother hangs up on her.

I describe this discourse stream as sexist for two key reasons: a) the assumption that any fault lies with Ginder (the woman) even if abuse is present; b) the continued expression of “ownership” revealed through comments and actions; c) the assumption that only the men have full rights to make important decisions; and d) the strained confluence of duty (as a positive) and sacrifice (as a negative) as definitive of a woman’s position to family. A critical analysis also reveals the multiple positions and guises gendered discrimination uses: from both men and other women, from young and old.
From other women:

Ginder: [greeting Asha] “Namste aunti ji. How are things?”

Asha: “You should ring your husband sometimes and find out.” [Asha walks away]

…

Bina: [turns to Pushpa] “Should we warn Rashida not to talk to her (Ginder) too much? That Ginder will teach her bad habits.”

Pushpa: “That Ginder…I heard she ran off. Left such a decent family. Took her son – and she even chose the husband.”

…

Hashida: “How are you gonna manage…raising him on your own?”

…

Pushpa: “I hear her husband used to beat her. These modern girls can’t adjust. And those with jobs are worse. Hey, Asha, wake up. You know her in-laws…is it true?”

Asha: “No. She must have done something.”

From men:

Ranjit’s Father: “You must find her. Talk to her. She belongs here…in this house. Bring them both back!”

…
Ranjit: [speaking to Manjit] “Then, one day you’ll realize that she’s changed everything that’s held you up and then she doesn’t need you anymore. And then, baby brother, you’ll going to want to kill her.”

…

Ranjit: [upon finally locating Ginder] “Look, I know you shouldn’t have gone off like that. I forgive you.”

**Secondary narrative (1): gendered male.** A secondary narrative questions the way gender issues are structured as being reflective of women and girls only - as if men are not influenced by hegemonic discourses on what it means to be male. In BotB, the heavy male presence of Ranjit and his brothers could have been a one dimensional characterization of patriarchal representations. Balbir, the oldest brother, is all sneer and swagger, pushing Ranjit to act like a man:

Balbir: “I tell you what’s your problem. Too much brains and not enough balls. Ranjit, he fills in the forms and I drive the trucks but he ain’t nothing special, man is he? Look at him with his fancy cigarettes and degree - they couldn’t keep her. I ain’t the stupid one. I know what I am and I know what to do. And I’ve still got a wife.”
Youngest brother, Manjit, serves as the foil to old world machismo. He is shown being affectionate with his wife and he is the one who tries to steer his brothers away from Ginder in Bristol. This, however, is a perilous position to take.

Manjit: “What the hell did you do? She’s not coming home.” [speaking to Ranjit]

Balbir: “Every time you open your mouth, your wife jumps out!” [Balbir slaps Manjit on the head] “Get in the bloody car.”

…

Manjit: “You know you really piss me off, man.” [he punches Balbir in the stomach and walks off]

In Ranjit, we can identify the presence of a character arc, as we see him shift from browbeaten and impotent to full entitled patriarchal rage and finally to defeat at a system he can’t sustain.

Ranjit: “Can’t I ever be alone in this bloody house??”

Balbir: “Where’s your balls? Everyone is talking?”

Ranjit’s Mom: “I can’t go to the temple anymore – everyone is talking.”

Ranjit: “Please get off my back.” [he sits at the table, head slumped]

Ranjit’s Mom: “Now she wants a divorce. Is this all that is left for me before I die?”
Ranjit: “So what do you want me to do? What do you want me to say?” [he pleads]

A key montage for this secondary narrative occurs under the pier, where Ranjit comes across Amrik who has strayed away from his mother. Ranjit is alone – his brothers off looking for Ginder elsewhere. Although it is still daytime, under the pier is a claustrophobic space, its size broken up and compartmentalized by crisscrossing pillars that break up the space and the light, throwing shadows in unexpected places. It feels eerily prison-like. Hesitantly, Ranjit approaches his son.

Ranjit: “Its daddy. My baby, baby boy. It’s ok. Now, daddy’s never hurt you, has he? You miss me?” [Ginder’s voice is heard in the distance. Ranjit touches foreheads with Amrik] “No, you’re coming with me, ok? Daddy loves you. Yes?”

Amrik cringes and pulls back from his father. Ranjit looks surprised. Hearing Ginder approach, Ranjit tells his son to be quiet before running off and hiding behind a pillar. Cowering behind the pillar, Ranjit looks scared. If we treat Ranjit’s narrative as its own discourse stream – to analyze what it means to be gendered male – then the second and third acts occur in rapid succession.

Ranjit: “Do you know my name’s dirt back home? Listen to me. Everyone says I’m being too soft, do you know that, do you know how that feels?”
Ranjit grabs Amrik and winds up under the pier again. Three groups of observers (the brothers, the other women, and the audience) ring Ranjit and Ginder as he tosses her around.

Ranjit: “What do you think? That makeup and a haircut makes you new?” [he pulls Ginder to her feet by the collar] “Now… who will want you now?” [he throws her to the ground again] “Only me! You’re my wife!”

After a pause, Manjit and Simi manage to pull Ginder and Amrik away from Ranjit who then collapses, sobbing, curling up in the sand.
Balbir: “Whats going on? C’mon man, get the fuck up! Get the fuck up! Mum was right - she’s just bad fucking news.” [he turns to the women] “All these bitches are. We’ve seen ya. Having a great fucking time without your husbands. Just you wait til we get back. Seaside trip my ass.” [to Ranjit] “Well you fucked up good and proper, aye? You shoulda smacked her so she’d never go away again.”

In the end, Ranjit’s narrative provides a more complex interrogation of gendered oppression, demonstrating how identity performance intersects with hegemonic discourses in practice, how individuals exhibit agency when responding to social expectations, and how power remains an unstable, contestable entity.

**Secondary narrative (2): the feminist/lesbian connection.** A key montage early in the film is the final gathering of women on the bus in Birmingham. Several of the aunties settle in, chatting quietly to one another. The young sisters, Madhu and Ladhu, claim the space at the rear of the bus, garnering displeased looks from the aunties as they jump around on the seats. Hashida sits quietly next to Rehka and Ginder holds Amrik tightly in a seat close to the door. Simi’s greeting is exuberant:

Simi: “Hello sisters…One more thing. It is not often that we women get away from the patriarchal demands made on us in our daily lives.” [Ginder frowns and looks down, Bina frowns and glances over at Pushpa]
Simi: “Struggling between the double yoke of racism and sexism that we bear.” [Asha and Pushpa exchange annoyed looks and shake their heads]

Simi: “This is your day – have a female fun time!”

The montage does two things: it establishes Simi as the resident voice of feminism and it marks a possible divide among the women of just what their issues are about – and who gets to name those issues. What I find most interesting about this montage in connection with the stream of images we encounter with Simi is a quiet disconnection: Simi (our feminist) is the only female character who does not at any point in the film receive positive male attention – nor is a connection between her and any male made known. Taken alone, this characterization could either be coincidental or a strategy to keep her centered as a leader among the women – Simi often presents as the voice of reason. However, critiqued as a possible secondary narrative, another discourse is possible - as strengthened by the following conversation between Asha and Wellington, the charming English actor she meets on the beach:

Asha: “Your wife must be so lucky. You bring her to lovely places like this.”

Wellington: “Ah, well. Tragedy struck last year, I’m afraid. My dear wife, god bless her…”

Asha: “I’m sorry, she passed away?”

Wellington: “No, she turned feminist and ran off with her agent, Mandy”.

The implication here is that Wellington’s wife, the new feminist, left her marriage and ran off with her female lover, Mandy. The inference then becomes one of feminist to lesbian – with all the concomitant negative associations and assumptions embedded in both of those discourses (Rudman & Fairchild, 2007; Swim, Ferguson & Hyers, 1999). As a result, this becomes a narrative implication that effectively works against the empowerment for women message intended by the film – or quietly delineates which women (heterosexual) are to be empowered.

**Secondary narrative (3): fetishizing the orient.** Staying with the narrative stream constructed around Asha and Wellington, we should also examine the nature of their attraction to each other. For Asha, this is more transparent: Wellington is attentive, charming, and interested in her – qualities not exhibited by her husband or found in her daily life. He represents another reality, the possibility of another kind of life for Asha. Yet, despite a lovely dream sequence of the two of them running through gardens and flirting in an observatory, she is fully aware of the delusion: at the end of the sequence, Wellington’s temporarily brown face dissolves revealing the pale skin beneath. In addition to marking the end of the daydream, this might also represent Asha’s feelings that what she is looking for is not possible with an Indian husband – a brown face.

Wellington’s attraction to Asha is also complicated but he may not be as cognizant of its genesis. In a small boardwalk theater, Wellington strokes Asha’s face, lost in memory:
Wellington: “…opera, world premieres, classics. That was our culture before the war. Now, it breaks my heart…look what we’ve become. Not like you. You’ve kept hold of your traditions: proud, exotic, fascinating, gentle, exquisite and beautiful.”

Figure 19. Asha is rescued from a daydream by Wellington.

Wellington longs for a time gone by – a time of opulence and high culture – before the war. It is significant here to understand the context of that particular timeframe. The end of World War II in 1945 ushered in a period of intense decolonization by Britain, reflecting an ideological “aversion to imperialism” by the ruling Labour Party (Morgan, 1985, p. 234) and global shifts in discourses on imperialism (Strang, 1990). The first major move made after the war was granting independence to India in 1947. As one of Britain’s main colonial outposts, Indian culture would have felt familiar to Wellington. As such, Asha becomes a representation of imperial superiority - a fetishism of the Orient, experienced as nostalgia about the native-as-
exotic Other, an ahistorical phenomena (Ciecko, 1999). Hidden in this fetishism is a power dynamic of the one who gets to covet and the one who is coveted – this is no equal relationship. As in the preceding example with Simi, I offer another montage to strengthen this observation. At the end of the film, we watch the bus weave its way through the neon wilderness of Bristol at night. Briefly, the camera touches on each of the women and we share their view. As Asha leans her head on the window, the bus slowly passes Wellington standing on a corner. He is smiling and his gestures are extravagant. His audience: two attentive brown skinned women wearing hijabs. Gliding by, Asha smiles and slowly shakes her head. The fetishism of a monolithic Orient continues for Wellington.

**Post Analysis**

*Discourse, design and production.*

I don’t think I realized how groundbreaking it was at the time. It’s only in retrospect that I realise it still remains one of the very few British cinema films written and directed by South Asian women with a virtually all-South Asian female cast. And it’s pretty sad that hasn’t been repeated enough since. (Meera Syal⁹)

The quote above is from an interview conducted with Meera Syal, the screenwriter for BotB, on the 20th anniversary of the film. Like director Chadha, Syal’s previous works are reflective of her personal history negotiating identity in multicultural Britain. In particular, her

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debut novel, *Anita and Me* (1997) – which was made into a film in 2002 - is semi-autobiographical and reflects some of the confusion she experienced growing up as the only Indian child in a small rural community. Before helming *BotB*, Chadha had developed a reputation for developing TV programs that looked at the Asian experience of living in England, including *I’m British but...* (1989) which explored the topics of identity and belonging among young British Asians. In the same interview, Syal comments that she was surprised at the positive reception she received from Channel 4 Film (about BotB) but said the timing was right since the production company had recently adopted a mandate “to give voice to those sections of British society who had been largely ignored by the mainstream channels.”

Although *BotB* received almost universal praise from reviewers as a ground breaking film that looked at the complexities of identity and modernization among British Asian women, it premiered to very little general public comment. However, this absence does not factor in the reaction in British Asian communities at its premier in England. Considered to be an attack on conservative Indian values, the film was denounced in some circles and picketed in a few cities. Both Chadha and Nyal are part of the first generation of British Asian film-makers who decided to address issues like migration, culture, and identity. In the years since, the debut film has largely been overshadowed by Chadha’s award winning film, *Bend it like Beckham* (2002), which dealt with similar themes but with a more international cast.

**Positionality.**

I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the west on the other, characterize a
sizable extent of western feminist work on women in the third world. (Mohanty, 1988, p. 63)

Although I critique in the synopsis an artificial application of a westernized feminist discourse, I will admit my culpability in the (re)production. My analysis of the primary narrative focused on Ginder’s precarious status as a woman torn between claiming freedom from her abusive husband and submitting to cultural ostracization for her decision. While there still exist tensions in western society about the family responsibilities of women in abusive relationships, the scope of that responsibility is generally confined within the scope of a nuclear family. My American sensibilities\textsuperscript{10} tend to get caught in the first consideration – freedom from an abusive husband – without deep concern about the second, ostracization. Yet, what I dismiss is caught by Oscar’s father when he remarks that marrying Hashida means marrying her family, too. My perception is further exacerbated by my own history in a nuclear family disconnected and isolated from extended family. My world view limits how I interpret the factors that are important in Ginder’s decision.

As a direct result of tensions I felt in the analysis of the primary narrative, specifically acquiescing to western-centric notions of women’s rights and my construction of the impact of gender on characters in the film, I felt drawn to explore the secondary narrative which extended gender to include the male performance. Most reviews of the film mentioned the loutish behavior

\textsuperscript{10} I hesitate to use this phrase but find it the least complicated for the purpose here. Suffice to say that this construction of my American sensibilities balances both the inadequacy of a monolithic “American” anything and the fact that I, as someone born and raised in America, nevertheless may share many world views with my fellow female citizens.
of the males in the film almost as an afterthought – so concentrated where they paying homage to this story about women. Yet, there was a need to challenge gender as a woman-only construction in order to bring it back into the mainstream. As West and Zimmerman (1987) write, “the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men” and only by challenging narrow constructions of the concept are we able to fully address related issues (p. 126). Interrogating the very visual battle Ranjit has between competing identity performances reveals the hegemonic constructs of both male and female identities. We then recognize that both Ginder and Ranjit are in contestation with sociocultural constraints that influence their decisions about their relationship.

**Power relations and social practices.**

Oppression also happens because individuals act strategically to achieve certain objectives within (or with) the ingroup. (Postmes & Smith, 2009, p. 774)

In BotB, one montage in particular provides a poignant example of how our orientation to discourses of power and race become problematic and express themselves in social practice. Pushpa and Bina sit down in a café to enjoy some lunch. They order coffee. Pulling tins from their bags, their table is soon covered by homemade delicacies that they share as they talk – completely oblivious to the disapproving stares of a white woman nearby. Glancing up, Pushpa notices Hashida who has come in and sat down at another table: “This country has cost us our children,” Bina tsks. The shopkeeper notices the food laid out in front of the two ladies.
Shopkeeper: “Excuse me, if it’s a take away you want, the Khyber Pass is round the corner. This is strictly English food in here. Understand? Bloody heathens.”

Bina: [points to Hashida] “No shame.”

Shopkeeper: [speaking to other customer] “They want to get back to where they come from.”

Pushpa: “We should never have come to this country.”

Shopkeeper: They breed like rabbits.

Pushpa: “If the baby dies it will be a blessing for everyone. Thank god I never had a daughter. What for? To curse me like this?”

Hashida: [storms over to the table] “Anything else?”

Pushpa: “You whore!”

Hashida: “Fuck you.” [throws coffee on Pushpa; steps over to the counter, knocks down utensils] “And you, fuck off, too!” [said to shopkeeper].

