OPENING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: EMPATHY AND INTERCULTURAL FILM VIEWING

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Contents

Abstract

That films generate empathy is often assumed, but there is a gap in research to date that explores how theoretically and pedagogically this can occur. Olson (2013) has argued that the idea that students will become more empathic simply through reading or watching fiction is "wishful thinking" (p. 170). To move beyond wishful thinking, this study examines a more nuanced conception of best practices, by beginning with the question: How could empathy, in the sense of a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166), produce what Rancière (2010) called dissensus— the sensory break with the normal order of things—in order to imagine new possibilities. Within an educational context, my goal was to encourage growth in the capacity to visualize the dialectical nature of difference— how it is constructed—rather than simply to learn about the Other. Using methods designed to examine how viewing is (and is not) transformative in a specific context, I facilitated three film viewing sessions with ten students and faculty members at a Canadian university. The three films, *Stupid Young Heart, Rhymes for Young Ghouls,* and *Meditation Park.* My intent was to prompt participant dialogue related to intercultural communication, justice and anti-racist education. The sessions served as a case study into how viewing and discussing films illustrates theoretical contributions, drawing together insights from film theory, empathy philosophy, affect theory, transformative education, and anti-racist education. I conclude that the films did help to conceptualize change as a matter of doing things differently. The films also helped participants realize that there is a much larger world of media available than the limited sources they were accustomed to. My research project

contributes to the ongoing discussions in media studies and anti-racist education and their relation to film's role as an affective, transformative learning strategy and experience.

Résumé

On suppose souvent que les films suscitent l'empathie, mais les recherches menées jusqu'à présent n'ont pas permis de déterminer comment cela se produit sur le plan théorique et pédagogique. Olson (2013) a fait valoir que l'idée que les élèves deviendront plus empathiques par le simple fait de lire ou de regarder de la fiction n'est rien de plus qu'un « vœu pieux » (p. 170). Pour aller au-delà d'un tel constat, mon projet analyse une conception plus nuancée des meilleures pratiques, en commençant par la question suivante : comment l'empathie, en tant qu'« expérience affective radicalement « déstabilisante » » (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166), peut-elle produire ce que Rancière (2010) appelle le dissensus — la rupture sensorielle avec l'ordre normal des choses — afin d'imaginer de nouvelles possibilités? Dans un contexte éducatif, mon objectif était de promouvoir la capacité à visualiser la nature dialectique de la différence — comment elle se construit — plutôt que de simplement apprendre sur l'Autre. En utilisant des méthodes conçues pour étudier comment le visionnement est transformateur (ou non) dans un contexte particulier, j'ai animé trois séances de visionnement de films avec dix étudiants et membres du corps professoral d'une université canadienne. Les trois films : *Stupid Young Heart, Rhymes for Young Ghouls,* et *Meditation Park.* Mon intention était de susciter un dialogue entre les participants sur la communication interculturelle, la justice et l'éducation antiraciste. Les séances ont servi d'étude de cas sur la façon dont le visionnement et la discussion de films donnent lieu à des mises en commun théoriques, en rassemblant des connaissances en matière de théorie du cinéma, de philosophie de l'empathie, de théorie de l'affect, d'éducation

transformatrice et d'éducation antiraciste. Je conclus que les films ont contribué à conceptualiser le changement comme étant une question de faire les choses différemment. Les films ont également aidé les participants à réaliser qu'il existe un univers médiatique beaucoup plus vaste que les ressources limitées auxquelles ils sont habitués. Mon projet de recherche contribue aux discussions en cours dans les domaines des études médiatiques et en éducation antiraciste, ainsi qu'à leur relation avec le rôle des films dans une stratégie et une expérience d'apprentissage affectives et transformatrices.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Film critic Roger Ebert (2005) described movies as "empathy machines", which he saw as a way to get beyond being stuck in our own experiences and towards creating an opportunity to understand more about people who, in Ebert's (2005) words, are different from the viewer in gender, race, age, economic class, nationality, profession and that have different hopes, aspirations, dreams and fears. As a lifelong movie fan, when I first heard this phrase, I felt something click and my interest in film made sense. Even as an elementary school student, I always felt trapped in myself and hoped to make sense of the world beyond my own viewpoint, because I often felt out-of-step with the world around me, and it became apparent to me that my experience and views of my surroundings were far from universal. I say this not because I would want to universalize my experience, but because, as I will outline, there is a necessity to understand that we live in a world of multiple perspectives. On the surface, that sounds like an obvious point, but as this study will explore, understanding and acknowledging multiple perspectives proves difficult to grasp.

In my first year of university, I, for reasons unclear to me, decided to take a Film Studies class. There I encountered two formative influences on my understanding of films' emotional power for transformative educational potential – the 1940s Italian neorealist screenwriter Cesare Zavattini and the 1970s German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Zavattini worked in post-World War II Italy. He described that plot imposed a fantasy structure on the uncertainty of real life. He described "the ideal film would be ninety minutes of

the life of a man to whom nothing happens" (Cook, 2004, p. 367). I remember reading this line and trying to puzzle out why this would be desirable. Zavattini's description helped me realize that films were more than plot, or even about trying to send a didactic message. Instead, through focusing on any subject, film could give it a significance that the interested viewer would pay attention to and could contemplate.

Fassbinder wrote about the 1950s melodrama films of Douglas Sirk as "Sirk has made the tenderest films I know; they are films of someone who loves people and doesn't despise them as we do" (Cook, 2004, p. 588). Fassbinder aimed at making melodramas that focused on people who don't succeed in the *Wirtschaftswunder*, the West German "economic miracle" where the country had one of the world's top economies from the 1950s to the 1970s (Meskill, 2010). Instead, Fassbinder asked if such a supposedly successful society still left out so many people, how can it be successful? His answer was that "we" despise the unsuccessful as a personal problem, rather than, as Fassbinder attempted to show, a structural feature.

Following the two insights gained from this introductory film course, one about caring for people and the other about the potential aesthetic means to encourage such caring, I began thinking about why I liked films and realized it was something similar to what Ebert described. I followed my Bachelor's Degree with a Master's of Arts in Communications, where I focused my research on Hollywood films and the devaluing of human lives through militarism, the opposite of empathy. I thought by focusing on how films can potentially decrease empathy, I could in the next step research how they increase it. When I was thinking this before my Master's, empathy seemed a wholly positive skill to promote. But the most important thing I learned from my

Master's research was the need to critique and to break down the liberal feel-good universalism of empathy to instead offer a more concrete analysis, which could account for the power differences of race, class, and gender in society. I was not unaware of these factors after finishing my undergraduate degree, but I was also not wholly prepared to critically engage with them.

The result was that my journey through critical academic work necessitated a critique of empathy. Around the same time Ebert was using empathy, the word started to become a buzzword. Barack Obama's 2006 book, which laid the groundwork for his successful 2008 American Presidential campaign, argued America has an "empathy deficit" (p. 68). While empathy had already been a component of popular self-help books like Daniel Goleman's (1995) *Emotional Intelligence,* numerous other self-help and popular science books with empathy in their titles were published in the wake of discussing the "empathy deficit," as well as coverage across numerous magazines and newspaper articles. Some had epochal titles, like *The Empathic Civilization* (Rifkin, 2010) and *The Age of Empathy* (de Waal, 2009) to imagine this emphasis on a trait that has always existed as if it was a new paradigm for organizing a society.

A buzzword connotes a phrase that ultimately has little meaning, but is used to stand in for specialized knowledge. For example, in this instance, empathy becomes an empty signifier that stands in place of the rigorous work of grappling with an ethical worldview. The idea is empathy can help elide actual political and social action by focusing on individuals needing to change. The idea that learning to care for other people will solve inequality is a seductive idea, but less effort is spent grappling with either how this would be accomplished or why this is not how people already act. My primary concern with empathy is that it easily fits into two

damaging precepts of the current neoliberal hegemony, that 1) solutions are purely a matter of individual inclinations; and 2) arbitrary social structures are presented as quantified and inherent biological traits.

At first, because empathy had started to become commodified, I considered giving up entirely on the idea of empathy. Instead, as I began to deepen my exploration of film and the construct of the empathy deficit, I found in the existing literature on empathy many positive but cautious theorizations that provided a path forward. Chapter Two unpacks the various definitions of empathy. However, for the purposes of this study I define empathy as the emotional connection to another person or even situation that, as Pedwell (2012) calls it, is a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (p. 166). It is tempting to imagine this as a force that an individual extends to the world, like some form of emotional echolocation, but this would only make empathy safe, as very rare is the person who seeks to be "radically unsettled". An affective experience rather than echolocation does not mean it is entirely out of control, as we must consider which environments produce and which environments kill these potentialities. It remains a political tool in setting up environments in which empathy can slip through the cracks in the walls of belief rather than pushing down an entire wall.

With this in mind, I reflected on the potential of using film in a learning environment, both in a formal classroom and in spaces where people are commonly exposed to informal and incidental learning. I also began to wonder about the impact or potentiality the experience of film viewing would have as an affective experience or transformation learning strategy.

As a result, I now see empathy as not a political project in itself, but rather as an affect with the ability to open doors to new politics. In turn, I also grew intrigued to learn more about how film viewing can contribute to creating more inclusive curricula, as well as more representation of racialized communities and opportunities for both educators and learners across multiple learning environments to reflect on their individual experiences that may enable collaboration and collective meaning making to foster a more equal and inclusive world (Ahmed, 2012). Curiosity around the learning opportunities that film viewing offers and my commitment to finding curricula strategies and transformative pedagogies motivated this research.

Objectives of This Study

The objectives of this study were twofold. First, it was to explore how film viewing contributes to an environment aimed at providing learning opportunities that stimulate reflection and dialogue, and contribute to transformation as a means to creating equity. The focus of this research was with adult viewers and took into account formal (e.g., university classrooms), informal (e.g., libraries), and incidental (e.g., media) ways in which they engage. Second, it was to gather input from participants on how film viewing can be used to enhance individual learning, contribute to teaching strategies in the affective domain, inform curricula, contribute new teaching strategies as a way to decenter traditional education, open dialogue on topics that can be uncomfortable, engage instructors and learners in shared meaning making, and develop new pedagogical approaches to inclusive learning practices. And, while this study draws on the use of film, the purpose the study is not to evaluate the individual films selected. The films

themselves were selected not necessarily for their quality, but as representatives of certain types of films. A rationale for this is elaborated on in Chapter Four.

Significance of This Study

This study has the potential to support a rapidly growing challenge for universities and informal learning spaces to develop more inclusive practices, and to promote and stimulate equity and inclusion. This is especially critical for institutions with a colonial past. This research began well before events like the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, but because of such events many faculty and students, along with the public, are looking for change and action. And while universities, by way of practices such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, are trying to revise their processes and practices, most academic institutions have significant work ahead of them. Research related to student engagement suggests that often the greatest influence on student learning and transformation is the interactions learners have in relationship with faculty and opportunities to reflect on new (and sometimes uncomfortable) concepts and meaning making in dialogue with each other (e.g., Cranton, 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2009; Levine & Dean, 2012). It is often common practice to address uncomfortableness in the learning process with programmatic changes, yet at the same time this approach, as Pedwell (2012) suggests, kills these potentialities for transformative learning. Exploring, through this research, how viewing film can be used as a way to stimulate dialogue and reflection can help inform how formal and informal learning spaces contribute to bringing about change.

Research Questions

The central research question that led this study was: How can film viewing for adults in a formal and/or informal learning space create empathetic responses in the sense of a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166), and produce what Rancière (2010) called dissensus, or the sensory break with the normal order of things to imagine new possibilities? I explored four sub-questions:

1. How prepared, ready, or open were the participants to receive the films?
2. What strategies did the participants report as critical to their engagement in new learning and meaning making?
3. What role did post-film viewing discussion and reflection have?
4. What avenues for future learning, curricula development, or teaching and learning strategies did the participants suggest?

I theorize that empathetic imagination is directed towards "how do I contribute to this already created situation" rather than "how can I fix it"? This question guided the exploration and meaning making process as a way to better understand the elements of transformative learning and the social processes of power, institutions, beliefs and cultural values.

Research Design

Entering into the research field I was aware that exploring how individual viewers experience film viewing and how it informed their understanding of, and response to, empathy was complex. Transformative learning is difficult to assess using efficient data gathering tools such as surveys because of how each participant journeys through the learning process at a

different pace. For instance, Baumgartner (2001) described transformative learning as occurring either gradually or from a sudden, powerful experience, changing the way people see themselves and their world. He further stressed transformation as a word that "evokes the notion of profound physical or psychological changes" (p.15). Transformations can be a gradual process for some or an immediate process for others. As a result, to provide participants the ability to engage in the study as individuals on unique paths to exploring empathy, I used a case study approach to capture their varied experiences and perspectives as individuals, as well as a group of film viewers.

This study was not designed to answer whether film viewing *did* or *did not* teach viewers empathy. Chapter Two discusses in detail the construct of framing empathy as a skill, but critical to this study is acknowledging that the research design was structured away from having a particular hypothesis as "true" and toward capturing a deeper understanding of the essence of the human phenomenon – in this case the experience of film viewing as a mode of exploring empathy in the affective domain. Chapter Four provides a thorough account of the research design.

Transdisciplinary Contributions

Balsiger (2004) recognized that there was no complete history or absolute agreement on the definition of transdisciplinarity, and there still remain discussions related to determining the differences between interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity is generally framed as involving the contributions of at least two disciplines where their work addresses common questions by integrating methods and principles to complement each other. An example

of this would be researchers from education and sociology, as two distinct disciplines, but both social science based researchers. Transdisciplinarity, while it can include the work of two or more related disciplines, is distinct because of its ability to transgress across boundaries, shift disciplinary thinking, and generate new ways to solve problems and imaginative thinking (e.g., Brown, Harris, & Russell, 2010; Fairclough, 2016: Jarvis & Kariuki, 2017). Transdisciplinary work often combines work drawing from a blend of the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. For this study I used a transdisciplinary lens to conduct the literature review, field work and analysis of the data because it enabled me to transgress the disciplinary boundaries of education to explore the research question by also drawing on scholarship, knowledge, and practices found in film studies, sociology, communications, culture, and critical media studies. Using a transdisciplinary lens created the conditions needed to imagine new possibilities to responding to the central research question.

Chapter Summaries

This chapter introduced what motivated the research, outlined the objectives and significance of the study, presented the central research question and briefly described the research design.

Chapter Two develops conceptual clarity around the multi-faceted term of empathy. To achieve this, I review the intellectual history that planted empathy into liberal parlance, tracing the idea from German aesthetic theory through psychology and self-help literature. I then place the word's deployment into a historical context to explain why empathy lent itself to being a

buzzword at this historical juncture. The chapter concludes with tracing an alternative, critical usage of empathy that can help resuscitate the term to work towards transformative education.

Chapter Three engages with the literature on film studies and critical media studies to examine how film has been theorized to create change in its viewers. The chapter aims to move away from the idea of the technology being the source of empathy, but rather focuses on the abilities of certain films to channel empathetic feelings towards different outlets. I cover both the way certain films use empathy as a commodity that confirms the viewer's goodness and films that aim to disrupt the conventional ways of seeing. The chapter closes by examining the formal and plot choices behind films that I outline as being potentially conducive to creative empathy.

Chapter Four narrows the scope of empathy down towards my case study. This involves building off of Bannerji (2000), Pedwell (2010), and Razack (2001) and outlining the context for how people are intertwined in the social web and must not only recognize connectivity and limitations, but understand how it limits the autonomy of others within the Canadian state. The chapter then addresses how researchers can comprehend the viewing experiences of viewers. I conclude by outlining the specific methods used to collect participants' reflections and then explain in detail my research process.

Chapter Five analyzes the responses from my participants using Fairclough's (1995) five stage critical discourse analysis: outlining the problem, diagnosing why the problem is difficult to solve, analyzing who benefits from the existing problem, pinpointing ways viewers resist and confirm the dominant narratives, and finally, addressing how this analysis works towards suggesting solutions to the problem. It also shares the data from the individual participant

interviews and summarizes the key insights gleaned from the participant's post-film viewing discussions. The chapter closes by returning to the research question and sub-questions to outline the core themes that emerged.

Chapter Six shares an unexpected finding that the participants brought to light during their post-film viewing discussions, the influence of algorithmic recommendations on audience's viewing choices through the participants' primary source for discovering new films, online streaming platforms. This influence was not something I explored during the literature review or field work preparation stage. I had not considered the effects of this prior to discussions with the participants, but in dialogue with them I realized algorithmic recommendations change the nature of film and empathy in both a philosophical and practical manner. As a result of this new insight, I returned to the literature and took the opportunity to capture this finding and reflect on its implications. This chapter analyzes how algorithmic recommendations create both a challenge in educating empathy, but also emphasizes the important role of film scholarship in maintaining an expanded memory archive of films. Chapter Seven concludes by summarizing the study, outlining consistencies with the reviewed literature, noting the limitations and presenting its significance and implications for future consideration. The chapter concludes with a transdisciplinary reflection on the essence of the study itself and its potential to support curriculum strategies and transformative pedagogies to produce empathetic responses in viewers and the ability to imagine new possibilities as described by Pedwell (2012) and Rancière (2010) in reframing this study's central research question.

Chapter 2: What is Empathy? A Literature Review

This chapter is divided into six sections. It opens with a brief overview and, using a transdisciplinary lens as described in the previous chapter, explores defining empathy. It outlines the intellectual history of empathy, discusses empathy as buzzword, and contextualizes empathy within a neoliberal as well as a critical theory discourse. It concludes by articulating how the literature provides the foundation to placing empathy at the centre of this study.

Overview

Empathy is often deployed as a buzzword because its meaning is slippery across different literatures. For example, does the common definition of "walking a mile in another's shoes" mean that I am thinking about how I would act in another person's situation, or that I am thinking about how that person would act? Pedwell (2012) argued that empathy, even without any precise meaning, or perhaps because of its lack of meaning, is considered unquestionably good. The unquestioned goodness results in assuming the word empathy "can represent a conceptual stoppage in conversation or analysis" (p. 281). What and how empathy works needs to be theorized more explicitly before getting to what Pedwell outlined as the typical question associated with empathy, "How do we cultivate it" (p. 281)?

Coplan & Goldie (2011) argued that it is not a good idea, even if it were possible, to come up with a single definition of empathy because it would limit the directions of research. Rather, they suggest each researcher should offer a precise definition in their particular usage of empathy. While reconciliatory and aiming to avoid facile debates about attaining the correct meaning, that empathy has become a buzzword indicates such a failure of conceptual clarity. In

the same way that conceptual slipperiness allows empathy to be a facile solution to a range of problems, the slipperiness makes it easy to write a critique of "empathy" by choosing the most problematic interpretation of empathy, as a form of mental colonization of another and of knowing for another, as the true hidden meaning of all empathies.

The aim of this chapter is to resuscitate empathy into a productive critical concept. To do this, I first trace an intellectual history of empathy's genealogy as both a word and a concept to illustrate how we have arrived at the point of "empathy" as it is used in both popular and academic contexts. Then I argue against what makes the predominant strains of empathy a problematic fit for critical and transformative experience, and, turning to critical and affect theory, outline how I use empathy for the remainder of my study.

Empathy: An Intellectual History

Empathy's conceptual quagmire is further complicated by similarities and differences to other concepts for emotional reactions to others' circumstances such as pity, sympathy, and compassion. The concept of empathy, or similar conceptions, is not only Western; it is expressed in various philosophical and theological systems such as Buddhism's *Mudita* or Islam's *Rahmah*. However, the majority of literature on empathy focuses on the Anglo-German tradition, primarily sorting out the difference between concepts of empathy, sympathy, and pity. There has so far been little English language engagement with empathy as a concept outside of the Anglo-German conceptions on which I can build. Primarily this section serves to explain why the specific use of "empathy" in English is often used for unclear and varying definitions and to explain the origin of the definition which informed this research.

Histories of empathy (Coplan & Goldie, 2011; Maibom, 2014) typically begin with Scottish philosopher David Hume's (1739) treatment of sympathy. Hume's definition of sympathy was broad, as the ability "to receive by communication their [others] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own" (p. 317). Coplan & Goldie (2011) interpreted Hume's work as emphasizing what is today called mirroring, emotional contagion, or low-level empathy, where the witnessing of another's emotions triggers similar emotions. Fellow Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1759) offered a more complex view of sympathy. Smith's presence in the development of empathy debate is curious, given his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) is the foundational text of free market capitalism, that argues that human pursuit of self-interest (and the competition between these interests) will eventually produce the most fair economic system. But Smith was not what a century later would be called a Social Darwinist, an advocate for survival of the fittest. In addition to Hume's conception of sympathy as mirroring, Smith (1759/2009) stretched his vision of "fellow-feeling" (p. 13) to include an imaginative element, that "as we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in that situation" (p. 13). Smith argued trade depended on some level of empathy to operate and that it was through cultivating the "moral sentiments" like empathy that Smith's infamous phrase "the invisible hand" can make an economy function freely. Smith's theory was perhaps the first to argue empathy was a good that would solve structural problems, a theme that repeats in much recent empathy literature.