The discursive juxtaposition here is between the racism of the majority and the sexism of the marginalized. The racist discourse is almost expected – these women present as too different not to be confronted for that difference at some point as they traverse this space. The shopkeeper’s comments open space for the narrative to tackle the discourse of race that has quietly followed the women throughout the film. However, instead of causing concern or reflection this knowledge that racist comments are to be expected actually serves to dilute its
presence and provide a tacit legitimization. This is reflected clearly in the fact that neither Pushpa nor Bina react, respond, or even acknowledge that the shopkeeper’s words are directed at them. If the objects of the racist practices dismiss the discourse, how do we, the audience, take up the cause? Instead, all of their attention is focused on Hashida – she exists within the sphere of their ability to judge, control, and censure – and results in oppressive actions that work to preserve a perceived status quo (Postmes & Smith, 2009). Focused on Pushpa, the locus of power shifts from the shopkeeper to her – until Hashida responds angrily. It is telling that she includes both Pushpa and the shopkeeper in the same outrage, effectively marking both discourses as equally oppressive. Coming about halfway through the film, this montage reminds us that: a) although racism is a secondary discourse here, it has not been forgotten; b) oppressive attitudes and practices are neither monolithic nor contained within static power formations; and c) generational differences (i.e. native versus non-native) create shifts in experience and power.

Exemplar II

Synopsis: The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (BEMH)

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel is a 2012 film, directed by John Madden (who also directed the Academy Award winning film, Shakespeare in Love in 1998) that examines the complexities of growing older without losing purpose, place or joy. The film follows seven British pensioners struggling with the realities of financing retirement as they give up on making a go of it in England and turn to India for a low cost alternative. England is gray, cold and indifferent to their needs, positioned to push them immediately into the role of the old and enfeebled. Rejecting that role, one by one they set their sights on the Best Exotic Marigold Hotel
for the Elderly and Beautiful, resplendent and palatial in the brochure, set in the outskirts of Jaipur.

In quick secession, we meet the main cast: Evelyn has found herself at loose ends after the unexpected death of her husband leaves her struggling to cover his debts and suddenly independent for the first time in her life; Graham, a High Court judge, has finally cut himself loose from a prosperous and respected life - surrendering to the siren call of a long lost love he abandoned in India; Douglas and Jean, in a marriage held together by old habits and resentment, have just lost their retirement funds after investing in their daughter’s latest business; Muriel, reluctantly, has come to accept that the only way she can afford the hip surgery she desperately needs is to get it done in India; Norman, a fading lothario, is looking for love in order to restore his feelings of use and vitality; Madge, unwilling to settle into the invisible role of grandmother, is looking for love and excitement - and possibly, husband number four.

Together, the seven converge on The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel for the Elderly and Beautiful where the optimistic young owner, Sonny, is trying a new business plan: outsourcing old age “not just to England but other countries where they don’t like old people”. However, Sonny, the third brother in a proud Indian family with two older, successful brothers, has not quite been able to realize his dream, yet. To add to the situation, Sonny can’t seem to secure the financing he needs to upgrade the hotel and faces increasing pressure from his mother to sell. The hotel has promise - but it turns out to be not quite what the group expects.

Everyone soon finds a path in this exotic new space – even if it’s just a rendition of previous behaviors. Evelyn and Douglas embrace the possibilities, enjoying new sights and sounds while discovering new joys and fortitude. Together, they assist Graham in a bittersweet
attempt to rewind the clock to a time before a forbidden love was snatched away from him, changing his life forever. Norman and Madge recreate old patterns, ordering the same drinks, recycling the same pickup lines, in the quest for a new love to make them feel wanted and youthful again. Meanwhile, Jean is stewing in bitterness, angry at her husband and her lot in life, and unwilling to allow anyone close to her to be happy, either. Her fruitless attraction to Graham and the growing comradery between Evelyn and Douglas prove to be the last straw. Watching them all is Muriel for whom an early betrayal cost her the only family she ever knew, fueling virulently racist attitudes she now has to confront as she puts her life into the hands of her Indian doctor.

![Figure 20. Waiting at the airport after a missed connection to Jaipur.](image)

As the seven arrive in India, the scene is chaotic and a bit claustrophobic: the roadways are clogged with traffic, with buses and tuktuks vying for a few precious inches of passing room; people are everywhere - hanging off the roofs of trains and clotting the sidewalks; walls, flowers,
and clothes scream with vibrant colors and the air mingles the smells of food vendors and exhaust. In the midst of this cacophonous moment, the group passes, helped out by patient, hospitable Indians. The vision of the empowered and independent elderly is strong and facilitated by the general ease with which this group manages in India. In fact, India becomes less of a destination than a flattened background metaphor for new beginnings as most of the local culture is reduced to well-worn tropes reflecting orientalist discourses about India (Said, 1979). In the end, BEMH fails to avoid what Sandhu calls “the clichés of poverty and spiritualism, chaos and capitalism” (2012, subheading): the food is too spicy; the colors too bright; temples too impressive; streets too noisy and crowded; the poor are too wise; the merchants too intent on making money; and the people too optimistic.

Figure 21. Evelyn navigates the markets of Jaipur.

Character List

Evelyn: recently widowed housewife
Graham: recently retired judge, grew up in India

Douglas & Jean: married couple

Muriel: retired housekeeper in need of hip replacement

Norman: aging lothario looking to be young again

Madge: on the search for a new husband

Sonny: young manager/owner of the hotel

Sunaina: Sonny’s girlfriend

Mamaji: Sonny’s mother

Manoj: Graham’s boyhood love interest

**Analysis and Discourse**

**Primary narrative.** Bracketed within an overall narrative that seeks to portray the elderly as vibrant, enthusiastic, and capable, sex is (of course) part of the tableau. Sex among the elderly is often a hidden discourse linked closely with medical concerns and caretaker attitudes – in fact, in a general search on the subject of sex and the elderly, almost all of the articles are in medical journals (Malatesta, et.al., 1988; Travis, 1987). Yet, the fact that we are witnessing a population with a steadily increasing lifespan and a growing population over 60 invites a critique of these old discourses (and fuels the success of the original BEMH and its recent sequel).

Hodson and Skeen (1994) comment about the dearth of research on sexually active elders, writing:
Not only are elders’ attitudes toward sexuality more open than expected, but the actual sexual behavior characteristic of elders does not match the myth of “nothingness” accepted by so many in Western society. The perception of geriatric lovemaking as a rare, astonishing, or ridiculous event is far from reality. (p. 223)

The film treats the subject along a continuum: Graham’s chaste love; the hint of a burgeoning attraction between Evelyn and Douglas; Norman’s perusal of the Kama Sutra prior to a night out. Old discourses of nonsexual geriatrics are challenged through a relatively benign portrayal of what – in a younger cast – would be considered normal flirtations and experiences. The burgeoning relationships are subdued and handled maturely; sex (and the possibility of) is accompanied by a bumbling, adolescent wink-wink as Norman gets the girl in the end.

Figure 22. Norman and Carol build a relationship.
**Secondary narrative (1): sexuality.** If we juxtapose the goals and narrative arcs of Madge and Norman, the secondary narrative is revealed. Each character is in search of a love interest and the film treats them with a mix of humor and pathos. Each character is introduced in a montage that highlights their relationship to the pursuit of sex/love and cleanly situates them within specific discourses delineated by gender. We meet Norman first, sitting across from a young blond woman. He is an eager participant at a speed-dating event in a bar.

Judith: “I’m sorry…but on the form, they asked for our age brackets and the age we wanted to meet. And in both cases I ticked 25 – 39…”

Norman: “That’s right. So did I.”

Judith: “And how old are you?”

Norman: “Early 40’s…”

Judith: “You mean you were born in the early 40’s?”


When we meet Madge she is in full escape mode, dodging the clutching fingers of her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. She has turned down their offer to babysit once again and has packed her suitcase. The adults doubt her sanity but the children may have more insight.
Madge: [saying goodbye to her grandchildren] “It’s tempting, darlings…but you know why I have to leave.”

Grandchildren: “We know. Being here is stopping her finding a husband.”

Son-in-Law: “Another one?... How many husbands have you had anyway?”

Madge: “Including my own?”

Norman’s narrative is about regaining his sexual prowess, not about a relationship or family. It is a male discourse equating manhood and sexual virility. The two key montages in this discourse stream – the beginning and the climax (pun intended) – are both accompanied by an urban soundtrack. An uncredited rap song plays over the speed dating scene. Later, Norman enjoys an energetic, post-Viagra outdoor shower, while a cover of Chic’s 1978 hit, Le Freak, thumps in the background. Pulling on provenance, can we make a connection to discourses about this genre of music and the culture it is supposed to represent? We could say the music is employed to create a more youthful ambiance surrounding Norman’s quest. Or we might recognize a connection that relates urban music to American Black culture which in turn suggests connections to historical discourses on Black hyper-sexuality (Staples, 1982; Weinberg & Williams, 1988). The score appropriates a subconscious social knowledge about Black sexuality to emphasize and give power to Norman’s quest for vitality.

On the other hand, Madge’s narrative is gendered stereotypically female– she is looking for a(nother) husband. The new husband needs to be a man of position and he needs to be wealthy. Madge’s first destination in Jaipur is the Viceroy Club whose membership fee of
120,000 rupees cuts deeply into her retirement savings. Her initial inquiry – “Would there be any wealthy single men in this evening?” – leads her directly to…Norman, masquerading as an English Lord. In the end, Madge succeeds in setting Norman up with a lonely English woman born in India. Despite her singular determination, Madge’s narrative arc effectively ends there: she finds no husband and apparently there is no alternative available, either. Norman, on the other hand, regains his vitality quite successfully and finds happiness in a surprising relationship.

The critique of these gendered discourses on sexuality expresses itself in two reactions: we laugh along with Norman as he waits in a clinic surrounded by women to get a prescription for Viagra yet tsk tsk judgingly at Madge for being a gold-digger. BEMH may set itself up to challenge dismissive notions about the topic of sexuality and the elderly but it does so clearly within gendered paradigms which (re)produce known discourses on how men and women relate to sexuality.

Figure 23. Madge at the Viceroy Club.
Secondary narrative (2): homosexuality. At the opposite end of the spectrum from Norman’s fruitful quest for sexual companionship, Graham’s emotional longing for a love he lost at eighteen remains chaste and thwarted. As young men living in the same household, Graham and Manoj, had a brief affair before public disclosure drove Manoj away and sent Graham to school in England.

Graham: [showing Evelyn old photos] “It was a big house, we had servants. Oh, um, we knew them, their wives and children. And, one of the boys, Manoj, he um became my friend. We played cricket together.”

Graham: “It was bad enough for me but I knew who I was and I think my family guessed. But for Manoj the disgrace was absolute. His father was fired, his family was sent away…all of them. I don’t know what I could have done but it should have been more than nothing. I just let it happen. I didn’t put up any kind of fight.”

In a progressive product like BEMH, the fact that Graham’s lost love was a man should open space for discourses on homosexuality framed by different cultural influences as well as changes in attitudes over time. Instead, the discourse appears to be hobbled by a problematic political correctness. Although, we are given the impression that Graham’s life has somehow been diminished by the loss of Manoj, it is difficult to qualify this impact. Graham is highly successful and well-respected. This trip is his first back to India although he obviously has had the means to return at any time. We are even led to assume he had a love life in England:
Graham: [to Muriel] “I’m gay. Ah, nowadays more in theory than in practice.”

Once in India, he visits his old neighborhood, expecting to find news of Manoj. However, the old neighborhood is gone and Manoj nowhere to be found. Over the next few weeks, while he continues the search, Graham slowly reveals his situation to the others. Thankfully (among this group of conservative, WWII baby boomers), the only problematic reaction comes from Jean, who was nursing a hopeful crush on the judge.

This lack of reaction intends an acceptance and legitimacy of Graham’s homosexuality that, while perhaps politically correct, feels superficial and disingenuous. The meaning of Graham’s lost love becomes truncated by history, disconnected from any larger discourses, and effectively sanitized. There is a narrative reversal: while the others are exploring new relationships and sexuality, Graham is no longer engaged with either activity. Graham finds
Manoj, who is happily married with an understanding wife who knows their whole history.

Then, hours after their reunion – just in case prevailing discourses on homosexuals as problematic become uncomfortably juxtaposed against positive feelings for Graham’s situation - his character dies. It’s a beautiful scene that would be even more powerful as a progressive discourse if it didn’t also serve as a symbol of the ultimate punishment for Graham’s homosexuality - death. Yet, once again, the narrative rolls on without discussion.

Hijacking this discourse is incongruous with the overall narrative tone of the film which seeks to challenge preconceived notions. Just as the narrative complicates notions of sexuality among the elderly, Graham’s homosexuality offers the opportunity to interrogate generational perceptions and constructions of non-heterosexual relations and identities. In the end, homosexuality becomes almost a moot point and Graham’s story would have been just as tragic if the relationship was heteronormative. By not interrogating the discourses surrounding homosexuality (positive and/or negative), the narrative effectively legitimizes problematic discourses on the subject.

Post Analysis

Discourse, design and production. BEMH was credited for employing a stellar, award winning cast to not only challenge tired assumptions about the lives of older adults but also to shine a spotlight on the precarious situation of the elderly in England. Months prior to the film’s release, the Equality and Human Rights Commission released the initial results of its yearlong inquiry into the state of elderly care in England. The report, replete with personal stories and anecdotes, uncovered systemic problems of abuse, misrepresentation, and fraud across home based care and support organizations (2011). Perhaps as a result of increased awareness, BEMH
was a surprise hit (considering its reliance on an older cast) and a sequel was released in 2015 which continues the narrative with a more international cast. In interviews, many of the original film’s stars (whose actual ages range from 63 to 80) spoke out about their concerns over the social expectations and treatment of the elderly. In an interview, Dame Judi Dench remarked: “We’re not good at dealing with old age in this country. We shove people in a room and leave them sitting round a television.” This juxtaposition of the real and surreal as real life concerns are mirrored onscreen create an effective discursive product tied into a specific historical context.

Further evidence that BEMH was primed to capitalize on current sentiment and deliver a message is provided by examining Participant Media, the American production company behind the film. Founded by Jeff Skoll, a former eBay executive, Participant Media was established in 2004 as a vehicle to support films with a strong social relevance and has earned a reputation for producing controversial and award winning films. While announcing the launch of a division that would focus on television programming, Skoll explained that “The goal of Participant is to tell stories that serve as catalysts for social change.”

**Positionality.** The stereotype of the ugly American is not without truth. Navigating the streets of Japan, I felt truly American for the first time in my life. Moving in that space with white Americans also quickly disabused me of any notion that there was a universal American expat. Perhaps it was my personal experience navigating American culture as an Other that made me hyper aware of how I claimed space and place in a foreign land. Unlike my white colleagues, I had no history of privilege upon which to construct my interactions. Even the designation of

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11 Interview, The Telegraph, 2012, Feb 14
12 Interview, Forbes, 2012
“American” which can often give you a gloss of privilege in non-American spaces was virtually lost to me – muddied by negative discourses on Blacks in America. Unlike Muriel, I didn’t stuff my suitcase with treats from back home. Instead, I started preparing months before the move – an effort to reduce an Otherness I just naturally assumed would apply to me. Naturally, I wondered how the pensioners in BEMH would navigate issues of space and place in Jaipur.

One discourse stream that highlights this concern is provided if we follow Muriel’s narrative. Muriel, the group’s resident xenophobe, undergoes what appears to be a complete reconstruction of her worldview. She begins the film spewing virulently racist comments about Blacks and Indians to anyone (white) who will listen. The only direct rebuttals to Muriel’s outbursts are provided by other white characters. In one scene, in response to Muriel’s demands to be attended to by an “English doctor”, a white nurse apparently teaches her a lesson by bringing (we can only assume) a British born Indian doctor. In another scene, as she is being wheeled out of the hospital by a white male attendant, Muriel reveals her knowledge about India:

“You know who’ll be there? Indians, loads of ‘em. Brown faces and black hearts. Reeking of curry. And you never see one on their own, do you? I mean, they always move in packs. Makes it easier to rob you blind, cut your throat.”