Einfühlung

The word "empathy", from the Greek *empathiea*, was introduced into English in 1909 by psychologist Edward Titchener, as his translation for the German word *einfühlung*, more literally translated as "feeling-into". Einfühlung was a philosophical problem considered by late 19th century German aesthetics. Einfühlung was first used by Johann Gottfried Herder (1772/2002) to explain that humans could understand nature by looking for similarities to human expression and ascribe related feelings to these natural events. Herder's conception of similarity was a somewhat mystical unification between subject and object, and he believed it could also be felt between humans and texts, cultures, and history (Nowak, 2011).

The version that became translated as empathy was developed by Robert Vischer (1873) to theorize viewing art. In an attempt to understand the visceral reactions provoked by art, Vischer divided engagement between passive seeing and active looking, the latter of which looked for imaginative entry points within art that allow viewers to imbue them with emotional value. Vischer's concept of einfühlung was that art triggered certain emotional responses and people experienced aesthetic pleasure by projecting those felt emotions back into the art as the property of the artwork. Einfühlung's emphasis on audiences bringing understanding to the work was not about giving the audience power of interpretation, but was rather the belief that there was a universal matching between object and viewer.

Theodor Lipps expanded upon Vischer's definition, taking from Vischer the conception of how we understand art and applying this "feeling into" towards answering Schopenhauer's

(1844/1966) problem of how we understand the representation of the other as having a will. Schopenauer argued

> only from a comparison with what goes on within me, with what is the inner nature of my own changes determined by external grounds or reasons, can I obtain an insight into the way in which those inanimate bodies change under the influences of causes, and thus understand what is their inner nature (1844/1966, p. 125).

By evaluating what one would do in another's place, Schopenauer imagined one can get closer to understanding another's will. Lipps suggested that such a process was linked to einfühlung.

Einfühlung was not an ethical theory, but rather a contemplation of the problem of how we, on some level, can understand the minds of others. John Stuart Mills (1865/2009) had proposed the inference from analogy, that when you see someone act, you think about what would cause you to act in that way and then you can assume the other person is sharing that feeling. Lipps (1907) opposed this on the ground that from analogy there is no reason to assume that one person has the same psychology as another does (Steuber, 2006). For Lipps, einfühlung did not involve thinking from analogy, but rather "this grasp happens immediately and simultaneously with the perception, and that does not mean that we see it or apprehend it by means of the senses" (Lipps, 1907, p. 713; Jahoda, 2005, p. 156). However, Lipps' solution cannot explain how einfühlung is not just projecting one's beliefs onto another and placing one's will into all representations.

Einfühlung faced substantial and necessary critique. Max Weber (1921/2019) correctly pointed out that the problem with einfühlung was that it universalized one's own experience, projecting a person's feelings into someone else and then potentially confusing this interpretation as being a gateway to objective truth. Lipps' ideas are similar to the simulation theory of the mind, which is typically how analytic philosophy continues to utilize empathy (Goldman, 2006; Gordon, 1986; Matravers, 2017; Stueber, 2006). The analytic philosophic approach to empathy is an example of Coplan & Goldie's (2011) emphasis for a plurality of meanings, as empathy serves a specific function in their discussion, about how people perceive others. While simulation plays a role in the popular conception of empathy, in analytic philosophy, empathy usually refers to processes happening nearly automatically and as a universal function of the brain, which does not allow for substantial theorization about how it can be used in educational directions.

Phenomenology

Lipps' use of einfühlung to address the problem of how we understand others' emotional states intrigued phenomenologists Max Scheler and Edith Stein. Both agreed that there is an ability to grasp that an other has an emotional life, but that the other's emotional life is mysterious. Scheler (1923/2017) described another's emotions as "a sphere of absolute personal privacy, which can never be given to us" (p. 10). For Stein, empathy was the ability to experience a sense of others' experiences, which happens instantaneously. She maintained that because "we are subject to such diverse deceptions that occasionally we are inclined to doubt the possibility of knowledge in this domain at all. But the phenomenon of foreign psychic life is

indubitably there" (1917/1989, p. 5). Stein suggested the other may emit clues as to what their internal emotional life is, and we may or may not accurately understand this. This basic level of empathy is what allows us to understand other people as people with their own experiences and emotions. It also raises intriguing ethical questions as it offers us both tremendous power and tremendous risk of miscommunication.

Scheler's "sympathy" is not used the same way sympathy is often used in a contemporary English context. Sandra Bartky (2002) linked the notion of sympathy found in greeting cards with Scheler's understanding of pity, that he defined as a "a heightened commiseration bestowed from above and from a standpoint of superior power and dignity" (p. 40). Bartky suggested that the notion of power dynamics is where sympathy and pity depart from empathy, and perhaps compassion. Scheler (1923) outlined four different types of "fellow feeling", the "community of feeling" (p. 12), "fellow-feeling" (p. 13), "emotional infection" (p. 14), and "emotional identification" (p.18).

Community of feeling occurs when two people are experiencing the exact same emotion from the exact same cause. Scheler saw this as rare and discussed it only briefly. Fellow feeling occurs as the interplay between two different phenomenological states. Seeing someone else suffering does not cause one to also feel the same suffering, but to have an emotional reaction that is different and separate from the other. Scheler argued that sharing feelings alone do create ethical responses because simply understanding other's pain does not necessarily lead to attempts to alleviate pain. Emotional infection refers to an involuntary spread of emotion, such as through

a crowd[1] or when someone who is unhappy attempts to cheer themselves up by seeing happy friends. Finally, Scheler defined emotional identification in a psychoanalytic sense, where someone identifies so strongly with another's emotional state they lose their sense of self. For this, Scheler provided the example of hypnosis.

Scheler also outlined that it is possible to know another's feelings without sharing in that feeling, much less having that feeling cause you to act in any certain way. "Sympathy" can be a route to further understanding, but only in one of the four forms. Both emotional infection and identification create the appearance of the loss of the individuality and difference necessary for moral knowledge. What Scheler called the "fellow feeling" version of sympathy is an awareness that the Other is an individual that one's feelings cannot reach, but yet at the same time we can feel with them.

Scheler critiqued that Lipps' concept of einfühlung would never create an understanding of radical otherness. Asking "how would it be if this had happened to me?" was, to Scheler (1923), "nothing to do with genuine fellow-feeling" (p. 39) because it ignores the other's personality and circumstances, which cause people to view situations differently. He saw such a conception of empathy as too fatalistic, following Enlightenment assumptions about the "natural egoism" of humans and that the comparison of an other's situation to one's own would enclose the complexity of human emotion into a neat ideological box. The result was "to be necessarily confined in the prison of our own casual experiences… so that the objects of our understanding

[1] The intellectual context in which Scheler was writing is particularly important to understanding his conception of contagion. Scheler cites Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1896/2002) and Sigmund Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921/1975), both works part of a concern about the effects of urbanization and industrialization upon an emerging mass society. I will address the fear of mass society further in the next chapter.

and sympathy would represent merely a selection from its own experience" (Scheler, 1923, p. 49). Since Scheler imagined he experienced an enlargement of his life by engaging with stories of others' circumstances, he saw Lipps' einfühlung as failing not only on a moral level, but also on a descriptive level.

I will return to the ethical dimensions raised here later in this chapter. Scheler and Stein provided the necessary complexities of empathy experienced as a moral concept by stressing that we receive novel affective information through empathy, rather than merely placing ourselves into representation. However, their efforts were largely unimportant to empathy's path to becoming a buzzword. Rather, their concerns about empathy would become relevant again once empathy had been further popularized in the 21st century and scholars found it necessary to again grapple with its moral promises and perils. Instead, Lipps' work was picked up by a diverging intellectual path, one that had a more significant cultural impact, psychology.

Psychology

Lipps' initial definition of empathy, as projecting oneself into the place of another, is the one that eventually entered popular culture through psychology. Lipps was an influential bridge figure between philosophy and psychology, declaring in 1907 that "aesthetics is either psychological aesthetics or a collection of declarations of some individual who possesses a significantly loud voice to proclaim his private predilections or his dependence on fashion" (Koss, 2006, p. 144).

In 1879, Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychology lab at the University of Leipzig. Trained as a physiologist, Wundt believed that the psyche was as measurable as the body, and his

experiments emphasized categories such as mood, attitude, morale, personality, emotion, and intelligence (Davies, 2015). His research experiments focused on pulse rate, blood pressure, and eye movement to try to determine psychological changes. Wundt's subjects knew they were participating in experiments. Wundt was interested in collecting participant's conscious reactions to the stimuli experiments, for example to compare the time when someone becomes consciously aware of a response to when they physically respond.

Lipps, while not a close associate of Wundt, was influenced by his theory of "introspection", where experiment subjects participated in a detailed set of practices for reflection. Lipps hoped to be able to make the same sort of generalizable claims about aesthetics, by collecting introspective reports, as Wundt did about psychology. His work would come to be regarded more as the "collection of declarations of some individual who possesses a significantly loud voice" Lipps' earlier denounced (Koss, 2006, p. 144) after multiple experiments with multiple subjects by psychologists like Edward Bullough eventually concluded Lipps' conception could not be empirically demonstrated (Koss, 2006). Remy Debes (2015) summarizes that this theoretical hope Lipps presented made Lipps a sensation in his own time, but the failure to demonstrate it meant he has had little influence on subsequent psychology research.

Lipps' influence by Wundt was reciprocal, and Lipps' theories were discussed at Wundt's lab. The lab became the training ground for American psychologists in the early 20th century (Jahoda, 2005). One of Wundt's many influential students was Edward Titchener, who would go on to oversee one of America's largest psychology labs at Cornell University. Jahoda

(2005) argued that despite Lipps not seeing a difference between *sympathie* and *einfühlung*, Titchener assumed the usage of different words meant different concepts, and so created "empathy" in his book *Lectures on the experimental psychology of thought processes*, where he writes:

> Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness, but I feel or act them in the mind's muscles. This is, I suppose, a simple case of empathy, if we may coin that term as a rendering of Einfühlung; there is nothing curious or idiosyncratic about it; but it is a fact that must be mentioned.
>
> (Titchener, 1909, pp. 21–22)

Jahoda (2005) argued the exercise in translation created two different concepts that have been post-hoc filled as different, which may have been for the best. As Scheler demonstrated, sympathy can mean a variety of different affective states. It did not help matters that these states have also all variously competed for the one true claim to empathy. Debes (2015) outlined that Titchener did not show much interest in einfühlung, nor cite extensively any of the literature on it. He "introduced the word and little more" (Debes, 2015, p. 6). Despite this lack of care, by 1923, American Psychological Association president Gardner Murphy spoke about empathy entering general psychological use (Debes, 2015). But clarity did not follow popularity. Abraham Luchins' 1957 article "A Variational Approach to Empathy" identified ten different conceptions of empathy within psychology alone and voiced a need to figure out if empathy referred to the phenomenon of understanding others, the awareness of other people's and object's emotional properties, or a theory for how this understanding comes about.