Although her need for India is greater than its need for her, Muriel nevertheless retains a position of dominance, initially remaining outspoken and resolute. About halfway, through the film Muriel makes a connection that acts to set up her attitudinal reversal: she is befriended by a
servant girl who (as Graham explains) is also an untouchable\textsuperscript{13}. This pseudo relationship mainly exists to usher in a cathartic moment for Muriel who is finally able to cast off unsettled feelings of anger and abandonment from her own days “in service.” Once this moment is realized, the servant girl – having served her purpose of restoring psychological stability to a white protagonist ala the Magic Negro (Hughey, 2009) – disappears. Muriel’s narrative concludes by having her assume the position of savior – of Sonny’s relationship with Sunaina and hopes of securing funding for the hotel, as well as actual management of the hotel itself. Muriel represents the rational west (with her practical business sense) rescuing the emotional east (Sonny has passion but little else). BEMH never explains how Muriel overcomes her racist attitude – leaving it to the audience to subsume it uncritically with her memories of being fired from service.

\textbf{Power relations and social practices.}

Sonny: “In India we have a saying…everything will be alright in the end. So if it is not alright, it is not yet the end.”

Sonny’s oft quoted sentiment is played as a reflection of his good natured optimism. However, it also reflects a capricious attitude on life: Sonny is relying on some undefined outside

\textsuperscript{13} Untouchable (as defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica): also called Dalit, officially Scheduled Caste, formerly Harijan, in traditional Indian society, the former name for any member of a wide range of low-caste Hindu groups and any person outside the caste system. For discussions on historical and contemporary contexts, please see Mendelsohn, O., & Vicziany, M. (1998). \textit{The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India} (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press; Bayly, S. (2001). \textit{Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age} (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.
force to make things turn out alright in the end – not his own skills. Do we take this charming, dreamy depiction of Sonny as completely unproblematic or symptomatic of a more complicated form of a benign post-colonial (re)imagination?

Instead of bringing discursive depth in direct relation to the India being inhabited by the current narrative, BEMH instead plays safe within well-worn conventions – knowledges – about India. The three main Indian characters could have just as easily been given uncomplicated place names: Sonny, the child-like daydreamer; Sunaina, the eastern temptress; Mamaji, the tradition-bound mother. Problematic discourses (like discrimination or personal freedom) are quickly resolved by the British. The ease with which the pensioners assume the mantle of privilege (functionally resisting being marked as Others themselves all the while claiming the right of space and place) rests within the monolithic discourses of orientalism and post-colonialism.

Orientalism refers to the ongoing construction of a discourse that frames and delimits the way we relate to and represent a monolithic Orient (Said, 1979). It is an imperialist discourse that seeks to define, categorize and explain a man-made geographical region defined as much by its perceived opposition to a western culture as its ability to be conceived as such by others. Ronald Inden (1986) takes the suppositions posited by Said on orientalism and re-centers the dialogue on India14, fully cognizant of the historical implications of British rule on phenomena as diverse as the caste system, scholarly research, and relations between Indians and Pakistanis. The influence of this orientalist discourse on the British cultural psyche influence the way the characters in

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14 Although India is indeed a part of the monolithic construction of the Orient, Said’s work in Orientalism centers the Middle East as the primary focus.
BEMH inhabit and relate to being in India, how the Indian people are (re)presented, and how we encounter the Indian landscape.

In the same article, Inden references an analysis of the American movie, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) to illustrate how the public is educated about the Other. Where that movie is seen as a projection of US foreign policy, I contend that BEMH represents a ‘family reunion’ motif for British/Indian relations. As examples, we have two characters who represent a shared history and a cultural commonality with their Indian counterparts (extending the definition of native): Graham was raised (and dies) in India and the country still holds his most precious memories, while Carol was born and raised in India. Additionally, we see how Evelyn and (even) Muriel seamlessly integrate into social roles which seem tailor-made for them: Evelyn teaches Indian call center workers how to speak to elderly British customers and Muriel, unlike Sonny, is able to competently manage the hotel. Even the overall theme of retiring in India has the feeling of returning home. The post-colonial reality (for the film) is one big happy family. Under the auspices of this ‘one big family’ discourse, we don’t get to see the pensioners Othered in this (supposedly) non-British space. In fact, as the British characters assume roles and claim space in their new home, we actually witness them displacing Indian characters – in effect, Othering the native Indian in their own homeland.

**Conclusion**

With the exemplars presented in this Chapter, I have provided a clear articulation of the ACE framework, endeavoring to demonstrate how it is used to guide not only a rich, multi-layered critical analysis but also how it uncovers the connections between discourse, the individual, and social practice. In the next Chapter, I attend to concerns that might arise in a
critique of the ACE framework – in particular, the areas of discourse, intentionality, and positionality.
Chapter 4: Critiquing the ACE Framework

In the preceding Chapters, I have endeavored to present a clear articulation of the development and practice of the Active Critical Engagement (ACE) framework. It is a direct reflection of my interest in how individuals mediate self through their interactions with social products and contribute to social practice. The research rests on the suppositions that engaging with social products like film contribute to the way we construct identities and relations to others and ourselves. In the moment of consumption, we have an opportunity to interrogate the interpretation of this experience. When reimagined as a critical orientation, this interrogation becomes an active pursuit that challenges hegemonic conditioning and creates transformative possibilities.

Nevertheless, I recognize possible critiques of the way I have structured the ACE framework and work in this Chapter to address key concerns. In particular, I will address two key areas: discourse and positionality. In section 1, Discourse and Critique, I address the way discourse is imagined and structured in traditional CDA, making space for extensions beyond sociolinguistic parameters and static artifacts. I present two examples of research that highlight the interdisciplinary promise of CDA. Next, I expand on my conceptualization of discourse and introduce the concept of an immersive interpretive experience. Finally, I turn to cultural studies to address concerns about the centrality of film and other pop culture artifacts in social justice studies. In section 2, Positionality and the Western Gaze, I consider questions of cross-cultural border crossings, subjectivity, and constructions of the Other. I begin by centering the experience as the key frame of reference. I then move on to tackle a deconstruction of the discursive...
construct embodied by the Western gaze, considering new orientations to binary constructions of east/west, shifting subjectivities and the transnational perspective. Finally, I use these perspectives to imagine my ideal interpreter. Through these efforts to address key concerns scholars may have about the ACE framework, it is my intention to stimulate dialogue, challenge dogmatic constructions, and make room for transformative practices.

**Section 1: Discourse and Critique**

In “Representations of Middle Age in Comedy Film: A Critical Discourse Analysis”, Gatling, Mills, and Lindsey (2014) identify a list of themes that construct the discourse of “middle age.” They do this through an application of dispositive analysis and Foucault’s approach to bricolage that enables them to make connections among disparate elements that structure a problematic discourse surrounding “middle age” (p. 3). In the dispositive analysis approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), discourse is expanded through a constellation of linguistic practices (text and talk) and “non-linguistic elements of non-discursive practices (actions) and materializations (objects)” to enrich meaning beyond text or language alone15 (p. 3). The bricolage approach supports the action of sifting through “a wide range of things” to identify phenomena “which have become emblematic in the discourse of middle age” (p. 3). For example, certain narratives are taken-for-granted knowledges about middle age: a man turns 50, dyes his hair, finds a younger wife, and buys a sports car. To operationalize their themes, the authors analyze three films with middle age as a central theme: *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Wild*...
Hogs (2009), and Something’s Gotta Give (2003). Their findings support the supposition that specific discursive themes are (re)produced in a fairly consistent manner to construct a social discourse that situates “middle age” as a time of uncertainty, dissatisfaction, regret, nostalgia, and unhappiness. However, in what I would classify as a secondary narrative, they also find a disjuncture in the narrative – a survey taken among a sample of over-50 adults found mostly benefits from being middle aged (including high confidence, freedom, and better financial stability) (p. 2).

Pimentel and Sawyer (2011) use CDA to interrogate what is considered a transgressive film, Akeelah and the Bee (2006), which follows a young Black girl from southern Los Angeles who becomes determined to win the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Applying the analytic focus of race, the authors critique the positive representation of a smart, hardworking, Black girl who ultimately finds success in a national arena. Four secondary narratives are identified that recognize disjunctions in the presentation and reception of discourses about African-Americans: “… (1) African-American communities represent an academic and social underclass that needs to be rescued; (2) African-American communities are wrought with violence and crime; (3) African-Americans rarely achieve success unless through sports; and (4) successful African-Americans must flee their communities” (p. 100). In support of their conclusions, Pimentel and Sawyer cite relevant text (ESPN on the television), imagery (the dismal streets and denizens of Crenshaw), and narrative (Akeelah’s feeling of difference from the other Blacks in her neighborhood) found throughout the film.

Both of these articles reflect the interdisciplinary prowess of CDA. Gatling, Mills, and Lindsey (2014) are all registered nurses researching how discourses of age and aging are
experienced in relation to humor. Pimentel and Sawyer’s (2011) research positions itself to challenge the idea of a post-racial America – as ushered in by the election of a Black president – to contend that the issue of race still “lurks in unsuspecting places” (p. 100). These examples share three key orientations with the ACE framework: (1) the diversity of positions from which CDA is operationalized; (2) the attention to multimodal modes of accessing discourse; and (3) centering artifacts of popular culture as important phenomena in social research. In the following section, I expand on each of these orientations.

**Orientation toward CDA/MMDA.**

…research in CDA must be multitheoretical and multimethodical, critical and self-reflective (Wodak, 2001 p. 64)

In developing the ACE framework, a prerequisite was to establish my orientation to CDA – in essence, to define what I mean by discourse and how I intend to approach it. I found this necessary considering my conceptualization of ACE as an extension of CDA and multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) – both well-established methodologies. The work of many of the pioneers who established scholarship around discourse analysis is very specifically grounded in the linguistic structuring of written and oral communication (Fairclough, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Dijk, 2003; Wodak, 2001). Their orientations seek understanding of the structures that are used in the production of text and speech, the rules that guide what is said and how, the way these systems are applied in different contexts (i.e. political arenas, family situations), and how practice as implicated in relations of power. MMDA shares the same
theoretical orientation as CDA – to discover discursive practices that perpetuate forms of marginalization and dominance. It expands its focus to include semiotic elements beyond the verbal (i.e. pictures, music, gestures, etc.) in recognition of the multimodality of modern existence (Kress & van Lueewen, 1996, 2001).

CDA shares the same epistemological roots as linguistic analysis – elements from social theory provide the lens through which we see the change in perspective and expansion of scope16. How do changes in discourse effect social change? Fairclough’s work on the interaction of the textual and the social is grounded in linguistic analysis of hegemonic processes that influence discourse construction and expression (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). By analyzing changes in rhetorical structures, we can observe how dominant discourses are (re)produced and social practices are affected. For CDA, hegemony reflects the dialectical relationship between semiosis and social practices. Semiosis is not limited to text but also includes visual elements and body language. Within a diverse social range of overlapping social practices, semiotics is functionalized as new discourses of language, representation and self-identity are constructed. CDA aligns itself with marginalized groups, contesting the way the powerful use “strategies of manipulation, legitimization, the manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence” the thoughts and actions of people (p. 18).

I conceptualize CDA as an analytical approach for several reasons. First, CDA routinely situates itself as an interdisciplinary research approach. This is a direct function of the broad range of disciplinary areas intersected by research into social practices. Social practices often

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manifest in complex webs of relations and formations and it becomes indispensable to include different perspectives. Secondly, critical research into the connection between language production and social structures is not limited to CDA. Other disciplines have been using various ideations of qualitative research methodologies to support their own orientations. Finally, a single method would contest the conceptual elements of CDA that seek to bridge the gap between micro- and macro-levels in society.

My conceptualization of ACE (and by extension, CDA) is strongly influenced by social theory and cultural studies. The correlation of power, ideology, and discourse in the work of Foucault is often cited as an early influence on CDA. His conceptualization of discourse focuses on how knowledge emerges through power relationships to discipline bodies and control social patterns. Unlike Marxist interpretations, power here is not unidirectional and confined to an elite group. Power is multidirectional, shifting as relationships are (re)negotiated through different social practices, histories, and institutions. Structural relations of power discipline bodies through discursive practices that are productive of rules that govern, sanction, and guide behavior. In this manner, power is inscribed on the body. For Foucault, “knowledge is discursive and discursive practices form knowledge” (Denison & Scott-Thomas, 2011). All knowledges are socially constructed and individuals are constitutive of these knowledges. Socially constructed discourses create the systems society uses to form bodies of knowledge. The rules for deciphering that knowledge are reproduced through orders of discourse. It is in this (re)production that social practices are enacted that (re)inscribe problematic knowledges onto Others.

Where the ACE framework may diverge from other methods of MMDA is in its orientation toward discursive narratives as an intertextual bricolage of text, imagery, and
narrative that intersect to construct systematic frames through which a society (re)produces knowledge, relations, and social practices. It takes the idea of hegemony literally - expanding the interrogation of discursive practices and products to privilege the actor involved in the interpretive process. For ACE, it is not enough to be able to recognize problematic components of a discourse. We should also be able to take explicit notice of how that discourse is strengthened and/or contested through its intersection with other discourses and how the individual (and by extension, the community) participates in the (re)production of the discourses through social practices. ACE makes a direct connection between the personal and the social, using popular culture as a familiar format and action about which most individuals already have a comfortable relationship toward. As such, film presents as a bounded, culturally embedded discursive product ripe for critical engagement.

Although ACE features textual representations both aural (i.e. the selection of the name Khan in MNIK) and visual (i.e. how clothing is used to delineate concepts of traditional vs. modernity in BotB), I am concerned with the immersive interpretive experience of discourse. By immersive interpretive experience, I mean the way discourses employ an intertextual web of modes to converge, diverge, strengthen, and weaken each other as they play out in our lives. I also focus on what Mankekar (1993) refers to as the “viewers’ active interaction” – the way that individuals situated in specific sociocultural contexts engage with pop culture and how that interaction influences “their constitution as national and gendered subjects” (p. 543-544). This is reflective of the way we actually experience the interplay of our individualities and the social. As I write this, I am aware of intersecting discourses of woman, sister, scholar, daughter, Black, Southern that continually brush up against one another – complete with collections of text,
imagery, and narrative – that I am constantly (re)negotiating in order to interpret my everyday. My experience is taken in total – it is complex, in flux, messy. Shutting down one of those discourses is disruptive (although sometimes freeing) and reorients the others. Multimodal artifacts reflect the immersive experience of everyday life.

Not only are films multimodal they are also polysemic: there exists the possibility of multiple meanings simply due to the diversity of subjectivities brought to bear. In other words, the experience of the individual in relation to the discourse is paramount. Barker (2008) writes

> We can examine the ways in which texts work, but we cannot simply ‘read-off’ audiences’ meaning production from textual analysis. At the very least, meaning is produced in the interplay between text and reader. Consequently, the moment of consumption is also a moment of meaningful production. (p.11)

The moment of consumption is captured in the immersive interpretive experience and is a key factor of the way the ACE framework seeks to empower and facilitate a critical orientation. ACE moves the locus of critique back into the self-in-relation-to how a particular experience is constructed through discourse instead of in detaching the critique from consumption and meaningful production. By concentrating on the immersive experience, the student becomes interpreter.

**Popular culture and cultural studies.** Although popular culture is no longer quite the anathema it once was in academia, I anticipate there may be questions about centering film as a
core practice of a curriculum. First, let me address the issue of viewing popular culture as a legitimate focus of academic study. Then I will expand on why it is so appropriate for this research. I will argue that cultural studies, with its orientation toward the lived everyday experience and popular culture, allows me to situate film (and other multimodal texts) as a product with legitimate claim to the (re)production of social discourse.

There is an ongoing debate about the legitimacy of popular cultural as a focus of academic study. It has its roots in the artificial divide historically erected between so-called ‘high’ culture and ‘low’ or ‘mass’ culture (Crane, 1994; William, 1981). This division was challenged in earnest by scholars at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham in the 1970’s who began to seriously address the “ordinariness” of culture and “the active, creative, capacity of common people to construct shared meaningful practices” (Barker, 2010, p. 4). Specifically, cultural studies recognizes that popular culture represents a contested field where the forces of hegemony – consent or resistance – are constantly played out. In this anthropological approach, cultural artifacts “do not simply reflect history, they make history and are part of its processes and practices and should, therefore, be studied” for their influence on everyday material practices (Storey, 1996, p. 3).

Re-examining the issue of consumption, Gledhill (1988) saw the relationship between spectator and film as a process of negotiation filtered through the complexity of social positions occupied by the spectator - which could produce acts of either consent or resistance. This reimagining of the spectator was in reaction to the passive, production focused viewer constructed by traditional film studies. Stacey (1994) continued this work, finding that cultural studies provided the lens through which spectators could be reimagined as active, conscious
viewers engaged in the process of meaning making. This orientation to the moment of consumption and the negotiation process frames the experience of viewing a film as an active moment of discursive contestation, re-evaluation, and critique.

The designation of ‘popular culture’ is in itself a reflection of discourses that seek to name that which is legitimate (associated with power) and that which is profane (associated with the masses). Critics of using popular culture in scholarly research ignore social, historical, and technological realities. There is no aspect of society that is not daily enmeshed in productions of popular culture and, thankfully, there are scholars engaging popular culture through a variety of different phenomenon such as television (Fiske, 1992; Lull, 1988), music (Jaffe, 2012; Strong, 2011), and sports (Hall, 1986; Jhally, 1989).

Focusing my attention on popular culture allows me to address several concerns head on:

1) I meet people on real-world terrain, participating in an activity that is at once familiar, personal, and discursively rich.

2) Popular culture recognizes the multimodal, interactive reality of everyday lives in the 21st century.

3) Film is an especially rich medium for discursive interrogation.

In regards to the third item listed above, I refer to a passage in Chapter 1 that I think is worth revisiting here as it is a vivid description of that richness:

Film holds a special place in discursive production as it combines written text, verbal and visual speech, images, aural components, innuendo, allusion, myth-making, subliminal
messages, reading, listening, imagination, deliberate falsification, exaggeration, physical interaction, acts of trust, investments of time and money, emotional commitment, politics, ideologies, culture, power plays, ego manipulation, and the promise of threat…all in a rather neat package with assorted resources (both biological and technical) available to help you (de)contextualize the experience. (Chapter 1, p. 5)

Section 2: Positionality and the Western Gaze

The Western gaze is a discursive construct that critiques the primacy of interpretive strategies based on a Western ontological perspective. The construct critiques a Western-centered interpretation of the Other, recognizing that interpretation as a product of imperialist imaginings, unequal distributions of power, and patterns of domination (Beardsell, 2000; Storey, 1996). From Laura Mulvey’s (1975) seminal article, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema - which described the role of cinema in (re)producing the female image as solely an object of the male gaze, “subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego” - feminist theory has explored the male gaze as an exercise in power that defines women as objects of patriarchal determination (Columpar, 2002; Calogero, 2004; Gaines, 1986). Similarly, post-colonial studies pulls from Said’s writings on orientalism to challenge the authority appropriated by the West to not only speak for the Other but to define the Other in terms of its own gaze. Those who question the Western gaze want to highlight the oppressive stance it takes – choosing to speak for the Other from a position of global legitimacy and in the process delegitimating the ability of the Other to speak for itself. As Said (1978) writes “the Orient is all absence” as the western Other assumes the role of authority (p. 208).
The monolithic presence of western scholarship is implicit in this oppression, as western scholars turn their focus to understanding the Other from within the ontological frameworks that underlie their theoretical and epistemological orientations. We interpret the Other through scholarly lenses based in a very specific sociocultural milieu, which prompts the question: how does my positionality as an American scholar working with ‘Indian’ films affect my analytic orientation and interpretive schemas? In order to address this question, I will first explain why I chose to base this research around this set of films. Then, I will discuss the tension I have with the way the Western gaze is positioned in scholarship – pointing toward a possible deconstruction to defend my desire to decenter the construct all together.

The initial impetus for selecting the films included in this research was a desire to explore the rich discursive landscape of *My Name is Khan* (MNIK). I first encountered the film several years ago in a South Asian Cinema Studies course and was immediately drawn to the intertextuality presented in the narrative. Discussions in class and with colleagues continuously exposed new layers of meaning directly reflective of my own experience and led me to wonder if that experiential knowledge would hold across other similarly situated films. I wanted to know how my relational knowledge about ‘Indian-ness’ would translate across different perspectives and narratives. Several viewings later, my query shifted to wondering how much of my interpretation of this ‘Indian-ness’ was actually a reflection of my previous stores of knowledge about a multitude of social discourses. Eventually, my focus solidified in a new question: How does the constructed performance of self-influence the way I encode knowledge about the Other and interrogate my experience of these films?
**Centering the experience.** My goal is to facilitate a critical orientation. A critical orientation is based on the belief that an active awareness of the individual as (co)constructive and (re)productive of social discourse fosters agency and supports transformative promise. This requires an understanding of the self in relation to the social – specifically dismantling false delineations between the self and the social – by thinking of the self as a subjective social process or a leading activity. The self as a leading activity is a concept that supports the idea that “the self represents a moment in ongoing social activities that is not stored somewhere in the depths of a human soul, but is constantly re-enacted and constructed by individuals anew in the ever-shifting balances of life” (Stetsenko & Arievich, 2004, p. 493). As we interact with social phenomena (a film) we are engaged in a relational process that either confirms or challenges previous knowledges but always presents as (re)manifestations of social practice. In other words, whether we make an active decision to (re)produce or not, we are always re-enacting or constructing new relations and social practices based on these discourses. This concept immerses the self in social activities at the moment of construction. The ACE framework reflects this conceptualization by interrogating that moment when the self engages in a social activity in order to recognize the power and fragility of discourse – and make the connection to social practice. Stetsenko and Arievich write that:

Understanding that people always contribute to social practices, rather than merely participate in or sustain them, places activities that allow individuals to purposefully transform the world at the very core of the self. (p. 494)
I argue that film has the ability to create space for transformation – of self and, through that, social practice- in both its production and reception. In its productive phrase, a film like MNIK reflects the desire of director Johar and star Shah Rukh Khan to challenge constructions of good/evil in post 9/11 America. In its receptive phase, MNIK challenges its audience to engage with assumptions about the world through an Other’s eyes and reflect on that positionality. Facilitating a critical orientation, the ACE framework stresses that moment of reflection by examining the tensions and disjunctions we experience in an analytical process.

In the end, the reason these particular films were selected was more about complicating the discursive interrogation by adding a very visible layer of Otherness than it was about analyzing a notion of ‘Indian-ness.’ MNIK became a social phenomenon that I was actively using to interrogate my construction of self, the Other, and social practice.

**Deconstructing the western gaze.** In the proceeding section, my intent is to make it clear that the selection of these particular films for this research is not a factor in the development of the ACE framework. I could have just as easily used all American films – I provide references to a multitude of films throughout the research. Still the question remains: even if I am not positioning myself as an authority of Indian diasporic film, how do I mitigate against the influence of the oppressive Western gaze in my analysis? In short, I decenter the question by challenging the monolithic binary implied in the conceptualization of the Western gaze, arguing that we are all transcultural, and re-inscribing the individual with the agency to contest oppressive practices.

I, like Chaudhuri (2009), am attempting to expand the discussion “by deconstructing the binary notion of ‘the Western gaze’” and mobilizing a more fluid set of perspectives” for
transnational experiences (p. 8). A binary implies that there are only two possibilities: the west or the Other. The very construction of the binary does several things: it postulates a homogeneous west, gives primacy and normalcy to the west, creates an Other in opposition to the west, and removes the possibility of seeing the west as Other. I am wary of the perspectival flattening required to center the Western gaze. This flattening begins with an artificial heterogeneous construction of the west with implications of an opposite east. In its very construction, the west is primary and the east is only constructed against – positioning imaginations of the east only in reference to the west (i.e. the west is rational therefore the east is mystical). Monolithic constructions of west or east ignore very real social, political, and cultural delineations in the imagined west as well as the “othering of the other of the West” (Spivak & Harasym, 1990, p. 39). Responding to a statement to the effect that India is often positioned to embody the Other in relation to the west, Guyarti Spivak replied: “I think we should also look at the West as differentiated. I’m really not that moved by arguments for the homogenisation on both sides.” (Spivak & Harasym, 1990, p. 39) In the end, such a construct fails to challenge ‘Western’ conceptualizations of a monolithic Orient as the concept replicates its own manufactured homogeneity in opposition.

The primacy given to the west is echoed in the way the Other gets critiqued. Chauduri argues, through an analysis of Deepa Mehta’s award winning film, Water (2005), that accusations of “pandering to the ‘Western’ or ‘white’ audiences” reinforces the legitimacy of Western/white as the norm and reproduces an artificial binary that does not reflect “the cultural heterogeneity and multicultural allegiances of audiences around the world or the codes of representation themselves” (p. 8). Critics of Mehta’s Water accused her of using exoticism to
target western audiences – “its negative portrayal of India, its use of exotic settings and ‘ethnic’ rituals, or its sensational melodramatic narrative” – as if these elements can only be understood in relation to the perceived desires of a western/white audience. In the U.S., ‘Black” movies that focus on troubling issues experienced in Black communities are routinely criticized for “airing dirty laundry,” pandering to white voyeurism, and replicating stereotypes. This critique assumes that: 1) “Black” movies are either only made for ‘white’ audiences or ‘white’ reactions are the most (or only) valuable; 2) there are forbidden avenues for the imagination in ‘Black” cinema (artificial censorship); and 3) fails to address whether the issues portrayed actually exist. This attitude strips the non-western Other of the ability to be imagined as is – free of definition in comparison to (the west). The Other only exists in opposition to the west – which implies a reactive relationship where the Other has to strive for its own identity through the benevolent gaze of the west. I find this to be an unnecessary and problematic relinquishing of power.

Finally, I return to the unchallenged absence in usual constructions of the Other – which obscures the possibility of a western/white imagination of the Other. Too often the traditional construct of the Other equates to non-West/white. I admit to my own struggles in this discourse. One of the tensions in concentrating on social justice issues is the unintentional reification of the populations and issues one researches. I have described Othering as a social phenomenon, enacted by and on individuals and groups, yet squarely defined within larger paradigms of social discourse. That definition in and of itself leaves room to address the absence in usual constructions of the Other. It allows for multiple subjective positions of an Other, in time and space. If we factor in Othering as a manifestation of constantly changing subjectivities influenced by history and place, we are all Othered. I chose the film, The Best Marigold Hotel

(BEMH)), in order to interrogate the idea of the white Other. What I found is interesting: while I initially expected to find the group of English pensioners Othered in India what I found instead was a more concrete representation of their Othering while they were still in England. In India, I felt that colonial legacies of power and privilege operated to challenge any attempts to position them as true Others. Yet, in England, other subjectivities (female, elderly, retired, widowed, gay, poor) enacted on them by the society quite clearly marked them as Other. This same phenomena is seen in the analysis of primary and secondary narratives of gender in *Bhaji on the Beach* (BotB): by expanding the perception of the Other, I am able to address problematic discourses of the male as Other (something traditional discourses on gender often fail to include). Lastly – and perhaps most importantly – challenging the absence of west/white in constructions of the Other allows for the non-western Other to deconstruct the gaze of authority – either to refuse to return it (rejecting a subservient position) or to reverse the gaze (decenter the place of authority) – actions which Bhabha (1994) refers to as “mimickry” or “the strategic reversal of the process of domination…that turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (p. 112).

Power, knowledge, and culture are never unidirectional – non-western Others are not silent in this (re)production (Beardsell, 2000). To reclaim the gaze and challenge the absence of the west/white presence in dialogues about the Other is a transformative move toward empowerment – one that forgoes retrenchment into a position that may seem rhetorically superior yet remains, in practice, reductive and ultimately re-inscribes marginality on the already marginalized. In the end, I do not wish to dissolve the conversation about the Other – I still firmly believe it is a problematic conceptualization often (re)productive of oppressive social practices. However, I think it is very important that we do not allow the absence to go
uncontested – to let notions of either west or white quietly assume the normative position (and cultural authority).

In other words, I find it more practical to consider the western gaze as another possible lens through which my interaction with social discourse is filtered than to center it at the forefront of my work/experience. I do this by confronting the construction of the west as well as the artificial binary it implies. I recall sitting in a graduate class amid an ongoing discussion about the imposition of the west on educational practices around the world when an Italian student asked: *What’s the west?* What followed was an exchange where we tried to convince him that he was indeed part of the West…and he steadfastly disagreed.

**A transnational perspective.** Adopting a transnational perspective adds to the deconstruction of a western gaze. In Chapter one, I briefly introduced the concept of *transnational* and sketched out how it applies to the films under analysis in this work. A transnational perspective attends to the realities of globalization, with its attendant advances in technology, migration, and flows of knowledge (Hall, 1997; Spring, 2014). It recognizes the fluidity of identities and cultures across borders, the blurring of global and local parameters, and the multi-directional flow of culture. As such, it resists dogmatic considerations of culture by recognizing the permeability of the local/global construct (Higbee & Lim, 2010). This is a direct challenge to monolithic constructions of the west or the Other. I use a transnational perspective to not only address the reality of shifting subjective positioning but also to erase the assumption that culture flows in one direction – from west to east. Thus, a transnational perspective allows me to resist the west/Other binary while opening up the ability to challenge the construction of individual world views from a myriad of positions. In the end, a transnational perspective
reinforces the idea that we all inhabit multiple cultures at any given time and only through recognition of that diversity can we truly interrogate the way we construct meaning.

**Positionality.** In this section, I have attempted to mark interpretation as a very personal experience – productive of a myriad of social discourses – yet personal all the same. I argue that it is in the interrogation of how the individual actively engages in a social experience that we can find the possibility of transformation. This calls for a reconciliation between the idea that the socially constructed self does not (nor should it) dissolve the individual experience – the two co-exist along a continuum of representations of self. Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) works toward this reconciliation by addressing “both individual (agentive) and social dimensions of the self in a non-dichotomizing way”. (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004, p. 476) CHAT focuses on the interactions between agent, mediating social artifacts, social others, and the processes of making meaning. A central component of CHAT, Vygotsky’s concept of mediated action, is congruent with my focus on the experience. A mediated action explains how an individual consciousness interacts with artifacts and social others in order to construct new meanings (Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki, 1999; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The experience of watching a film creates another opportunity to interact with a social product as part of the continuous activity of meaning making.