A clarity of popular usage was finally provided by the late 1950s development of humanistic clinical psychology. In contrast to Sigmund Freud's emphasis that psychoanalysts must remain emotionally detached during analysis, Carl Rogers argued that for therapy to be successful, the analyst needed to create an empathetic relation with the client. By 1980, Rogers defined empathy as "temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware…" (p. 142). Unlike prior theories of empathy, Rogers (1975) believed empathy was an ability that could be developed.

Rogers' (1951) client-centered therapy treats every individual as the centre of their own experiences. A key part of his communication process was empathic listening,

> the therapist senses accurately the feelings and personal meanings that the client is experiencing and communicates this understanding to the client. When functioning best the therapist is so much inside the private world of the other that he or she can clarify not only the meanings of which the client is aware but even those just below the level of awareness. (Rogers, 1980, p. 116)

By doing so, he believed that by being heard, people can actualize the person they want to be and become free from the external pressures that are preventing them from becoming themselves. Rogers advocated that, through empathy, he was facilitating clients in finding the answers themselves.

Rogers clarified empathy as an attempt to understand the other on their own terms, but with added knowledge that the other does not have, and to combine these two outlooks to create a clearer understanding. This idea of empathy does have a clear power imbalance, but it was

developed for therapy and part of the therapist's role is to provide a clearer understanding. However, Rogers imagined this empathy as having wider applications. For example, Rogers (1980) advocated for empathy in education, that "when teachers show evidence that they understand the meaning of classroom experiences for students, learning improves" (p. 155).

Empathy: A Buzzword

With Rogers, empathy became a skill. And with the change in paradigm about individual responsibilities in the late 20th century, empathy became a valuable skill. To explain why involves a discussion about neoliberalism as a hegemonic form of understanding the world and the rise of self-help and self-optimization culture, particularly in relation to business.

Neoliberalism

Harvey (2005) defined neoliberalism as the hegemonic mode of global economics, that emphasizes free markets, free trade, and strong private property rights. Under neoliberal ideology, the state exists only to guarantee security for private property and the proper functioning of markets, which justifies heavy spending on military and police, but little on other social services. States are also encouraged to create markets where ones may not have previously existed, such as land and water rights, education, health care, and social security. Public spending is justified only if it produces economic growth rather than judging it by social good. Harvey (2005) outlined for such transformation requires "creative destruction" of existing social practices (p. 3), and to replace them with processes which seek to bring "all human action into the domain of the market" (p. 3). Emphasizing the priorities of the wealthy hardly seems empathetic. Any worthwhile ethical use of empathy has to be directed against the neoliberal

paradigm of total individual freedom and towards seeing interdependence. But empathy is easily twisted to meet neoliberal moral claims about individual self-responsibility.

Ong (2006) expanded "neoliberalism can also be conceptualized as a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as non-political and non-ideological problems that need technical solutions" (p. 3). The new relationship that imagines a technocracy beyond politics and ideology is what transforms neoliberalism from the capitalism of traditional critiques. Under neoliberalism, Ong (2006) argues, the technology of governing citizens has moved from the industrial capitalism system of labourers who must be managed, to a demand that everyone become "the entrepreneur of himself or herself" (Gordon, 1991, p. 44), regardless of the systemic oppressions subjects face. Ehrenreich (2009) argued that such thinking is on display in the wave of neoliberal "downsizing", where lost job stability is marketed as the pursuit of new opportunities. No longer is the worker an employee, but a set of skills united under a personal brand.

Neoliberalism should not be thought of as a decline in care and emotion, but as the current mutation in a long line of structures meant to channel and reroute emotion and affect to win people to systems against their own interests. In the context of mid-20th century European industrial capitalism, Antonio Gramsci (1929-1935/1971) theorized hegemony, that people are not simply "brainwashed" but are educated into consenting to the dominant system of power. Following Gramsci's work, Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts (1975) defined:

> Hegemony works through ideology, but it does not consist of false ideas, perceptions, definitions. It works primarily by inserting the subordinate class

> into the key institutions and structures which support the power and social authority of the dominant order… Hegemony is not simple "class rule". It requires to some degree the "consent" of the subordinate class, which has, in turn, to be won and secured; thus an ascendancy of social authority, not only in the state but in civil society as well, in culture and ideology. (p. 39)

Empathy as a buzzword can be framed in ways in which to acquire this consent. Empathy becomes a way to regulate and mask inequality. Berlant (2004), writing about the related affect "compassion", which she defined as a "a social relation between spectators and sufferers" (p. 1), traced a discourse of compassion across the evolution of neoliberal politics in the USA. Invoked by both Democrats (Bill Clinton's "I feel your pain") and Republicans (George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism"), Berlant (2004) argued compassion shifts the onus on individuals to help other individuals in place of a disappearing state. No longer can the state be imagined as the vehicle for compassionate or empathetic collective politics, but instead it shrinks to facilitate a free market that supposedly empowers individuals to be compassionate. Structural issues of income inequality then become merely the failures of the ultra-wealthy to be more charitable and promote good will. Berlant suggested labour is now also the act of labouring to be the deserving subject of compassion or empathy. The "hard" worker either generates income for the ultra-wealthy to spend on social projects as they see fit, generates enough income for themselves to not need to be subject of other's compassion/empathy, or proves their value in deserving aid from others.

Empathy exists as part of a constellation of positive psychology, including mindfulness, selfcare, and happiness that is encouraged to make individuals feel empowered by the precarity of being the entrepreneur of the self. Positive psychology hopes that any flaws in the current political-economic system can be overcome through turning inward. Carl Roger's conception of empathy is an entry point for further analysis of how empathy interacts with positive psychology to win consent for neoliberal governance.

It is important to keep in mind that Rogers' approach is for one-on-one counselling and would be best understood as a way to deal with the trials of life rather than as normative claims to how life should be structured. Assessed as communication, Rogers and his humanistic psychology has many admirable qualities. On the downside, the approach can focus on the self with little concern for collective wellbeing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Lyons (2001) defended that many community education groups have used humanistic psychology principles in anti-oppression work. O'Hara (1989) linked that Rogers' person-centred approach functions very much like Freire's (1970) concept of conscientização as a radical humanism. She notes an important distinction is that Rogers' imagines the individuals outside of society as compared to Freire's Marxist understanding of the individual existing in certain socio-political contexts. O'Hara acknowledged Roger's theory is limited in it lacks an acute political awareness beyond American middle-class malaise. Indeed, Rogers' political stance was not aimed at a certain vision of justice, only a process for how he imagines it can be achieved. While treating people with value should have certain political principles, Rogers did not focus on large scale politics and, but unsurprisingly given his background as a therapist, focuses on specific individuals.

My goal here is not to arbitrate humanistic psychology's core values, but rather to consider how a crass version is consumed by North American popular culture. I will look at how psychology, particularly in popular forms, "is very often how societies avoid looking in the mirror" (Davies, 2015, p. 10). Rogers and humanistic psychology may have popularized empathy in the English lexicon, but I need to back up further in time, back to Wilhelm Wundt, to contextualize a way of thinking that humanistic psychology complements.

Self-help, while suited for a neoliberal era, has older roots. The neoliberal imperative is the evolution of the protestant work ethic (Weber, 1905/2002), where hard work is rewarded (and laziness punished), which Weber argued contributed to making the extractive and violent nature of capitalism be seen as ethical. In tracing the history of the "positive thinking" self-help industry, Ehrenreich (2009) linked another of Wundt's students, William James, to self-help's foundations. Ehrenreich (2009) contextualized that the New Thought movement emerged against a backdrop of dour Calvinist belief in perpetual hard work and self-examination and self-recrimination. James was ambivalent towards the "New Thought" movement of the late 19th century, considering the claims that our mental attitudes shape our physical experiences as vague and hard to assess. But James (1902/2002) ultimately lent intellectual defense to the movement by writing "we do find sufficient evidence to convince us that the proper reform in mental attitude would relieve many a sufferer of ills that the ordinary physician cannot touch" (p. 111). Ehrenreich argued that New Thought, or as Methodist Minister Norman Vincent Peale rebranded it in the mid 20th century, Positive Thinking, was repackaged Calvinisim with a new "positive"

exterior, yet retaining the emphasis on the necessary “hard work” for the individual to attain fulfilment.

The intervention of Rogers and positive psychology was an attempt to replace an external measure of normal for people to achieve, with the assumption that growth is limitless and to be good, people must always be growing. Rogers (1961) wrote that “whether one calls it a growth tendency, a drive toward self-actualization, or a forward-moving directional tendency, it is the mainspring of life” (p. 35). Growth does not mean economically (necessarily), but it is an easy jump to make, that any form of stagnation is a negative. Erich Fromm (1952) criticized Sigmund Freud’s theories of the “drives” because it was

> based on the structure of capitalism. In order to prove that capitalism corresponded to the natural needs of man, one had to show that man was by nature competitive and full of mutual hostility. While economists "proved" this in terms of the insatiable desire for economic gain, and the Darwinists in terms of the biological law of the survival of the fittest, Freud came to the same result by the assumption that man is driven by a limitless desire… (p. 84)

While the Freudian psychoanalysis that Rogers disavowed may have been tailored to industrial early capitalism, the friendlier, empathetic, client-centred therapy of Carl Rogers suggested a more neoliberal outlook of the self, based on endless growth. While Rogers’ definition of growth was malleable, the idea of a specific type of growth, economic, as the ultimate societal good, defines neoliberalism.

Krznaric (2014) called the 20th century's self-help obsession "the age of introspection" which promoted "the idea that the best way to understand who you are, and how to live, was to look inside yourself and focus on your own feeling, experiences, and desires" (p. xxiii). Krznaric argued the goal of introspection culture is happiness, pointing to a wave of books dedicated to achieving personal happiness that would give them the self-esteem, self-improvement, and self-empowerment people sought. But clearly the continual search for happiness can not be found through self-improvement and introspection, as the self-help industry remains as big as ever.

At the same time as empathy is promoted as being a skill to build, it is also presented as a skill in decline. An American meta-analysis by Konrath, O'Brien, and Hsing (2011) analyzed 72 empathy survey (Davis, 1980; 1983) studies of university students between 1979 and 2009. They found a 40% drop in student empathy over that time. Konrath et al. offered some hope, suggesting that "if empathy can decline, then certainly it can rise again" (Myron, 2014). As covered in the introduction, Barack Obama spoke about the "empathy deficit" that needed to be addressed. If there is an empathy "deficit", such thinking implies that empathy is a resource, and one that was in better equilibrium with society in the past. Emotions in general as resources are at the center of neoliberal thinking. Daniel Goleman's 1995 best seller, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ,* argues that while emotions are neurobiologically hardwired, their expression is a matter of individual choice. One part of this is managing and motivating oneself to keep undesirable emotional reactions like anger and sadness from being expressed. The other part is to acquire desirable emotions like optimism and empathy. The acquisition of

desirable emotions to empower a pursuit of being the entrepreneur of the self has made the acquisition of empathy of great interest in both formal and informal education.

It Gets Worse: Neuroessentialism

At the same time as the self-help industry encourages neoliberal subjects to be entrepreneurs of the self, Ong (2006) outlined "governing activities are recast as non-political and nonideological problems that need technical solutions" (p. 3). Goleman's (1995) emphasis that emotions are neurobiologically hardwired is as indicative of the contemporary emotional management climate as his idea of acquiring better emotional skills. Neuroscience research underpins much of popular literature on empathy in specific, and positive psychology in general. The brain is the site of the "technical solution" to justify the current status quo. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) purports to finally see inside the brain. Davies (2015) argued fMRIs have empowered claims "the expert understanding of social life and morality is rapidly submerging into the study of the body" (p. 195). Finally, scientists and writers imagine the brain itself can be examined and provide the truth of inner mental processes.

Or maybe not. Popular media often uses graphics that illustrate the part of the brain that "lights up" to certain reaction. The "light" is a representation of blood flow to certain areas of the brain (Legrenzi & Umiltà, 2011). fMRIs can only be done by lying inside a large machine, that take seconds, rather than the milliseconds of brain activity, and often produces so much "noise" that the imaging must be done multiple times to create a composite picture (Raz, 2011). Legrenzi & Umiltà (2011) cautioned that results are being over-represented in the areas of the brain that are responsible for multiple simultaneous functions rather than one specific activity. Like a film,

the technical work to produce some images is hidden from the public's consumption, and there is more interpretation necessary to understand these images than is usually presented in media reports.

In addition to fMRIs as a popular approach to empathy research (i.e., Cogoni et al., 2018; Fourie et al., 2017; Szycik et al., 2017; Kramer et al., 2010; Lawrence et al., 2006; Nummenmaa et al., 2008; Schnell et al., 2011), mirror neurons are the second aspect of the brain frequently held up as neural proof of empathy (Gallese & Goldman, 1998; Iacoboni, 2008; Pfeifer & Dapretto, 2009). di Pellegrino et al. (1992) identified mirror neurons by examining the brains of macaque monkeys under fMRI. Mirror neurons fire the same if the monkey performed a specific action as when the monkey observed an action. Mukamel et al. (2010) later confirmed the presence of the same neurons in the human brain.

Mirror neurons facilitate empathy in the same way theory of the mind discusses empathy, but popular science literature conflates the empathy of understanding another's physical actions with ethical empathy. The leap made in popular science writing, such as neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni's (2008) suggestion in his book *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others*—that mirror neurons were the foundation of morality— is a leap too far. There is an obvious problem with this excitement over the "discovery" – only the knowledge of the neurons is new, not the neurons themselves. The neurons presence through the years have hardly been a "solution" to morality. This may be because, for science, the question of "how" is often the same as "why". "How is the sky blue?" is functionally the same question as "why is the

sky blue?". But "how are people empathetic" is not necessarily the same as "why are people empathetic?".

While this research may be highly valuable for understanding how the brain functions, I put it aside from actually answering ethical questions and instead look at how this "science" is mobilized into discursive formations. For example, Iacoboni (et al., 2007) was part of a group who infamously published an article in the *New York Times* "this is your brain on politics", that used fMRIs to map brain activity as 20 independent voters reacted to various political candidates. One of their conclusions was that

> Mr. Obama was rated relatively high on the pre-scan questionnaire, yet both men and women exhibited less brain activity while viewing the pre-video set of still pictures of Mr. Obama than they did while looking at any of the other candidates… our findings suggest that Mr. Obama has yet to create an impression on some swing voters. (Iacoboni et al., 2007, para. 20)

Although the sample size of 20 was quite small, their pre-scan questionnaires may indeed have been more accurate than the brain scanning considering Obama's eventual victory. The article was met with swift rebuke, including 17 neuroscientists writing a letter to *The New York Times* claiming the impossibility of such a study (Aron et al., 2007). For example, they point to Iacoboni et al., (2007) saying activity in the amygdala showed anxiety about a candidate, but Aron et al. (2007), complicated that observation by saying that many different emotions could cause the same activity. However, the *New York Times* has continued to run endless "This is

Your Brain on…" stories about fMRI imaging, including on "podcasts" (Carey 2016), "writing" (Zimmer, 2014), "coffee" (Reynolds, 2013), and "opera" (da Fonseca-Wollheim, 2013).

Racine et al. (2005) introduced a trio of concepts, neuro-realism, neuro-essentialism, and neuro-policy to emphasize the problems with such coverage of fMRIs. Neuro-realism "reflects the uncritical way in which an fMRI investigation can be taken as validation or invalidation of our ordinary view of the world" (Racine et al., 2005, p. 160). Racine et al., (2005) provide an example of coverage of a study of the brain's pain relief center responding to acupuncture, "proving" acupuncture does indeed provide the pain relief respondents have long reported the procedure to provide, even though why it does this is unknown. The fMRI does not actually answer "why" beyond confirming the person does actually feel it does, but the brain activity alone is provided for popular conception as proof that acupuncture "works".

Such framing leads to neuro-essentialism, the idea that personal identity and subjectivity are synonymous with the brain, which, like in this sentence, is often used as the grammatical subject in ways other organs are not. Fine (2010) summarized how neuro-essentialism depicts neuroscience informed work as proof of "hard-wiring", but that such thinking assumes socially constructed meanings are not "real". Since brain activity responds to external stimuli, there is no reason that external experience does not shape function. And third, building off the assumption that you are what fMRI can depict in your brain, fMRI becomes conceptualized as a powerful policy tool that can make decisions about difficult questions, recalling Ong's (2006) definition of neoliberalism, where "governing activities are recast as non-political and nonideological problems that need technical solutions" (p. 3).

Iacoboni et al., (2007) attempted to work through the paradox of why "belief systems" overcome neurobiology by suggesting belief systems are based upon "deliberate, reflective, explicit discourse" (para. 3) while the empathy of mirror neurons is instead "pre-reflective, automatic, implicit" (para. 3) Iacononi et al., imagined the knowledge of mirror neurons will supposedly provide explicit "proof" that human nature is empathetic and not selfish will "dissolve the massive belief systems that dominate our societies" (para. 3). Mirror neurons are framed as the ideology killer, and like the ethos of neoliberalism, reveal the true technical solution.

Inspired in part by mirror neuron research, primatologist Frans De Waal's book *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (2009), sounds like an affirming and inspiring book, discussing how kind chimpanzees are to each to other, and that by studying them, we can see the "truth" of human nature. But as Pedwell (2014) identified, "*The Age of Empathy* is a highly political book which nonetheless insists on the absolute objectivity of its scientific claims" (p. 156). De Waal claimed "instead of trying to justify a particular ideological framework, the biologist has an actual interest in the question of what human nature is and where it came from" (p. 4). He argued that animal behaviour, particularly in chimpanzees, shows that "we are group animals: highly cooperative, sensitive to injustice, sometimes warmongering, but mostly peace loving. A society that ignores these tendencies can't be optimal" (p. 5). Biological essentialism aside, so far, so good. De Waal mustered numerous anecdotes about his extensive work in primatology and summaries of studies by him and his colleagues to argue against "Social Darwinism", the need that constant, ruthless competition produces the strongest

creatures. Instead, primarily through discussing mirror neurons, he argued how basic empathy is necessary for chimpanzee survival and an advantage in human evolution.

De Waal's book betrays its premise of being non-ideological by instead providing one of the most explicit examples of how the technocratic visions of empathy are about winning consent for a neoliberal hegemony. De Waal's own reading, which he believed to be objective, is a result of reading capitalism imposed upon animals. He frequently criticized Western Europe in the book, because "when citizens are pampered by the state, they lose interest in economic advancement" (p. 37). A curious argument, as chimpanzees are not interested in the "economic advancement" of their society. Rather, De Waal conflated evolution with economic advancement. He complained that too much empathy might result in how he characterizes bonobos, as "one giant hippie fest of flower power and free love. Happy we might be, but productive perhaps not" (p. 203). De Waal assumed the reader will obviously see this as a bad thing, but it is not so clear to me. Bonobos do not all starve to death, so some level of effort at communal flourishing is still present. Nor is it clear why productivity is inherently superior to happiness.

For example, De Waal related the story of teaching capuchin monkeys how to use money as proof they are "little capitalists with prehensile tails, who pay one another's labor, engage in tit for tat, understand the value of money, and feel offended by unequal treatment. They seem to know the price of everything" (p. 196). Besides the fact that De Waal described exchange economics and not capitalism (the monkeys are not exploiting labour in search of profit), the story seems more about the fact monkeys can learn, than any story about nature. So, while the

opening sentence of the book boldly declares “greed is out, empathy is in” (p. ix), De Waal’s real argument is a bit of empathy can keep greed in check to the point another 2008 Great Recession occurs, the event De Waal often returns to as the pinnacle of his foil, Social Darwinism. The conception of keeping greed in check is key to understanding empathy as a buzzword, tempered by the neuro-essentialism that accompanies it.

Literary theorist Alan Sinfield (1992) defined “faultline stories” as ones that are told “when a part of our worldview threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we reorganise and retell its story, trying to get into shape” (p. 46). The Great Recession was an indicator that neoliberalism had not developed a utopic prosperity, as was imagined in the 1990s, but brought a new set of crises. The ethos of neoliberalism needed a new story to tell to win consent, and empathy is a perfect component in the way that it serves as a regulatory device. The fact that some care about others, for reasons beyond pure self interest necessary in a free market, was apparent right from the beginning with Adam Smith, who influentially introduced the term “the invisible hand of the market” but was also concerned about sympathy. In several ways, the buzz around empathy is a return to Smith’s principles.