I have so far constructed a self/interpreter who resists the centrality of the western gaze yet remains cognizant of its problematic influence and actively challenges its representation just as she challenges other problematic perspectives. She recognizes the shifting diversity of the sociocultural subjectivities she inhabits as reflective of continually reimagined time and space. And, finally, she also recognizes that any transformative possibilities lie in the active
interrogation of mediating actions between self and social products – facilitated through the development of a critical orientation.

A note: Is it easy for me to be objective and optimistically transcultural because I am subconsciously backed by the authority invested in me as a western scholar? Perhaps, but the question itself is based in the assumption that I could not espouse this view otherwise. That such a view could only come from an ‘elite’ western positionality. This view is also based on the assumption that by merely being an ‘American’, I get to claim and benefit from all that implies. I assure you that the realities of differentiation in the U.S belie this. However, the fact that I address this concern demonstrates my acknowledgement of a ‘western’ influence as one of the many lenses I use in interpretation. The post analysis section of the ACE framework serves this purpose as well.

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have tried to address two areas of concern that might arise concerning the ACE framework. The first area, Discourse and Critique, reviewed how the methodological orientation of critical discourse analysis (CDA) informs the ACE framework and allows for expansion into larger, multimodal expressions of discourse. In this section, I also introduced the concept of the immersive interpretive experience as a way the ACE framework pulls from cultural studies to recognize the value inherent in the “moment of consumption”. The second area of concern I address, Positionality and the Western Gaze, builds from the idea of the moment of consumption to center the experience of the interpreter watching a film, approaching this experience with a critical orientation creates possibilities for agency and transformative practices. In order to truly make the experience personal, I acknowledge the reality of a bias
fashioned through the Western Gaze but actively decenter the gaze - deconstructing its untenable essentialization of west/east and its unchallenged absences.

This Chapter functions as a post-analysis of sorts. It allowed me to contextualize the ACE framework by stepping outside of its construction to consider question and concerns, placing the framework in direct contact with scholarly dialogues. This Chapter also allowed me to expand on some of the foundational orientations that inform my work – in essence, expanding on my positionality. In Chapter 5, I expand on the third component of a post-analysis - social practice - by making a final turn to pedagogy, situating my practice and the ACE framework back in the classroom, addressing theoretical supports and tackling pedagogical concerns.
Chapter 5: ACE as a Pedagogical Tool

In the opening Chapter, I expressed my intent to develop an analytical framework that would act to scaffold critical interrogations of multimodal discursive products. Under the umbrella of CDA, this framework would be grounded in an ontological grasp of the connection between relations of power and the (re)production of social discourses (and by extension, social practices). Finally, this framework needed to be applicable as a pedagogical tool. It is to this last goal that I turn in this Chapter.

In organizing this project, I had in mind an instructional manual of sorts. Although, I support the use of critical pedagogy in K-12 environments, the framework developed here is not meant for that student group. I have used the term ‘facilitate’ several times throughout this project. In that vein, my intention is for the ACE framework to become an additional tool that teachers and professors can use in facilitating a critical orientation in their undergraduate college students. As a result, I have tried to organize the Chapters in a way that they will step the reader through the process – from conception to practice. In Chapter 1, I develop the need for this research, positioning myself as a critical scholar interested in how relations of power are (re)produced in discourses that intersect with our constructions of identity, institutions, and social practice. In Chapter 2, I show the development of the Active Critical Engagement (ACE) framework – its theoretical orientations and suppositions – to identify key elements and structures. Chapter 3 presents two examples of the ACE framework in practice. Understanding

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17 Going forward, unless otherwise indicated, the term “student” will refer to undergraduate college students.
that any new concept struggles to find stable ground, Chapter 4 acts as a self-critique – addressing some of the most direct concerns others may have about the framework.

This Chapter on pedagogy brings all of those discussions together. Here, my aim is to identify theoretical hurdles and supports; address pedagogical issues and concerns; and, finally, consider what comes next. The first section, Pedagogy: from Theory to Practice considers the influence of critical pedagogy, semiotic pedagogy and critical discourse analysis (CDA) on the formation of the ACE framework and my overall approach to pedagogy. In the second section, I move into the classroom (building on the work of Giroux and Simon) to consider four primary concerns facing those who align themselves with a critical pedagogy: curriculum practice; cultural politics, social differences and practices; guarding against hopelessness; and the work of teaching. Building on their list, I add three concerns of my own: classroom culture, flexibility, and authority. Finally, I give consideration to implications and future research.

**Pedagogy: From Theory to Practice**

…we want to argue for schools as social forms that expand human capacities in order to enable people to intervene in the formation of their own subjectivities and to be able to exercise power in the interest of transforming the ideological and material conditions of domination into social practices which promote social empowerment and demonstrate democratic possibilities. (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 10)

The pedagogical orientation of the ACE framework begins under the broad umbrella of critical pedagogy to “contest(s) racism, sexism, and class exploitation as ideologies and social practices” by recognizing that educative practices are constitutive of sociopolitical ideologies
and relations of power (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 16). Then, I refine my practice by pulling from semiotic pedagogy to explore learning as a process of inquiry, not transmission, where the “purposeful nurturing of reasoning” facilitates challenges to existent knowledges (Smith-Shank, 2010, p. 249). Finally, centering my interest in the role of discursive practices in the (re)production of identity, social relations, and institutional structures - and seeking a method to operationalize critical pedagogy - I come to critical discourse analysis (CDA). (Hjelm, 2013; Mayes, 2010)

I situate pedagogical practices within the milieu of social discourses. This orientation recognizes that pedagogy as practiced is not a neutral collection of organizational and administrative elements that exist alongside content. The very way in which we organize, design, implement, and assess curricular activities is itself a function of social discourses on the how and why of education. Pedagogy, as a social construction, “is simultaneously about the practices students and teachers might engage in together and the cultural politics such practices support” (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 12). As a result, educators are implicated in the (re)production of discourses about schooling, education, and learning – about which knowledges are legitimized and which are censured. Therefore, it is important that I view my pedagogical practice as part of the process of constructing knowledge.

Giroux (1989, 1994), at the intersection of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, writes about the ideological import of popular culture and its connections to pedagogy. Popular culture becomes recognized as a site for contestation – particularly in negotiating concepts of the self and Others – where both (re)production and resistance are viable alternatives. Interrogating the cultural phenomena that make up students’ worlds provides a site from which “to consider the
question of how everyday experiences of the self might be utilized as tools for the development of a critical pedagogy” (Austin & Hickey, 2008, p. 134). The ACE framework attempts to arrest students at a moment of discursive engagement to challenge them to be active participants in the construction of their world views and to be critically aware of the relations of power embedded in popular discourses. Passivity ignores the ability of signs and discourses to become “catalysts for intolerance, racism, sexism, among other undesirable –isms” (Smith-Shank, 2010, p. 255).

Through the ACE framework, we come to see how cultural signs and discourses impart knowledge about ourselves and Others as a form of “common sense”. The attention given to how we engage, interpret, and actualize these signs and discourses is the work of semiotic pedagogy. Semiotic pedagogy looks at the way we reason as we interact with signs - pulling on stores of knowledge, referents, and previous knowledge - and provides a tool for identifying hidden constructions of power (Smith-Shank, 2010; Spina, 1997). In the ACE framework, the processes of analysis and reflection (post analysis) challenge the existential veracity of common sense and “purposefully calls into conversation routinely unexamined cultural signs and explicitly confronts their arbitrary natures” (Smith-Shank, 2010, p. 253). The very nature of watching a film makes it a prime site for disruption: film intersects our lived experience via multiple senses; film is immersive; and film’s fictionalized representations engage the imagination and the notion of change. Additionally, the use of multiple narratives and discursive strategies reference both belonging and Otherness, confirmation and subversion, the known and unknown. Nevertheless, the success of the ACE framework depends entirely on placing students in an untenable space where critical dialogue is possible.
At this point, the discussion of pedagogy turns from the theoretical to the practical: how do I operationalize these concepts in meaningful ways in a classroom? Scholars from literacy (Kellner, 1998; McLaren, 1988; Morrell, 2002) to multicultural education (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Spina, 1997) have tackled this issue with gusto. Many agree that critical pedagogy must stay vigilant about reproducing itself as dogmatic and address this through a focus on student empowerment. Most agree that whatever ones disciplinary focus, there is no one-size-fits-all application. With this in mind, I move into the classroom in the next section.

**Pedagogy: Into the Classroom**

I construct the ACE framework as a pedagogical tool specifically for one reason: too many well-intentioned teachers (myself included) make the assumption that students already know how to think critically, as if this skill is a natural by-product of attending school. Yet, despite continued official pandering to the concept of critical thinking (primary narrative), most education policy strips critical thinking of its efficacy by its dogged endorsement of standardized education and assessments (secondary narrative). My undergraduate students routinely tell me that they have not been expected to talk up in classes, question information, or critically engage with source materials. This reflects the continued reliance on what Freire (1993, 2005) described as the “banking method” in education: the instructor, acting as the unimpeachable bearer of knowledge, fills the empty receptacles the students bring to class. In this discourse, students are constructed as passive receivers of knowledge/truth. Assessment driven education policies only serve to multiply the predicament. Intrinsic to most standardized assessments is the presumption that there is only one answer – natural curiosity is replaced by precision. While this method may
(temporarily) impart information, it does not foster critical thinking – neither in terms of performance nor in terms of development.

Smith-Shank writes that “unlimited semiosis is the process of lifelong learning, and is built upon intellectual guidance” (p.249). The idea of “intellectual guidance” must be taken up in addressing a pedagogy that purports to facilitate a critical orientation among our students. It is disingenuous to expect our students to organically exhibit the critical reflexivity called for in critical pedagogy. The ACE framework is designed to act as a guide teachers can use, stepping their students through a process that orients them toward discursive disjunctures, encourages reflexivity, and models critical dialogue. The combination of CDA and film, with a focus on discourses, touches on familiar knowledges our students engage with in everyday life and acts a way to bracket the work in a manageable form (Hjelm, 2013).

Giroux and Simon (1989), in their article, “Popular Culture and Critical Pedagogy: Everyday Life as a Basis for Curriculum Knowledge” analyze the possibility of transformative practices in the merger of critical pedagogy and popular culture. They conclude the article by addressing some specific areas of concern expressed by those involved in cultural work. Giroux and Simon set these out as a way to muse on how pedagogy can be re-imagined “as a form of cultural politics supportive of a project of hope and possibility” even as it remains a site of struggle itself (p. 22). In what follows, I tackle each of the four concerns Giroux and Simon list -
considering praxis and the articulation of the ACE framework – and add three concerns of my own.

**Concern 1: curriculum practice.** When selecting artifacts to use with the ACE framework, I look for rich, complicated discursive terrain. Often, this terrain can be very intense, sometimes controversial. Then, I add an expectation for analysis that requires the interpreter to confront and/or challenge their own world views as they intersect with powerful social discourses. In short, the question arises: might a course dedicated to facilitating a critical orientation and employing the ACE framework lead to emotional reactions and moments of cognitive dissonance? My short (and immediate) response was YES, and that’s a good thing! However, while I do appreciate the concern, I contend that those moments of discomfort are necessary in teaching practice.

In order to push past normative practices and problematic knowledges, space must be opened for interrogation, confrontation, and analysis. The transformative practices that critical pedagogy seeks to encourage are only possible from within a space of tension and discomfort. Nevertheless, teachers must balance the discomfort with supportive structures – such as the ACE framework. In Creating Discomfort in the Name of Transformative Pedagogy, Eslden-Clifton (2008) describes the process of fostering a pedagogy of discomfort from curriculum design through student reflection in her research with pre-service teachers. Eslden-Clifton lists three tensions encountered during her research that I feel are valid here: “What do I trouble and what do I support? Who am I targeting the discomfort at? What do I consider discomfort? How can the space of discomfort be a space to transform and inform?” (p. 3). My attempts to address some of these tensions are reflected in the core elements of the ACE framework: taking a
transnational perspective allows me to create new connections and disjunctures across global positioning and multiple identity constructions; deconstructing the wester gaze levels the playing field for who gets considered as “marginalized” and complicates the very label itself; including a post analysis to the framework is supportive and provides students a chance to reflect and make meaningful connections to self and social practice.

How then do we create curriculums that are reflective of students’ lived experiences while simultaneously challenging their world views and preserving the classroom as a democratic space for collaborative learning? Tall order. Yet, the discomfort that underlies this query is part of the DNA of critical pedagogy: it is only through struggle with institutionalized discourses of self, society, and Other that we become more aware of the constitutive nature of power. It can be a challenging experience. Of parallel concern is the slippery slide into a counter-dogma structured and legitimized by the instructor. In pursuing a critical pedagogy, instructors must be constantly vigilant that they are privileging the diversity of voices represented in their classrooms as well as resisting monolithic essentializations of social justice issues. Near the beginning of each class of undergraduates I face, I make a statement (students call it my soapbox moment): *I want you to challenge your assumptions about the way you view the world and others in it. Dig. Question. Discuss. In the end, I don’t care if you agree with my opinions or not, but I want you to take responsibility for whatever it is you decide to know.*

Curriculum practice as imagined here is informed by the principles of the democratic classroom in both organization and philosophy (Colin & Heaney, 2001; Thayer-Bacon, 2008, 2013; Wolk, 2003). The selection of the film then becomes less important that how it is selected. If the films are to connect with the students’ experience in creating social knowledge, students
need to be a part of the decision. The instructors’ primary role becomes that of facilitator, referee, if you will. I create the space for safe dialogue and interaction, stay vigilant for the (re)production of problematic discourses and practices, and encourage the co-production of knowledge. The instructor’s secondary role is that of participant – I am unable to advocate the decentering of knowledge production if I am not open to learning as well.

**Concern 2: cultural politics, social differences and practice.** Giroux and Simon (1989) ask “how can we keep from slipping from a vision of human possibility into a totalizing dogma?” (p. 23). In my practice, the central issue here lies within the struggle of fostering student engagement. Unfortunately, one of the legacies of decades of neo-liberal education practices (with its focus on standardization and the transmission of information) is the near total detachment of student from content (and by extension, education and learning). By reclaiming the sociocultural/political aspects of pedagogy, critical pedagogy recognizes that it not just about developing assignments that include social justice concerns, it is also about realigning educative practices.

When critical pedagogy considers the political and practical aspects of pedagogy, the focus becomes the “processes through which knowledge is produced” (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 12). These processes challenge the status-quo, opening room for new paradigmatic imaginings and challenging the education/learning divide: the simple (yet, still revolutionary in some settings) act of physically dismantling hierarchy in the classroom by putting chairs in a circle or abandoning the safety of the podium; or the radically subversive idea of letting students help design assignments and negotiate classroom practices. These acts begin to reconnect students to
the process of learning, restoring a sense of agency and investment (beyond grades) while
developing a foundation for critical dialogues

So, what happens when these critical dialogues, produced by these engaged students,
begin to reflect cultural politics and social differences? This is actually a somewhat moot point:
all dialogues are reflections of culture and social differences. Burbules and Berk (1999) write
that “difference is a condition of criticality”: this recognition allows us to address cultural
diversity, issues of equity and access, discourse and privilege (p. 57). By addressing these issues,
we transform education by reconnecting its processes to the social (life outside the four walls of
the classroom), empowering students to be active agents in their social construction of self and
others, and expanding the “cognitive grace” that legitimates cultural histories to include
marginalized populations (Flores, p. 193, 2004)

**Concern 3: guarding against hopelessness.**

“This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill—the
story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take
the red pill—you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.
Remember: all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more.” (Morpheus, *The Matrix*, 1999)

How do we “guard against the production of hopelessness” when assuming a critical
orientation to social justice issues and the construction of knowledge? (Giroux & Simon, 1999,
p. 24). We can guard against hopelessness by including in the core of a critical pedagogy the
intent to empower. Empowered, students “develop mastery of their lives, control of valued
resources, and skills to engage in collective sociopolitical action for mutual problem solving” (Gay, 1995, p. 175). Empowered, students gain insight into the practices and relations that constrain and promote their beliefs. Yet, even with the best of intentions, challenging the network of long held beliefs can be a precarious activity.