What Does Neoliberal Empathy Do?

While so far I have outlined *how* empathy is mobilized as a discourse to win consent, I now address *what* empathy is said to be doing. Empathy is marketed as delivering in three core areas: personal benefit, pastoral power, and encouraging (a narrowly defined) altruism.

Personal Benefit

As early as 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote in his highly influential self-help guide *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

> if as a result of reading this book, you get only one thing – an increased tendency to think always in terms of the other person's point of view and see things from his angle as well as your own… it may easily prove to be one of the milestones of your career (p. 218).

In a modern context, influential self-help and business skill books such as *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995) and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) stress empathy because trying to understand the perspective of other people helps to determine how to craft messaging and products to their needs. Empathy in this scenario is only targeted at others because of a pre-determined goal and is not conducive to truly broadening perspective. At best, it works in liberal contract theory that you are assessing someone's needs and meeting the needs of the marketplace. At worst, empathy becomes a means to exploit others because you can use the understanding gained for personal advantage.

Pastoral Power

Boler (1999) used Foucault's (1982) concept of pastoral power, where emotions are educated to be self-controlled and surveilled, as a framework to understand how "emotions are a primary medium through which we learn to internalize ideologies as common-sense truths" (Boler, 1999, p. 32). Education, both in schools and corporate training sessions, often teaches empathy as a regulatory device to create an emotional medium to internalize neoliberal truths.

Empathy both regulates the inequalities of neoliberal societies and the interactions within hierarchical organizations, becoming an emotional technology of control. Ahmed (2004) worried that emotions in education "transforms emotions into a bank, to evoke Freire's (1970/2000) classic metaphor for instrumental and conservative practices of teaching" (p. 182).

Empathy is often used as pastoral power for education aimed at adults. For example, a collection on empathy put out by Harvard Business Review, and available in airport bookstores, suggests "empathy is key to a great meeting" (McKee, 2017, p. 43) because it "lets you see and manage… power dynamics" (p. 45). While this is true and a good way to run a meeting, the scope of empathy is not imagined as affecting the goals of the meeting, but in controlling how the participants working towards the goal behave.

Even the American military,[2] about as unempathetic a group as possible, given that their training seeks to dehumanize "the enemy" (Barry, 2010) and to internalize the expendability of lives, is celebrated for empathy education in this model (Oxley, 2011). The US Army Leadership Handbook (Department of the Army, 2006) proclaimed "the ability to see something from another person's point of view, to identify with and enter into another person's feelings and emotions, enables the Army leader to better care" (p. 4-9). In common with personal benefit, empathy is framed as a way in which to understand other people better when you are already feeling a sense of obligation towards them. Empathy as an ability is useful, but only if it is directed towards pre-determined aims. Aims are not being determined with empathy, but their

[2] The Canadian military too includes empathy in its *Leadership in the Canadian Forces Doctrine* (Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, 2005), though it is not discussed in as much detail.

deployment is managed through empathy to create social scripts that say the right thing to people while ultimately continuing to pursue personal and financial interests.

The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis

Empathy is promoted in only one way that is not either for self-gain or self-control, but to ethically improve the world. The end goal of developing empathy, for many researchers (e.g., Batson et al., 2002) is to encourage altruism, often narrowly defined through monetary donation, where individuals and corporations support people in need through empathy rather than through structural solutions.

Cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker's (2011) *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* argued that four "better angels" have helped move humans to be less violent: self-control, "the moral sense", reason, and empathy. Pinker's work deserves attention here not for its historiography, but for the role it plays in the empathy discourse. "The Pinker Thesis" is that the world is getting increasingly less violent and places empathy as a core, necessary human value. Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates reviewed the book as "one of the most important books I've read" (2012, para. 1). He raved "How can we encourage a less violent, more just society, particularly for the poor? Steven Pinker shows us ways we can make those positive trajectories a little more likely" (para. 15). Gates suggested that a more thorough knowledge of "the four angels" will accelerate their appearances in human behaviour. When Gates tweeted about *Better Angels* 14 times in May 2017, he returned the book to the top of Amazon.com's best seller list (Galanes, 2018). Pinker and similar academics serve as a form of intellectual ammunition for the socially conscious mega-rich like Gates, that the world is

inevitably getting better. The lengthy book functions as the urtext of neoliberal ideology, working to combine the veneer of science through charts, brain diagrams, and psychological experiments, aimed at shielding the ideological work, with historical examples carefully selected and twisted to reflect a pre-ordained conclusion.

Micale & Dwyer (2018) characterized the book as

> a general cultural phenomenon. Its ideas are entering mainstream public discourse and are beginning to inform the activities and outlook of some of the most prominent and influential people today. For better or worse, the Pinker Thesis is spreading globally. (p. 4)

There is a need to engage with Pinker's arguments on a serious level. Pinker's historical methodology has been thoroughly criticized (Micale & Dwyer, 2018) for its nearly exclusive focus upon Europe (neither colonialism or imperialism is listed in the index), a lack of engagement with the methods of academic history, and, despite his declaration for data, a dependence upon cherry picking anecdotes.

While Pinker positioned his work as non-ideological, citing both the work on cognitive biases and offers diagrams of the brain as "factual" support, Pinker's argument needs to be engaged with from a philosophical perspective rather than the professed "unbiased" psychological perspective to examine exactly how empathy works. Pinker emphasized the end goal of empathy is Peter Singer's "expanding circle of empathy" (p. 175), to which Pinker attributes the rise of literacy, arguing reading is a technology for perspective taking. Singer (2015) himself is more skeptical of empathy, instead trying to portray his theory of ethical

altruism as a purely rational endeavour, based upon “the fact that the lives of distant strangers have the same value as the lives of those we love” (p. 80). A worthy end goal, but one that seems to require more than facts to achieve.

The output of this circle, for both Pinker and Singer, is altruism, the concern for the well-being of others in direct interactions. Pinker (2011) offered a surprising source for what expanded the circle, business, because “once people are enticed into voluntary exchange, they are encouraged to take each other’s perspectives to clinch the best deal, which in turn may lead them to respectful consideration of each other’s interests, if not necessarily warmth” (p. 683). Pinker’s analysis of world history boils down to that neoliberal exchange, which, when coupled with the enforcement of “civilizing manners”, he views as creating less violence. Pinker was not wrong in that wars between Western nations are generally economically disadvantageous to them. On the other hand, Pinker was close to an epiphany writing “governments that base their nation’s wealth on digging oil, minerals, and diamonds out of the ground rather than adding value to it via commerce and trade are more likely to fall into civil wars” (p. 684). Such an assertion is indicative of the shallowness of Pinker’s historical curiosity and his complete oversight of colonialism and neo-imperialism. Instead, he attributes it to a lack of empathy, in that “cultural and intellectual elites have always felt superior to businesspeople and it doesn’t occur to them to credit mere merchants with something as noble as peace” (p. 684). Pinker declared “ideology” one of the humanity’s inner demons (p. 566), yet as his book stands, Pinker’s work is neoliberalism par excellence, declaring the end of violence is the “Capitalist

Peace" (p. 287). Pinker, contra-Marx, has developed the lens of world history not being one of capital exploitation, but one of capital pacification.

Singer's (2015) conception of effective altruism explicitly involves "choosing" the highest paying job so that you can give away as much as possible. An entire chapter of his book *The Most Good You Can Do* is titled "Earning to Give" (p. 39-54), as if having a high-earning career is simply a choice. Once in this position, Singer advocates donating as much money as you can to charities. While he considers the differences between how much charities actually give to people in need, there is no reflection upon the charity model. Rather Singer argues complicity may be fine because

> if you do not take the position offered by the investment bank, someone else will, and from the bank's perspective that person will probably be nearly as good… your refusal to take the job is not going to stop [anything] happening. It will prevent you being able to donate as much to good causes (p. 52).

The question of accumulating capital is not couched in moral terms in the same way spending money is. Only half the equation is really being addressed under altruism.

With charity being the moral output, empathy is often instrumentalized as the pathway to donations. For example, a 2015 TED Talk by virtual reality (VR) filmmaker Chris Milk paraphrased Roger Ebert in claiming VR is an empathy machine. Milk's film, *Clouds Over Sidra*, is an 8-minute 360° film created by Milk and Gabo Arora that places viewers as an omniscient viewer in a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan. Sidra, a twelve-year-old girl, narrates about her life in the camp. But what is the viewer to do with their newfound empathy? United

Nations promotional material primarily discussed *Clouds Over Sidra* as a vehicle to increase charitable donations, reporting that viewers of *Clouds* donated twice the normal rate of a campaign (Robinson, 2016). Greenpeace reported similar figures with its VR experience of the rain forest (Bailenson, 2018b).

Much of the research on empathy being used for pro-social ends remains in the neoliberal belief system that individual relations can end inequality. Some of this research is undoubtedly well intentioned, while others are a misdirection from the fact that neoliberalism's requisite cheap labour requires oppression. Some scholars, such as Calloway-Thomas (2010) emphasized how "our beneficence increases the likelihood that we will also have future profitable exchanges, if need be. In this way, empathy conspires with cultural and social capital to provide assistance to the weak and exploited among us" (p. 150). But even the studies that suggest an altruistic reason for empathetic action, such as Batson's extensive work on the empathy-altruism promise (e.g., Fultz et al., 1986; Batson & Shaw, 1991; Batson et al., 2002) focus on individual actions.

Keen's (2007) complication of Pinker's idea of the novel as a technology for perspective taking correctly notes, "simple accounts of the utility of novel reading… should be replaced by more nuanced study of the consequences of experiencing aesthetic emotions" (p. xxv), a call that the remainder of this dissertation takes up. But I trouble that Keen's critique accepts the term of charitable action as the goal of empathy and only cautions that feeling empathy from novels can not be "securely linked in a causal chain" to charitable action (p. 35).

Keen's meta-analysis[3] of psychology studies on the links between fiction and charitable action show, at best, mixed results, that she assumes must be the only demonstratable result. However, Keen's criticism is trapped under the "empathy-altruism" hypothesis, in which she argued that because people do not display charitable behaviours, then empathy has not been created. She pointed to the American 2002 National Altruism study that "eighty-nine percent of Americans… believe that people should be willing to help those who are less fortunate" (p. 26), but that this does not actually play out when it comes to action. I agree with the above, but do not see it as the condemnation Keen imagined it to be. The point of empathic engagement with art should not primarily be to motivate charity, but could expand into more valuable, but less quantifiable relationships with the world.