One of the key discourse streams in the American film, *The Matrix* (1999), deals with our relation to the construction of knowledge. Are we passive or engaged? Do we challenge or do we acquiesce? What are the consequences of assuming this orientation? Following the film’s protagonist, Neo, I mark this discursive narrative with three crucial nodes: doubt, rejection, and creation. In the beginning, we see Neo inhabiting the edges of an existence he no longer trusts, plagued by doubt and intrigued by rumors of “the matrix.” Giving in to this impulse is scripted as a very traumatic experience for Neo – physically and mentally. Next, he sits before Morpheus and contemplates the rejection of all that he knows to be true: red pill or blue? Finally, manipulating new ideological possibilities, Neo creates a new relationship to truth and knowledge.

To engage in critical practice and nurture a critical orientation to the world is to swallow the red pill and accept the fragility of an established world view. However, in that fragility exists the possibility of change – in fact, that fragility supports the fact of change. In the moment when Neo swallows the red pill and becomes aware of the illusion of experience, his accepted world view dissolves – this is change at its essence. And change, like power, is not unidirectional: I would bracket Neo’s decision with that of another character, Cypher. Cypher, a member of Morpheus’ group, rejects the reality outside of the matrix and asks to be returned to the
This recognition of the multi-directionality of change also acts as a bulwark against dogmatism. Change (in and of itself) does not equate with standard notions of good and bad. Change equates with difference - and difference facilitates a multiplicity of possibilities.

Figure 25. Neo’s doubts about the world manifest.

Figure 26. A choice: red pill, blue pill.

I am aware that there is a presupposition of right and wrong when referencing one choice as “the illusion”. I use this terminology to reflect its usage in the film’s narrative. However, it might prove to be rich territory for an analysis of a secondary narrative.
Concern 4: the work of teaching. This concern contextualizes the teacher who decides to inscribe their practice with a critical pedagogy. The work of teaching, when conceptualized as a critical orientation toward facilitating the processes of learning, requires that we confront social, institutional, and personal challenges to social injustices. How do we address the very real issues of neo-liberal education policy, school and community culture, and student and parental resistance? I feel less confident addressing this concern. However, my experience is peppered with examples of dedicated educators who made a way to open spaces for critical engagement. My first teacher, my mother, read me to sleep with tales from the Arabian Nights – broadening my perception of Others (then) and complicating my construction of woman (now). In high school, my Latin teacher, Doc Beaton, was happy to be relegated to a trailer in the parking lot. It took me years to recognize what those extra yards of distance from official administration meant – I just knew that his Socratic method (I learned that years later, as well) made for a far richer learning experience. And today, I watch as a mentor continues to search for new ways to support
doctoral students who have started Neo’s journey from doubt to creation – in spite of constant challenges and retrenchments.

The work of teaching is where action and words meet. A tool like the ACE framework should be an organic reflection of a whole practice of teaching that orients itself toward social justice, focusing on what Giroux (1998) calls “radical democracy” (p. 53). A critical pedagogue makes connections between the student, the classroom, the course, the university, the community, the political, and the social. In the process of creating these linkages, teachers may experience resistance - from students who don’t want to write papers or participate in discussions; from administrations that demand standardized assessments; from parents who prefer traditional teaching methods. The work of teaching is about creating a classroom culture open to critical pedagogy. Therefore, I add three concerns of my own in order to address that concrete concern of all instructors: “How do I make this work?”

**Concern 5: classroom culture.** The ACE framework is not meant to be used in a vacuum. It is intended to support curricular practices based on critical pedagogy. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) call for the development of a “critical counter-culture” as a “deliberate attack on any and all forms of low expectations and social, political, and economic exploitation, replacing them with a culture of excellence and justice” (p. 172). It is important, therefore, that the structure of the course and the reality of the classroom (and society) reflect this orientation. Specifically, I believe we must address issues of textual and visual dissonance found in many college classrooms as instructors expect one level of engagement (Let’s discuss this – textual) yet model another (lectures, standardized tests – visual). It is not sufficient to have
an assignment that purports to engage critical discourse inserted into an otherwise non-critical classroom culture.

The development of the ACE framework was a result of a need for additional tools to support the ways I already organized my undergraduate classes. Like a puzzle piece, ACE fits into that classroom culture as another model of a critically engaged orientation to learning - developed to support and demonstrate the objectives of a critical pedagogy. Facilitating a critical orientation among college students requires a holistic approach which manifests itself in the teacher’s methodological considerations, selection of resources, relational strategies, and course design – toward creating a cohesive classroom culture that supports a critical pedagogical perspective (Gunther & Dees, 1999). Two key areas in this process – flexibility and authority – are addressed next.

**Concern 6: flexibility (syllabus subject to change).** In order to truly follow an orientation toward critical pedagogy, it becomes necessary to expect and nourish a certain amount of flexibility in one’s classroom. At the college level, every semester brings with it a new group of students who represent a unique mix of social positions, ideologies, and cultures. Respecting this mix and facilitating ways for these voices to engage in critical dialogues requires a flexible approach to curriculum design and practice. My first syllabus always comes with a caveat: *subject to change*. Yet, this is not a frivolous action - it is an intentional practice that reflects my openness to the possibilities of change and models the processes of critical engagement.

Under the topic of flexibility is also where I place concerns over “how to assess” assignments like the ACE framework. The process of assessing a student’s foray into critical
Figure 28. the ACE framework: A Rubric
analysis should not be confused with the task of fitting preconceived answers to a grading rubric. Unfortunately, it is much more difficult than that…but often more rewarding (for student and teacher). My assessment strategy is based on teaching the method, setting the guidelines for the process, and evaluating how much students are able to discover. As an example, I include a rubric for assessing the ACE framework.

**Concern 7: authority (step away from the podium).** As an integral component of the ACE framework, engagement (or the “buy in”) is crucial to facilitating a critical orientation in students. Part of this is convincing students to assume an active role in their education that extends beyond grades and content to recognize the value of the process. This active role situates students as co-creators of knowledge who, along with the teacher, are responsible for developing a learning experience that is both rich and relatable. For this to work, teachers have to be able to step away from the podium – to relinquish that position of absolute power over knowledge. Freire (2005) writes “(P)rojecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (p. 257). This “projection of ignorance” is a by-product of the discourses that define students in relation to the podium – where the podium is an objective stand-in for the authority to name and deliver knowledge. Stepping away from the podium has several benefits: (1) returns value to students’ experience; (2) models democratic principles; (3) includes the teacher in the learning process; and (4) facilitates critical dialogue. To be fair, it may also come with some disadvantages – not the least of which is a period of cognitive dissonance as students adjust to a new structure.

Most students – educated in the American public school system – have come to expect a classroom to work a certain way and teachers should be prepared when introducing new
pedagogical practices. I will use a personal story to illustrate. An early version of the ACE framework was piloted in an undergraduate course on globalization and international education. In that course, we typically spend the first half of the semester familiarizing students with key concepts and scholars as a framework for understanding the subject. This involves a preponderance of lectures and power points – typical, teacher oriented, uni-directional pedagogical practice. In the second half of the semester, students apply these key concepts to specific national education systems to construct an integrated understanding of the complexity of education reform and policy. These sessions are multi-modal, relying on group activities, discussions, essays in conjunction with video clips, popular press articles, scholarly research, etc. This transition - from teacher centered to student centered – can be difficult for students who have come to expect that ‘education’ and ‘learning’ look and behave a certain way. What has worked best in my experience is threefold: be clear with your students and explain why you are doing what you are doing; openly discuss concerns and negotiate solutions; and remain flexible and consistent. There is no panacea but these tactics help students to embrace critical practices.

Conclusion

Research objective. The purpose of this research was to develop an analytical framework that would provide for a more systematic analysis of social discourses using multimodal artifacts that would center the interpreter experience as a moment for critical reflection in interpreting the (re)production of problematic social discourses.

The need for this framework is threefold: 1) to help facilitate a critical orientation in students toward their own articulations within social discourse; 2) to recognize and replicate the
multimodal realities of everyday experience; and 2) to interrogate the (re)productive discursive power embodied in films.

To define the direction this research would take required that I adopt a theoretical orientation as a guide. Mirroring the complex multimodality of my subject, I chose to layer my interpretive orientation in considerations of cultural studies and critical discourse analysis with their concomitant focus on engaging and challenging the (re)production of oppressive discourses and social practices that foster marginalization and discrimination among non-dominant groups. Specifically, my framework would center an interrogation into our construction of the Other as filtered through a variety of sociocultural lenses, exemplified but not exhausted by phenomenon such as race, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and age. Within this construction, I would construct an understanding of the Other/Othering as a social fact, a problematic construction of social relations and practices enacted by and on individuals and groups yet reflective of larger paradigms of social discourse.

This framework would operate as a form of critical discourse analysis (CDA), incorporating CDA’s systematic approach to discourse as a reflection of relations of power and central to issues of social justice, and building on extensions made in multimodal discourse analysis which move beyond text and language to include other semiotic phenomenon such as imagery and music. As a new approach, this framework does address a gap in the scholarship by seeking to extend – once again – CDA’s methodological constructs to address the complexity of a multimodal format like film through the application of a pedagogical tool.

The three films selected for analysis – *My Name is Khan*, *Bhaji on the Beach*, and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* – all share connections to India yet represent different discourses on
(re)presentation. In order to foster a deeper experience of the three films, I allowed a transnational perspective to influence the analysis. A transnational perspective considers the multi-directionality of cultural influences, eschews dogmatic constructions of marginalization, and recognizes the influence of colonial legacies on shifting notions of identity.

In order to fulfill its purpose, this framework would need to meet the following criteria:

1) Situate film as a multimodal, narrative construct of social discourse.

2) Recognize film as a cultural product, pedagogical tool, and discursive practice.

3) Be grounded in theoretical considerations of power, discrimination, and social justice.

4) Facilitate an active critical orientation that reflects an understanding of the self as constructed through and constructive of social discourses.

**Research summation.** In Chapter 2, I detailed the development of the Active Critical Engagement (ACE) framework as applied to the film, *My Name is Khan*. I began by identifying structure the complexity inherent in films: text, imagery, and narrative. Text was shown to be the contextualized representation of linguistic representation, inclusive of both spoken dialogue and written text observed on screen. The primacy of imagery is recognized through its ability to instantly reference a complex and multi-positional articulation of social knowledges and discourses. Narrative was shown to be a complex construction - inclusive of both primary and secondary discourses - through which social knowledges are (re)produced and resisted.

In Chapter 3, I provided exemplars of the ACE framework applied to the analysis of two films, *Bhaji on the Beach* and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Following the ACE framework,
each exemplar began with a detailed synopsis of the film. Next, focusing on examples of text, imagery, and narrative, the analysis identified primary and secondary narratives toward a critical interrogation of discursive streams found in each film. Throughout, the analysis was guided by careful consideration of key analytical foci (e.g., gender and sexuality). Finally, the post-analysis demonstrated how critical reflections on design and production, positionality and social practice deepen the analysis by centering the self as an active participant in the experience and (re)production of knowledge.

In Chapter 4, I addressed possible concerns about the ACE framework by focusing on the areas of discourse and positionality. As an extension of CDA, the ACE frameworks reflects a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as all encompassing, constitutive of and by social relations and institutions of power. It extends semiotic engagement beyond considerations of text and language to embrace the multimodal complexity of everyday experience – embodied in the concept of the immersive interpretive experience which privileges the individual’s moment of consumption (of a sociocultural phenomenon) and its meaning making potential. I recognize discourse as strongly represented in all forms of popular culture and through application of the ACE framework demonstrate the (re)productive and transmissive power of discourse through film. I also addressed concerns about positionality and my choice of films. Reflecting on the process that brought these films to my attention, I explained why the ‘Indian’ connection is relatively arbitrary and completely dependent on my complex fascination with the discursive richness, contradictions, and transformative positioning of the film, My Name is Khan. The ACE framework is designed to be applicable to any number of multimodal formats – as my examples from American films and commercials demonstrate. Nevertheless, analysis of these films does
trigger concerns about the western gaze and impositions of power onto the Other. I counter this charge by continuing a deconstruction of the western gaze discourse and challenging the absences in traditional conceptualizations of the Other. Specifically, I take issue with the construction of a monolithic binary relationship between east and west and its assumption of a unidirectional flow of culture, power, and information. Additionally, I call attention to the absence this construction allows in considerations of the Other – specifically the untroubled absence of a western/white subjectivity. I find this absence to be repressive, (re)productive of oppressive power relations, and completely untenable given the current realities of globalization and technological development.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I turned to issues of pedagogy and practice. Here, I outlined the theoretical supports and influences the ACE framework relies upon. Specifically, I discuss how elements from critical pedagogy, semiotic pedagogy, and critical discourse analysis strengthen my research by grounding it in theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological concepts. This is of utmost importance as I situate the ACE framework as a pedagogical tool and intend it to be used in the college classroom. However, along with intention come concerns about application and classroom practice. I refer to concerns raised by critical pedagogues to address issues related to curriculum practice; cultural politics, social differences and practice; guarding against hopelessness; and the work of teaching. Finally, I address my own concerns about nurturing a safe, critical classroom culture; embracing flexibility as a strength; and disrupting oppressive power relations between students and teacher.

Consequences. The areas of concern mentioned in the preceding section are central to the goal of facilitating a critical orientation and reflective of the understanding that this
orientation can be both jarring and transformative. They are also congruent with my belief that a critical orientation is not a characteristic of an existential condition but a product of intentional practice and should be part of a deliberate practice in the classroom. The impetus for my initial interest in developing this framework is the result of a random conversation among doctoral students, venting at the end of a long semester about the inability of our undergraduate students to critically engage with materials. We wanted/expected them to grapple with context and ideological assumptions, positionality and sociocultural subjectivities, discourse and power. We expected a certain level of active participation in the construction of knowledge. And, we were left confused and disappointed until someone asked the question: *so, why do we think they can do all of this already?*

Please allow me to qualify that this is not a commentary on the intellectual capabilities of undergraduates nor the supremacy of doctoral students. As doctoral students (and cultural studies scholars in particular), we had just become accustomed to assuming a critical orientation toward the world. And we had come to value the richness and transformative possibilities provided through a critical orientation. We wanted our students to have this experience but, for the most part, it was largely absent in our classrooms. I surveyed my students about their exposure to concepts like critical thinking: a few recalled taking a logic class or maybe hearing about it in a literature class.

The first phase of what would eventually become the ACE framework was the creation of a developmental method to facilitate critical thinking skills that would be applicable not only during textual analysis but also during interactions with other multimodal phenomenon. The results showed students reaching a much deeper and more complex level of analysis and
engagement with text as well as the transfer of critical skills to other activities. However, I should be clear that this method was probably successful because the theoretical and methodological assumptions which support it are integrated into my curricular design, teaching practice, and classroom culture. Specifically, the critical orientation that the ACE framework aims to facilitate is modeled when designing curriculum that addresses problematic relations of power; using my practice to challenge dogmatic constructions of knowledge; and creating an environment where students are expected (and encouraged) to take an active role in their learning process from content, through implementation, and, finally, to assessment.