The idea of altruism follows Davies (2015) summation that "empathy and relationships are celebrated, but only as particular brand habits that happy individuals have learned to practice" (p. 212). Empathy is an important skill to have in the self's toolkit and donating to charity is a sign of a "good" person, but it does not lead to questions about why the world is as it is, only to questions about how to be a regulatory valve upon inequity. Empathy for altruism imagines the individual as not already implicated in social relations, but rather as a subject untethered from impacting the world. Never with empathy are the privileged to do less harm, but only to do more good. The charity model continues the belief of entrepreneurs of the self.

[3] Several studies since 2004 have suggested stronger links, such as Johnson (2012) and Johnson et al. (2013), though as Keen cautions, the studies involved an experiment design that asks participants to do something after reading and judging the results. For example, Johnson (2012) dropped pens within sight of the participant and then recorded if the participant helps to pick up the pens, while Johnson et al. (2013) asked participants to fill out an additional survey for a mere $0.05 payment.

Each entrepreneur of the self is imagined as an independent subject of "rights". Razack (2001) argued that the language of "rights thinking" (p. 17) is a construct that allows the privileged to deny oppression exists. The core of liberal contract theory is that everyone is a subject who enters into mutually beneficial social contracts in the name of maximum personal liberty. As Razack (2001) emphasized, the idea of the universal liberal subject hides historical processes of domination by allowing the oppressed to be blamed for their own failures (which has only intensified under the ethical claims of a neoliberal system). While modern contract theorists like Rawls (1971) emphasized the ideal of the contract, that could apply to all subjects, Mills (1997) argued this ignores the "eminently non-ideal features of the real world" that are not incorporated into the ideal, which starts from scratch, "without any fundamental change in the arrangements that have resulted from the previous system of explicit de jure racial [or any form] privilege" (p. 75). The long and violent history of extraction and exploitation by the West is supposed to be wiped clean simply by the declaration the individual is now the entrepreneur of the self in a supposedly meritocratic system.

Without a broadening of how interconnectivity works, empathy is a choice extended by the privileged to another individual, unless they have already established a personal relationship. Because of this, power relations are maintained. Heron (2007) argued that the discourse of development and charity:

> normalizes our centering of ourselves in relation to other people's needs, not by recognizing how we are implicated in global economic processes of globalization that underlie these needs, but by erasing the agency of local peoples who are

> Othered in these processes, and by presenting "our" (read white middle-class Northern) knowledge, values, and ways of doing things as at once preferable and right (p. 3).

For Heron, the "resulting moral imperative and entitlement to intervene in/"improve" the lives of those very Others, rests on assumptions organized by racial differences" (p. 126). Neoliberal empathy is shallow, extending to the "deserving poor" individual. While the disadvantaged are told to pursue resilience or grit (e.g., Duckworth, 2016), privileged subjects are told to have empathy. We can only have empathy for specific other persons, not entire social subject positions, much less understand all positions as interconnected.

Both De Waal and Pinker claimed their work is non-ideological, which perhaps demonstrates a problem of the 21st century, that for those in positions of power, neoliberalism is viewed not a construct, but a natural outcome, either of human behaviour or historical trial and error at building the best society. De Waal (2009) and Pinker (2011) shared the concern that with too much empathy, humans might be happy, but not productive. Business is unquestioned as the grand organizer of human activity and charity is business' fruit. Singer (2015) wrote capitalism "increases the ability of the rich to help the poor" (p. 50). All three share an underlying belief in the ethos of neoliberalism that assumes only a profit motive ever drives progress, a dim view of human curiosity and creativity. But such thinking offers us a false dilemma. We do not need to pick one of the extreme versions of capitalism and communism that are played out in the 20th century. Rather, I seek to make business thinking subordinate to empathy instead of empathy subordinate to the neoliberal subject, the reverse of most popular conceptions of empathy.

A Critical Theory of Empathy

While developing more humane and empathetic ways of interacting within business is a noble goal, I find the scope of such empathy too limited and can not imagine how empathy could ever be a pathway to anything other than, as Neil Young (1989) critiqued President George Bush in his song "Keep on Rockin' in the Free World", "a kinder, gentler machine gun hand". The empathy of the neoliberal era is more for the strength of corporate teamwork, the idea that working together, people create more innovative solutions.

After this critique of empathy's easy reduction to simply making dominant power relations more palatable, can we still follow Chabot Davis (2014) in her call that "left-oriented scholars cannot afford to give up empathy's promise for fostering cross-cultural understanding and desires for social justice and quality" (p. 406)? I believe so, but with the necessary reimagining of what empathy *enables us to do* rather than what empathy *does*.

Many scholars in feminist and anti-racist theory have emphasized empathy's role in obtaining justice (e.g., Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Bartky, 2002; Bennett, 2005; Chabot Davis, 2014; Hill Collins, 1990, Leonardo, 2009), providing a foundation to move forward upon. Empathetic imagination must then not turn only to "how I can fix this situation" but rather, "how did I contribute to this already created situation". "Empathy" must be a recognition of "how we continuously affect one another and shape another's conditions and experiences, if unequally and often violently" (Pedwell, 2010, p. 123).

Affect Theory

While there is a cognitive, contemplative, reflective side once empathy is felt, it is important to remember, as Ahmed (2004) emphasized:

> empathy remains a "wish feeling", in which subjects "feel" something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels. The impossibility of feeling the pain of others does not mean that the pain is simply theirs, or that their pain has nothing to do with me. I want to suggest here, cautiously, and tentatively, that an ethics of responding to pain involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel (p. 30).

Empathy is not an ability that will magically allow us to know the other, and to believe so would only be harmful. Empathy, in my definition, does not need to be an exact emotional match, but rather an attunement to being affectively impacted by others. Affects are visceral forces beyond emotion and conscious knowing. They are necessarily relational, found in "the intensities that pass body-to-body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise)" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Ahmed described affects as "sticky", as "what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (p. 29). Empathy is then, as Pedwell (2014) emphasized, not an end point. Rather it is a feeling that causes new ideas, echoing Deleuze's (1964/2008) reflection that "thought is nothing without something that forces and does violence to it. More important than thought is 'what leads to thought'" (p. 95). Empathy cannot be an end unto itself, but a way of opening new potentialities.

With the current “common sense” of the global order presented as rational, as it has been referred to since the Enlightenment, the hopes of breaking this rational hegemony often falls to affective force. Bartky (2002) argued that historically the solution to overcoming hegemonies was in the search for “better cognition”, such as new forms of education. While these play a vital role, Olson (2013), in reflecting upon his experiences with university students, writes “radical teachers cannot assume that an awakening from moral amnesia will be triggered automatically by mere exposure to radical approaches” (p. 16). In particular, there are no incentives for the privileged to challenge the hegemonic order. Rather, Olson suggested “We must find ways, perhaps outrageous and risky ways, of joining concrete analysis of the world with the boldly undernourished capacities for empathy and compassion existing in our students” (p. 16). Bartky agreed, adding that “few theorists have examined closely enough the emotional dimension that is part of the search for better cognition, of the affective taste of the kinds of intersubjectivity that can build political solidarities” (p. 72). Ahmed (2004) emphasized the importance of emotion in education as opening lines of communication rather than as outcomes. The affective relationship of empathy is not a skill, but rather is an affect that should be generated as a way of opening up learning outside the bounds of “common sense”.

Todd (1998) raised the concern that

> empathic feelings are within no one's sphere of control, neither the one who wishes to encourage empathy in others nor the one who actually feels empathy. Thus, the unpredictability and non-intentionality that characterize the experience of being-for turn the demand for empathy into an impossibility (p. 49).

While this caution is clearly correct in the inability to "demand" empathy, as Ahmed (2004) has emphasized, I am not demanding empathy as a result. But it is exactly the reason that they are not within anyone's control that makes affects powerful. Rather than assume we need to build empathy, it is more fruitful to consider how environments encourage affective connections or create affective blockages (Ascheim, 2016; Berlowitz, 2016).

The emphasis on affect opens up criticism such as that of Bloom (2016), who argued that empathy's selectivity and in-group bias will lead to moral concern for those who are seen and ignore the "unseen" masses. Instead, Bloom (2016) argued for a form of rational utilitarianism. In regard to Bloom, there are many ends that rationality could decide is acceptable. For example, sweatshop labour is rational to neoliberal logic. Wong & Schorr (2013) outlined that utilitarian theory is unclear as to the moral status of sweatshop labour, echoing the words of the think tanks and economists who defend the practice that any job is better than nothing (Myerson, 1997; Krugman, 1997; Perry, 2014). This ignores the fact that countries have been pushed to cheapen their labour through globalization (Enloe, 2016). But such reason requires any feelings for the worker to be crushed.

Bloom's argument also depended on the idea that empathy alone is the criteria for ethics, a concern that is defeated when empathy is no longer seen as the outcome, but rather as a route to knowledge. Empathy as a path to opening up new ways of thinking does not push aside thinking. But it may allow what counts and does not count as evidence to shift and for formerly overlooked or unconsidered pathways to be rejoined.

Vetlesen (1994) wrote

> moral perception tends to be a blind spot in moral theories where the object or phenomenon of judgment is so often taken for granted – as if the act of identifying and recognizing a situation as morally significant merited no theoretical inquiry and met with no practical obstacles (p. 7).

For this reason, the affective side of empathy is important as, clearly, there are many injustices that are overlooked. Vetlesen (1994) developed his theory of moral judgment as being equally cognitive and emotional. He gives as an example that suffering is constituted as an object for moral judgement through the cooperation of the two faculties. As seeing the world is informed through both cognitive and emotional views simultaneously, "suffering is not a neutral phenomenon in the first place, and there is no disinterested access to the human reality of suffering" (Vetlesen, 1994, p. 159). He outlined a flow of "perception -> judgement -> action" (p. 163) to explain that both cognitive and emotional perception must be in sync to act. Someone may be capable of cognitively perceiving a situation, but without an emotional understanding, they have no motivation to go forward on judgement and action because a joint cognitive and emotional state is more persuasive than a merely cognitive one.