In an era where the politics of education reflects a general discourse that camouflages the realities of groupthink, conformity, segregation, social control, and classism beneath the neoliberal rhetoric of rationality, meritocracy, and individuality, I submit that our classrooms are contested territory and our students are at great risk of becoming absent in their own futures. Nevertheless, the ACE framework is not to be taken as representative of any particular ideological stance – its purpose is to facilitate an active agency where individuals understand their relationship to discourse and social practice and make a choice.

I write this in the aftermath of the mass shooting at a historical Black church in South Carolina where a young white male killed nine Black parishioners after declaring that he had come “to shoot Black people” (Ellis, 2015). As I listen to the multitude of discussions this event spawns, I am struck by the way “official” narratives (from local and national media, politicians, and pundits) seem to by-pass concerns uppermost in my thoughts. These official narratives doggedly (re)produce discourses which position the shooting as an attack on Christianity – a primary narrative that calls for forgiveness, peace, and empathy. This decentering, however,
seems highly disingenuous and self-serving. Of course, there is nothing subtle or extremely complicated about the reasoning behind this positioning: it serves to redirect attention away from the issue of racism in the U.S. Yet, I am also struck by the secondary narratives included in this repositioning. By repositioning the shooting as an attack on Christianity, the official narrative facilitates several secondary narratives: 1) it negates the Black community’s right to be angry; 2) it decenters the Black church (a discourse in its own right) by centering a Christian identity (arguably still constructed white in the U.S.); 3) it minimizes and white-washes\textsuperscript{20} the murderous aspect of the shooter (who is never constructed as a representation of all whites); and 4) it repositions the event as a Black concern.

Without the inclination toward a critical engagement with social discourses and the ability to push past pre-constituted (re)presentations of social knowledges, we see the mass shooting in passing - never making connections to social reality and the articulation of social practices. Without considerations of the secondary narratives listed above, we never ask the real question: what would have happened if it had been a white church? And, by not asking that question, we (re)inscribe marginalization, disenfranchisement, and powerlessness onto Black identity. Methods for facilitating this critical orientation should be at the core of any articulation of critical pedagogy.

Having said that, it should not be assumed that I believe that adopting a critical pedagogical approach in teaching practice is an easy or unproblematic route. Underlying all of

\textsuperscript{20} Merriam-Webster definition of “white wash”: to prevent people from learning the truth about something bad, dishonest, immoral, or illegal. In her article for the Washington Post, Shooters of color are ‘terrorists’ and ‘thugs’. Why are white shooters called ‘mentally ill’?, Anthea Butler addresses the construction of white and Black perpetrators in the media.
the concerns outlined above is the reality of the institutional structures teachers operate within. These structures (e.g., government, community, family, university, and department) all exert some degree of influence over the way a teacher interprets pedagogical practice. As a critical pedagogue, how does one answer institutional calls for standardized assessments, handle policy mandates that support discriminatory practices, or address diversity issues in the classroom? These are difficult tensions each teacher must inevitably face. For consolation, I turn to Derrick Bell (1992) who, juxtaposing the continued struggle for racial justice and the permanency of racism in America, writes:

> In these perilous times, we must do no less than they did; fashion a philosophy that both matches the unique dangers we face, and enables us to recognize in those dangers opportunities for committed living and humane service.” (p. 195)

**Implications and future research.** This initial iteration of the ACE framework should be viewed as a gateway tool for facilitating a critical orientation. The modes and elements that make up the framework serve as touchstones for structuring a critical engagement with cultural artifacts. Each is developed to function as both introductory and advanced guides. For example, on the surface, the use of a single analytic focus may appear as a simplistic way to frame discursive analysis. However, I have deferred to my own experience teaching undergraduate college students to believe that scaffolding is required in order to help students not only identify problematic discourses but also recognize the very existence of social discourses. As
demonstrated in the analyses presented here, attending to one analytic focus often serves as a catalyst for deeper analysis as the interrogator begins to notice how a single analysis is complicated as it intersects with other subjectivities. Intersectionality then serves to decenter hegemonic constructions of identity and discourse even as it reinforces polysemic viewings and interactions. While I attempt to layer on aspects I consider crucial, I look forward to expanding the framework to allow for even more multilayered considerations of social justice and relations of power.

My work with the ACE framework thus far has concentrated mainly on a higher ed context – teachers and professors of undergraduate college students. Facilitating a critical orientation in teachers begins in teacher education programs. I would see the ACE framework taken up by teacher education programs as a way to re-integrate critical pedagogy and social foundation themes. The framework would be extended to use across a selection of social phenomena (i.e. documentaries on schools, education policy mandates, and social media) - identifying common discursive streams, interrogating how these discourses influence teacher perceptions about students, education, and pedagogy, and challenging problematic teaching practices. The ACE framework would provide a method to help teachers acquire their own critical orientations by challenging the assumptions that influence their teaching practice and provide scaffolding for their work with future students.

As new teachers develop their teaching practices, my hope is that they will pay close attention to the lived experiences of students, especially as the lived experience is expressed by/through popular culture and new technologies. As I push for the increased inclusion of popular culture artifacts in curriculums, I am encouraged by the possibilities technology offers
teachers. In this research, I limited my discussion to an array of films (with a few commercial references) but I have tried to make the case that the ACE framework is useful across different multimodal formats including (but not limited to) documentaries, YouTube clips, music videos, websites, live performances and other events. In addition to the way new technologies allow us to envision multimodality, it also allows us to interact with multimodal artifacts in various ways. For example, in an effort to not only enhance the integrative immersive experience but to also observe how changes in experience affect interpretation, I am experimenting with a way to tap into the influence of the communal experience on interpretation by using live tweeting to allow an audience to post real time reactions to a viewing. New technologies also make it easier to allow students to become the producers of their own multimedia artifacts using smartphones, a proliferation of social apps like Vine and Tumblr, or digital recorders. This type of application becomes a more visible example of positioning students as creators of knowledge.

New technologies also provide access to artifacts that allow us to expand the scope of discourse along global lines. For example, scholars are beginning to pay attention to the discursive terrain and sociocultural implications (across Asia, Europe, and the U.S.) surrounding the success of Hallyu (the Korean Wave) - a term that attempts to contain the international proliferation of multimodal expressions of South Korean culture that includes consumer goods, music, language, and television dramas (an expansion from east to west). The Hallyu represents a unique opportunity for understanding how constructions of self and Other are influenced by global discourses. In addition to the artifacts themselves (e.g., streaming videos, CDs, etc.), scholars now have access to blogs, forums, websites, tours, live concerts, and film screenings
from which to investigate this phenomena. I am working on developing a curriculum on globalization, cultural appropriation and capitalism around this phenomena.

As my own research reaches out to discover other ways multimodal critical discourse analysis can be employed to facilitate the development of a critical orientation, my hope is that the work presented here will provide practical guidance for those teachers looking for ways to operationalize critical pedagogy in their practices. At the least, it should stimulate conversations around the power of social discourse, the value of popular culture, and the weighted nature of pedagogy.
References


Fedtke, J. (2014). ‘My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist’: Disability and asexuality in *My Name is Khan*. *South Asian History and Culture*, 5(4), 521-533.


Hooper, T. (Director). (2014). *Good to be Bad* [Television commercial].


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Zimmerman, D. D. (2014). Young Arab Muslim women’s agency challenging western feminism.

Appendices
Appendix A

[online resources for images used in this document designated by Chapter and figure number]

Chapter 2: Figure 3. The Khans at home.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=my+name+is+khan&view=detailev2&&id=0E232B04030F454B5EDAA80B9BB7611DB073124F&selectedIndex=118&ccid=Mnxv7h8z&simid=607996743596179616&thid=JN.EJ30jONQisYE1IF61luHPuQ
Chapter 2: Figure 3. Time of death…8:05pm.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=my+name+is+khan+sameer+death&view=detailv2&id=2BD463473C6F7F03A3761C26B0D3A715656BA1C0&selectedIndex=10&ccid=TowzGsqz&simid=608029316633331315&thid=JN.EHcmifkYYWguEoLrmUacxw
Chapter 5: Figure 4. I am not a terrorist.

https://www.google.com/search?q=my+name+is+khan&rls=com.microsoft:en-US:IE-Address&biw=1280&bih=899&tbnid=2rK2W1BuMuJ4M:ei=XAZIVPn4KsOhgwSvhoPIAw&source=lnms&sa=X&ei=XAZlVPn4KsOhgwSvhoPIAw&ved=0CAcQ_AUoAg#facrc=_&imgdii=_&imgrc=2rk2W1buMuJ4M%253A%253BLMcPwzWyUTNGhM%253Bhttp%253A%252F%252F%252Ffc09.deviantart.net%252Ff%252F%252F2014%252F197%252F5%252Fmy+name+is+khan__i+m_not+a+terrorist_by_niromohamed-d7qyhhv.png%253Bhttp%253A%252F%252Fniromohamed.deviantart.com%252Fart%252FMy-name-is-khan-I-m-not-a-Terrorist-468542227%3B600%3B700
Chapter 2: Figure 5. My Name is Khan (DVD cover).
Chapter 2: Figure 6. Born on the 4th of July (DVD cover).

Chapter 2: Figure 7. Eyes on the Prize (DVD cover).

Chapter 2: Figure 8. Khan’s autism ID.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=my%20name%20is%20khan%20autism&qs=n&form=Q BIR&pq=my%20name%20is%20khan%20autism&sc=0-18&sp=-1&sk=#view=detail&id=6DFBB4C4C5B71B3CE5C069AE690FC3A0FF05FCC5&selectedIndex=34

Chapter 2: Figure 9. Khan.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=my+name+is+khan&FORM=HDRSC2#view=detail&id=9FE7ED43B9560653493B7038F68D3DD1B801C021&selectedIndex=71
Chapter 2: Figure 10. Forrest Gump.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=forrest+gump&FORM=HDRSC2#view=detail&id=88AC26B3CF1CA5FFF68700BE8184FB76E9B7242&selectedIndex=0

Chapter 2: Figure 11. From The Kids are Alright.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=the+kids+are+alright&view=detailv2&&id=415D51A98A48F546248280B780F6872751168953&selectedIndex=26&ccid=bWCfVHKj&simid=607991224559206866&thid=JN.xkwkl4eTWEhsSONSmEgbw
Chapter 2: Figure 12. The Odessa Steps montage.

Chapter 2: Figure 13. Funny Haired Joel.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=my%20name%20is%20khan%20funny%20haired%20joel&qs=n&form=QBIR&pq=my%20name%20is%20khan%20funny%20haired%20joel&sc=0-18&sp=-1&sk=#view=detail&id=0FB3CB8DFC0A4375C2D339A1159BF873DE8EB7EE&selectedIndex=36

Chapter 2: Figure 14. Khan and Mama Jenny.

http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https://drshahsofficehours.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/mama-jenny1.jpg&imgrefurl=https://drshahsofficehours.wordpress.com/2012/10/28/bollywood-lovehate/&h=2592&w=3456&tbnid=AvHwWQdXGP3sAM:&zoom=1&docid=rtxJtvdavLktgM&ei=dwqPVYvZB5apyATX8LaIDQ&tbm=isch&ved=0CBwQMygAMAA
Chapter 2: Figure 15. Singing in the church.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=%20my%20name%20is%20we%20shall%20overcome&qs=n&form=QBIR&pq=my%20name%20is%20we%20shall%20overcome&sc=0-13&sp=-1&sk=#view=detail&id=D16410F662AFCDE6AE05A1D5E107B5CB5D382A8C&selectedIndex=2

Chapter 3: Figure 17. The women of Bhaji on the Beach.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Bhaji+On+the+Beach+by+Gurinder+Chadha&view=detailv2&&&id=8AFB0A788E82E7F8C9912CBD85CDE31A1D2E50CB&selectedIndex=12&ccid=w13SHE%2bD&simid=607986843608548487&thid=JN.Bw3UHX0wBGUhl%2fElwtXzSg
Chapter 3: Figure 18. Ginder and Ranjit. Discussing reconciliation.

http://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CAcQjRw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fexplore.bfi.org.uk%2F4ce2b7c06cc6d&ei=UsRXVf30N4zlsAWP7IHABg&bvm=bv.93564037,d.b2w&psig=AFQjCNH_ZcS90XJ0Xe0_3DABesDhtdr6JQ&ust=1431901506169369

Chapter 3: Figure 19. Asha is rescued from a daydream by Wellington.

Chapter 3: Figure 20. Waiting at the airport after a missed connection to Jaipur.


Chapter 3: Figure 21. Evelyn navigates the markets of Jaipur.

Chapter 3: Figure 22. Norman and Carol build a relationship.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=best+exotic+hotel+norman&view=detailv2&id=D43B43BC3E4158EEB96F9A3D1A697E5CA9D29932&selectedIndex=5&ccid=jo97FWAN&simid=607988312569087193&thid=JN.ayKgS4OvknNdKv%2bWORUzuQ

Chapter 3: Figure 23. Madge at the Viceroy Club.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Celia+Imrie+best+exotic+marigold+hotel&view=detailv2&id=50C556A7CECD0BBF225AC56A84A9851418141AD8&selectedIndex=66&ccid=VRrow884&simid=608003787341824959&thid=JN.nANdsM8HilHl4Zi5tn3vsg
Chapter 3: Figure 24. Graham in his old neighborhood where everything has changed.

&id=FCCB9FAD5B49FF2E5A39403AA4E25ACE8505723F&selectedIndex=48&ccid=44dZ
SNHP&simid=608043270881935844&thid=JN.IELnpF9Oz0wzBgeOzjqGsQ
Chapter 5: Figure 25. Neo’s doubts about the world manifest.


Chapter 5: Figure 26. A choice: red pill, blue pill.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=matrix+red+pill+blue+pill&view=detailv2&&&id=1C4DDE32F175EBA9525E2594DB4DD2FF06AF6B5A&selectedIndex=30&ccid=C6rD1RPT&simid=608010182501467281&thid=JN.o2B595pUcM%2fmvIthDbQOxw
Chapter 5: Figure 27. Creating new knowledge: Neo stops the bullets.

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Keanu+Reeves+Matrix&view=detailv2&&&id=B151D5F804879904DF23DFCF64028D6497FEAF78&selectedIndex=3&ccid=kICp%2f4WJ&simid=608046075543227913&thid=JN.8Gr3aDxBcE8d%2boguDRq9LA
## Appendix B

List of Films

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<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
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<td>Philadelphia</td>
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<td>Do the Right Thing</td>
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<td>Spike Lee</td>
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<td>Crooklyn</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Spike Lee</td>
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<td>The Hurt Locker</td>
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<td>Alien</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Ridley Scott</td>
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<td>Salt</td>
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<td>Django Unchained</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Quentin Tarantino</td>
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<td>My Name is Khan</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Karan Johar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhaji on the Beach</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Gurinder Chadha</td>
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<td>The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel</td>
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<td>John Madden</td>
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<td>Lagaan</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Ashutosh Gowariker</td>
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<td>Forest Gump</td>
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<td>Robert Zemeckis</td>
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<td>Director</td>
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<td>Fists of Fury</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Wei Lo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Born on the 4th of July</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Oliver Stone</td>
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<td>Eyes on the Prize</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Judith Vecchione</td>
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<td>The Kids are All Right</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Lisa Cholodenko</td>
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<td>Battleship Potemkin</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Sergei Eisenstein</td>
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<td>My Fair Lady</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>George Cukor</td>
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<td>Kuch Kuch Hota Hai</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Karan Johar</td>
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<td>Mississippi Masala</td>
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<td>Mira Nair</td>
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<td>The Namesake</td>
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<td>Gurinder Chadha</td>
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<td>Best Exotic Marigold Hotel</td>
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<td>Chapter 4</td>
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<td>Water</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Deepa Mehta</td>
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<td>Bhaji on the Beach</td>
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<td>John Madden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Matrix</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>The Wachowskis</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix C

Notes from: Active Critical Engagement (ACE) Pilot Study 2014

ACE: Pilot Project

The first 6 weeks of the semester are designed to provide students with an understanding of the core concepts used to connect and construct the discourses on globalization and education. These lessons typically follow a lecture/discussion format often supplemented with a power point. For the remainder of the semester, students apply these core concepts to specific national education systems to construct an integrated understanding of the complexity of education reform and policy. These sessions are multi-modal, relying on group activities, discussions, essays in conjunction with video clips, popular press articles, scholarly research, etc.

Past experience has shown that this transition is often a difficult one for most students. The first half of the semester more closely resembles a type of schooling they are familiar with – instructor as provider of knowledge to a mostly passive student body. Although student engagement and participation are actively encouraged during this half of the semester, the presence of a typical lecture format may work as a deterrent – a case where the visual does not reinforce the spoken expectations. Students’ initial reaction to changes in the class space, knowledge orientation, and expectations demonstrated that the education rhetoric we inhabit does not generally reflect classroom reality. Too often, progressive and innovative pedagogical practices become overwhelmed in public school spaces by the constant demands of standardization and assessment driven policies.
Analysis: The Experiment

For this research, I piloted an experiment using ACE as a pedagogical framework in an undergraduate course on globalization and comparative international education. The aims of this experiment were quite specific: 1) to model coherence between visual (lectures, standardized tests) and textual (the instructor says “Let’s discuss this”) elements, 2) to gauge how students reacted to ACE prompts, and 3) to monitor for examples of transference once the assignment was completed. For this experiment, students were given the article “A Senseless Massacre of Innocents” in Nigeria by Gordon Brown, as an alternative to the standard power point presentation on an issue affecting education in Nigeria. The following prompts were then written on the board by the instructor - students were directed to read them but given little unsolicited explanation:

- What phrases elicit a reaction when you read? Why?
- What is the purpose of this text?
- Who is producing the text?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What conflicts arise in the juxtaposition of key elements and representations?
- How does this text reflect what you know & highlight your assumptions about the topic?
- How does this text legitimize or diverge from previous assumptions and knowledge about this topic?
- Does this text connect to other discourses we’ve covered in class? Outside of class?

What follows reflects the way the students processed the assignment. During the discussion, the article was broken down into sections by the class which identified different tones and purposes in different sections. I have broken the analysis down into those sections in order to follow the class’ practice and numbered the lines within the text. Each section begins with a brief
explanation of any additional scaffolding provided by the instructor. The students’ comments and analysis are represented by italicized text.

Section 1 – the emotional draw in

The class was instructed to do one complete, quick read of the article – no more than 10 minutes. They were then asked to share the phrases that stuck out to them or seemed important. The instructor wrote these phrases on the board and student’s circled them on their individual copies of the article. The discussion that followed focused on immediate reactions to the article, the phrases selected, and how these connected to creating an impression of the article’s message.

1 When courageous Malala Yousafzai was shot, 5 million men, women and children signed petitions calling for every girl in Pakistan to have the chance to go school.

2 But this week the world remained silent when 40 schoolchildren were shot and then burnt to death in a school in north east Nigeria. The incident was nothing less than a massacre of the innocents.

3 This latest attack, perpetrated by Boko Haram, brings the number of people murdered in the last month by the terrorist group to 300. Many were children targeted simply for going to school.

4 President Jonathan called the attack “a callous and senseless murder by deranged terrorists and fanatics who have clearly lost all human morality and descended to bestiality.” US Secretary of State John Kerry has condemned “unspeakable acts of terror.” Malala herself has spoken out for Nigerian children murdered when they are at school.
But so far there has been scant global reaction. Militant terrorists from Boko Haram make a practice of burning down schools and murdering boys and girls and their very name, translated from the Hausa language, means "Western education is sinful." Last month they razed a whole village to the ground, casually shooting panicked men, women and children as they fled for safety.

The class identified the following key phrases as evocative of a supposed Western sensibility toward girl’s education, the innocence of children, and terrorism in general:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senseless massacre of innocents</th>
<th>Courageous Malala Yousafzai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men, women and children</td>
<td>Every girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance to go to school</td>
<td>The world remained silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The terrorist group</td>
<td>simply for going to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children targeted</td>
<td>murdering boys and girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scant global reaction</td>
<td>Western education is sinful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>militant terrorists from Boko Haram</td>
<td>Shot and then burnt to death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>casually shooting panicked men, women and children</td>
<td>burning down schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They also identified what they saw as a disconnect between the Nigerian president’s reaction to the event and the (official) American response:

- “a callous and senseless murder by deranged terrorists and fanatics who have clearly lost all human morality and descended to bestiality” – President Jonathan
- “unspeakable acts of terror” – John Kerry, U.S Secretary of State

The key phrases listed above were used to produce a wordle and referred to during the wrap-up at the end of section four. The wordle highlighted key words that allowed students to further discuss how word choice and usage help to center and de-center meaning.

Section 2 – the facts

Students were next led through a section by section review with the following instructions: Reread the section. Does anything stand out? How does it tie into or reflect
information from elsewhere? What stores of personal information are activated when you read this? What do you already know? What assumptions come to bear in helping you process the information?

6 It is time the world came to the aid of Nigeria as they try to make schools safe for children and to address and tackle the discrimination that prevents millions of children getting an education.

_Nigeria presented as a unified whole – who is the they? Is Nigeria the one making schools safe AND tackling discrimination? Nigeria – part of problem or solution?_

7 Nigeria has more than 10 million children out of school, the worst record in the world. We cannot meet the millennium development goals for universal education by December 2015 unless we tackle the education gap in Nigeria. A failure to address historic under-provision and discrimination in the northern provinces has left 6 million girls without any chance of an education.

_A sudden shift to We. Who’s the we – the world, Nigeria? The author? Are the southern provinces doing well?_

8 The education challenges in Nigeria are real and many. There is a teacher shortage of nearly 1.3 million, basic infrastructure is lacking and there is a shortfall of up to 1.2 million classrooms. There are fewer children in school each year due to child marriages and gender and religious biases and education is simply too costly for the poor.
These issues with education don’t really seem to have anything to do with the terrorists, do they?

For those that do find ways to get their children into school, learning is limited if it happens at all. The number of adults who cannot read or write has risen to 35 million, confirming that illiteracy is a huge barrier to the future success of the Nigerian economy. Shockingly, around 52 percent of young women who complete primary education remain illiterate.

So the education they have isn’t good. Is this Nigeria’s commitment to education? Seems to be a bias toward girls and girl’s education continued in article – see the constant references back to Malala. But there weren’t any girls killed in the 40 massacred. Why keep highlighting girls? More international attention? Do they think western women are more likely to read and respond to this article? Is that who he’s writing to?

Nigeria -- which in 2025 will become the world's fifth biggest country by population and could surpass South Africa in economic size -- will continue to lag behind the rest of the world for decades in the provision of educational opportunity unless something is done.

If nothing is done, Nigeria cannot make the transition from low-income country to high-income country in the foreseeable future. The latest figures suggest that by 2025, 71 percent of 30- to 34-year-olds in Japan, 79 percent in South Korea and 87 percent in Singapore will have tertiary education. But in Nigeria, it will only be 24 percent -- unless there is a sea shift in educational provision.
Unfair comparison – these are the top PISA scores in the world. Why compare to them?

Continues idea that education equals better economy – knowledge economy ideas. But for who?

Section 3 – what to do

Students were also asked to look for inconsistencies, claims that appeared without support, rhetoric and assumptions.

12 The mountain Nigeria has to climb will be the subject of a summit held by President Goodluck Jonathan in May. We want to offer help from the rest of the world with a $500 million package, made up of $250 million from the federal government, which was matched by international donors.

This is the first time he uses the Nigerian president’s first name – is it really Goodluck?

The use of ‘we’ is very confusing – the world didn’t respond (so it’s not the world), the author is British, and it’s published in an American paper? Don’t understand who’s offering the money – is he speaking for England or Nigeria?

13 These funds will support state-led initiatives including school building programs, teacher recruitment and training and the implementation of new technologies in learning.

What does he mean by state-led initiatives? Very unclear who or what the state is.

14 Donors including the USAID, the Global Partnership for Education, Qatar's Educate a Child, the UK's DFID and the business community (represented by the Global Business
Coalition for Education) have shown their determination to give practical support to President Jonathan in the drive for education.

Aren’t these international organizations? Including the West? Who does he mean by the world, anyway?

But in the midst of the education crisis, President Jonathan is prepared to take unprecedented action. He realizes that getting every child into school and learning is feasible and achievable and the key to Nigerian prosperity.

What does he mean by crisis? Seems like the education issues go much further than Boko Haram. Author has shifted focus – maybe the crisis is not really about what Boko Haram does. Using them ties it to the West – the problem, terrorists are our problem, too. Looks like they have killed more regular people than kids. For many years, too. Is there outrage for that?

Learning from what works best, financial incentives must be fine-tuned to help the government deliver. This means teacher training and professional development must be undertaken by leveraging technology. The curriculum of Islamic schools must be strengthened to develop literacy and numeracy skills and families must be supported in their demand for education through conditional cash transfers that, having been pioneered in some states, can encourage enrollment and attendance.

He’s assuming they know what works best. Are they going to borrow from Japan or Singapore? It won’t work in Nigeria. Then what will they say? Considering they need basic education, is technology really a key point? If they have issues with religion and gender affecting
education, they don’t seem to be addressing any of it. What about the ideas that support terrorism? Or the child marriages and schooling girls? Conditional cash transfers – is that like incentives? What states use these? If the people demand to go to school why do they need incentives?

Section 4 – the wrap up

After we had completed the previous section by section analysis and worked to see how phrases and assumptions worked to shape a response, we moved back to the bigger questions of who the target audience might be and what response was produced.

17 Nigeria itself is calling for the education it needs. Despite the violence and attacks on education from extremist groups, many Nigerians have signed the petition to support President Jonathan's commitment to education. They are calling for safe schools for all of Nigeria's children and for state level implementation of plans for universal education.

18 The future for education in Nigeria will be built not just with its government's commitment and international support but because it is the demand of girls and boys everywhere to make education a civil right.

The author used a lot of emotional language to pull us in. Make us feel immediately horrified by what happened and ready to act. A lot of it seemed to be built around the same words. Maybe to influence how we saw the article:

- Children targeted simply for going to school. Makes it sound like a basic human need – does he believe that?
- **The massacre and attack on education by Boko Haram** – deranged terrorists, militant terrorists, no morality, they think western education is sinful. Descended into bestiality! Of course, any talk about terrorists – just using that word – makes us go against them.

- Making education **the only thing that helps** them make the move from low-income to high income country. Calling up how we think about education and globalization.

- **The continued focus on women and girls.** People in the West would be more sensitive to this and it is part of what we think about Muslim countries – they discriminate against women.

- **The best education plan** – teacher training, professional development, technology, literacy, numeracy – all that is stuff we hear in America. Of course we would agree with this plan. Not sure if it actually addresses their main issues, though.

- Then he closes with the demand of girls and boys everywhere to **make education a civil right.** He put girls first this time. And Americans would clue into him using civil right.

Transference: The week following this session included two days during which the class watched videos chronicling the lives of seven international students as part of an international effort to provide basic education to all children by the year 2015 (Nigeria was not included). At the end of each day’s viewing session, we had a brief discussion period. In comparison to similar videos watched by the class before the experiment, these discussions have particular interest. After previous videos, discussions were student responsive instead of productive – they only responded to specific questions I posed about the video. On these later occasions, however, the class was specifically interested in the particular student chosen as representative of each country: why select only poor children in underdeveloped countries but middle-class children in wealthier nations? What was the agenda of the organizations sponsoring this international effort? Who did they speak for? While not conclusive of transfer across disciplines, I am encouraged by
the critically aware nature of the comments proffered *without* prompts and in relation to a different format (video).
Appendix D

Using ACE as a Course Assignment

As part of a course module on: Transnational Discourses on Gender (topics)

- What is Gender?
- Which social knowledges do you rely on for your interpretation of gender?
- What discursive markers are used to convey gender? Are these markers biological or socially constructed?
- How is the discourse of gender complicated by the intersections with other discourses of identity (i.e. class, race, religion)?
- Are there disconnections between gender identity as seen in the film and your world view?
- How do discourses of gender shape social practices toward women/men? How do these practices intersect with issues of social justice?

Instructions: For this project, you will use the Active Critical Engagement (ACE) framework to analyze the film, Bhaji on the Beach (1993, dir. Gurinder Chadha). For your analysis, you must: (1) write a thorough synopsis of the film; (2) provide an analysis of both primary and secondary narratives guided by at least one analytical focus (include relevant examples of Text and Imagery); (3) compose a post analysis; and (4) include appropriate references to support your narrative interpretations.
Viewing Guide

Viewing 1: General impressions of primary narrative, personal reaction, contextual observations

- Questions: What is the film about? What did you think of the film? What items hold special saliency for you?
- Task: Research into the socio-historical context of the film (at production & viewing).
- Write: the Synopsis; begin compiling notes for the Post-Analysis based on your research.

Viewing 2: Apply the Analytic Focus (AF)

- Questions: What discourses do these montages/discourse streams represent in relation to the AF? Are they uniform in their depiction of the AF? Are there disruptions, tensions, contradictions in how the discourses are received? Thinking about any disruptions, tensions, or contradictions – are you able to develop support for a secondary narrative? Note how the identification of a secondary narrative intersects with your positionality (add to notes for the Post-Analysis)
- Task: Note montages and discourse streams that tie into selected AF (include time stamps): recording specific examples of modal (text, imagery, narrative) reflection that support the inclusion of these montages/discourse streams.
- Write: Identify and analyze primary/secondary narratives; continue compiling notes for Post-Analysis

Post-Analysis

- How do the contextual influences of design, production, and (socio-historical) discourse shape the film as a discursive practice?
• How is your world view, immersive experience, and positionality reflected in the analysis of the film?

• Pulling from examples in the film and your own experience, how does discourse influence social practice? How does social practice reflect problematic discourses?
Sultana A. Shabazz was born in Griffin, GA. She received the Bachelor of Business Administration in 1992 and the Master of Education in 1998 from the University of Georgia, graduating with special commendation (Department of Adult Education). She received awards for Outstanding Achievement while serving as an English as a Foreign Language instructor in Hiroshima and Yokogawa, Japan. While at the University of Tennessee pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, she co-developed and taught a course on globalization and education as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. In addition, she presented at regional and international conferences, and published a chapter in *Media and Education in the Digital Age: Concepts, Assessments, Subversions* titled “Bowling Online: A Critical View of Social Capital and Virtual Communities.” Her research agenda focuses on social discourses, transformative learning, and the intersection of individuals and institutions to interrogate how identity and social practices are constructed within problematic social discourses.