But Vetlesen was well aware that "individuals are not free to pick just any moral objects… perception does not start from scratch, it is guided, channelled, given a specific horizon, direction, and target by society" (p. 194). Vetlesen did not mean this in the sense that moral concern is as simple as exposure to difference. Rather, he emphasized empathy as precarious and that ideology, technology, and bureaucracy can easily abstract Others from being

worthy of moral considerations. Mills (1997) theorized that under the “racial contract”, the liberal subject of the social contract is only a white subject, who derives wealth from the exploitation from racialized peoples. Mills argued that “because the racial contract requires the exploitation of nonwhites, it requires in whites the cultivation of patterns of affect and empathy that are only weakly, if at all, influenced by nonwhite suffering” (p. 95), which exemplifies Vetlesen’s conception of channeling emotions away from certain Others to deny them moral subjectivity. While Hoffman (2000), Pinker (2012), Bloom (2016), and Printz (2011) discussed empathy’s “familiarity bias”, they devote insufficient consideration to how what is familiar is a construct. As Ahmed (2000) defined, the Other is “not as that which we fail to recognise, but as that which we have already recognised as "a stranger"” (p. 3), and already recognized as less worthy as a moral subject.

Conclusion

Oxley (2011) was correct in asserting that empathy “is unsuitable as a criterion of morality because it is an experience, not a normative principle”. Ahmed (2004) too was suspicious of the idea that warm feelings can eradicate problems, that “a world where we all love each other is a humanist fantasy that informs much of the multicultural discourse of love (if only we got closer we would be as one)” (p. 140). Empathy itself will not alleviate the suffering of specific individuals as some skill-based conceptions imagine. Rather, affective relations may contribute to the recognition of the already ongoing moral interrelationship in the processes of Othering and potentially trigger support for collective action that can alleviate such processes. The latter action will require viewers to then engage in the search for better answers. This

conception answers Koehn's (1998) question: "are we wicked if we sleep in and dream for another hour instead of waking up and making an effort to empathize with our family members?" (p. 65) with a resounding "no". Empathy is an affect to increase recognition that the effects of one's actions already do have upon others. It is not about consuming all one's time in an effort to be better. Empathy rejects the entrepreneur-of-the-self model where problems are solved by doing more. Clohesy (2013) stressed that "violence" is the real significance of empathy, which is important "less in its capacity to give us a sense of what it is like to be someone else and more in how it allows us to think of ourselves as subjects who commit violence to difference" (p. 6). The affective encounter with difference can break the neoliberal reduction of everyone being equal but autonomous individuals, and instead realize how actions reverberate across the social web.

As Chabot Davis (2014) indicated, empathy in this way is linked to a "left-oriented" (p. 406) politics, though the exact nature remains up for debate. The affect is utilized as largely a micro-politics, of getting people to feel injustice for and then to search for the larger answers. Empathy is not a political project in itself, but opening doors to new politics – no longer about the technocratic search for new solutions, but about implementing the will to implement solutions that may not be on the side of those already in power. There is a wide variety of solutions out there, but a lack of will to take action, or even passively support others to take action. Consider climate change, where the knowledge of what can be done to save the planet exists. The problem, as climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe (2019) explained, is not that people do not believe the science, but they fear they do not like the solution. How do we go about creating an emotional will to implement these solutions?

In her qualitative study of what led white people to become anti-racist allies, O'Brien (2001) found it was some form of empathy that triggered the actions, not cool logic. This was either through relationships, through engagement with African American art, or shared experience. Journalist Rebecca Solnit (2013) recounted similar stories, that there is an affective moment in the reconsideration of beliefs. And this, ultimately, is how I would define empathy, the emotional connection to another person or situation that, as Pedwell (2012) called it, is a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (p. 166). It is tempting to imagine this as a force the individual puts out into the world, like some form of emotional echo location, but this would only make it safe, as very rare is the person who seeks to be "radically unsettled". Empathy is not entirely out of control, as we must consider which environments produce and which environments kill these potentialities. It remains a political tool in setting up environments in which empathy can slip through the cracks in the walls of belief rather than pushing down an entire wall. This raises a new set of questions: Which of these environments are ethical? Who and what is being used to make others feel? There is great potential for exploitation in crafting the affective vessel, which must be taken up further. The next chapter addresses how film content and viewing environment work as affective environments.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an exploration of the history of the word "empathy", which illustrated how the concept in its current popular usage is combining the legacy of two different disciplines, psychology, and philosophy. I explained why I have positioned my work on the philosophical concept rather than upon the psychology concept. The chapter next critically

analyzed how several sources, both academic and popular, use empathy. I problematized how the current concept of empathy often suggests an illusion or hope for change with little concrete connection to particular actions. I offered in this chapter a modified definition of empathy which I utilized for the remainder of the study.

Chapter 3: Deconstructing the "Empathy Machine": Film and Empathy

This chapter contributes to the literature review but transgresses beyond the philosophical definitions to draw on disciplinary knowledge from Film Studies and Critical Media Studies. It continues to explore empathy and expand upon films' role in creating empathetic learning opportunities and/or responses from viewers (i.e., participants). It is divided into three sections with the final section discussing the contributions film can make to creating learning opportunities that foster potentialities.

The Empathy Machine

> Movies are the most powerful empathy machine in all the arts. When I go to a great movie I can live somebody else's life for a while. I can walk in somebody else's shoes. I can see what it feels like to be a member of a different gender, a different race, a different economic class, to live in a different time, to have a different belief. This is a liberalizing influence on me. It gives me a broader mind. It helps me to join my family of men and women on this planet. It helps me to identify with them, so I'm not just stuck being myself, day after day. The great movies enlarge us, they civilize us, they make us more decent people (Ebert, 2005, para. 3-5).

Long time critic Roger Ebert prioritized empathy to describe why he felt his life in film criticism was important. He defended his perspective by arguing he had not spent his career simply evaluating the merits of entertainment, but that engaging with films could actually contribute to a meaningful difference in viewer's lives. Ebert's conception of empathy, while

relying on the other's shoes metaphor problematized in the second chapter, is congruent with my definition of empathy as a force that leads to different ways of thinking. Unfortunately, while Ebert's use of machine was metaphorical, the idea of art as a literal machine, perhaps unsurprisingly given the commodification of empathy outlined in the previous chapter, has taken on a life of its own. That virtual reality (VR) is "an empathy machine" has been a truism amongst some technology enthusiasts since a 2015 TED Talk by Chris Milk, the filmmaker behind the United Nations' much lauded VR project *Clouds Over Silra*. Sarah Hill, the chief executive officer of Story Up: An Empathy Agency, a company that creates virtual reality experiences, envisioned a future where people can be manipulated, through studying electroencephalography data, like "tuning a piano. The storyteller presses a key and the psychologist studies whether the immersive storytelling input needs to be louder, brighter or a different character altogether" (Jan 5, 2017). Utopian ideas like creating immersive storytelling to fine tune messages quickly slide into the dystopian if thought is given to how such power is framed as manipulating the audience to any desired end.

Thankfully, the idea of the literal machine directing human emotion based upon fine tuned manipulable storytelling is improbable. Even Jeremy Bailenson (2018b), the head of Stanford's VR lab and a major proponent of the educational and life changing capabilities of VR technology, emphasized that VR does not automatically create empathy. Bailenson only went as far as suggesting that VR may be better at communicating empathy because of its ability to create presence, where the user's motor and perceptual skills interact with a virtual world in a

parallel fashion to the real world. He argues this makes VR "psychologically real" (2018a, p. 20).

The idea of new communication technologies creating an enhanced psychological realism that will solve large scale problems because it will create closer connections among people is not novel, but rather a recurring pattern in emergent technologies. Soviet film director Dziga Vertov (1923/2011) believed the movie camera could create new consciousness by revealing the truth the subjective human eye can miss. Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1969) believed that electronic media would inevitably transform "literate, fragmented man into a complex and depth-structured human being with a deep emotional awareness of his complete interdependence with all of humanity" (p.70). Similar utopian visions followed the birth of the internet. For example, Howard Rheingold (1993) envisioned the internet as a place beyond racism, sexism, and classism because anonymity allowed users to define themselves and everyone could relate as equals. Nearly thirty years later, the internet, partially because of that anonymity, has only served to amplify messages of racism and misogyny. The continued search for the empathy machine is proof of its failure because the more empathetic world will not be created through technology, but through better relationships within the world.

The reason for these failures is they all presume the obstacle to caring about others is simply the boundaries between bodies. Such a belief operates under the assumption that empathy is created, as Ahmed (2000) wrote "if only we'd be closer, there would have been love, we would have lived as one" (p. 124). Ahmed emphasized this treats the (typically white) empathizer as simply not having known about, rather than having a complicit passivity, in

oppressive hierarchies. Indeed, for Ahmed (2000), the stranger is not who "we fail to recognize, but as that which we have already recognized as 'a stranger'" (p.3). As outlined in Chapter Two, who we feel empathy for and who we do not is not simply a random occurrence of those outside our concern, but politically and historically decided. New technology can aid in the unlearning process, but it can never wipe the slate clean. Unfortunately, technological advances bring about new hopes that seem rather to obfuscate these historical processes and continue to approach empathy as needing to come from a place purely of discovery. Rather than reflect upon current circumstances, there is a belief that we need only to augment existing structures rather than interrogate their actual foundations.

A belief that it is new technology that is needed follows what Chouliarki (2013) argues shifts blame "from the apathy of the West towards the failing performative practice through which the West is invited to engage with vulnerable others" (p. 190). If proximity was the strongest approach to learning empathy, then the personal encounter would be the ideal venue for generating empathy and technology should replicate this as much as possible. But empathy is not created simply by proximity – it is possible to have empathy for people far away and possible to have hatred for your neighbours. Pedwell's (2014) work on travel "immersions", which put citizens of the privileged West into contact with the everyday lives of the Global South, emphasizes the limits of proximity. She writes such programs attempt to take the imagination out of empathy, as if the traveler will encounter a reality that melts away their "cognitive, cultural, or political frames" (p. 83). The idea behind immersions is that having then encountered this reality, the traveler can in the future speak a "truth" from experience of being there. Bennett's (2005)

belief that the affect of empathy is not truth, but rather an emotional jolt that leads to new thought, is ignored by the conception of presence being direct access to truth.

Instead, this chapter will look at film not as a literal technology of empathy (and will critique such an approach), but as a site of a potentially empathetic experience. The focus will be a literature review on how art, particularly film, has been imagined as an ethical force. I will examine how films have been theorized to create empathy and, in context of Chapter Two, what this empathy looks like. I will conclude with a theoretical framework of film's role in the learning of the radically unsettling empathy I outlined in Chapter Two.

Art as Ethical Experience

Nussbaum (2010) stressed empathy as the road to building a "moral imagination" and argues that a Liberal Arts curriculum, and particularly literature, is necessary to educate for a liberal democracy. Nussbaum defined empathy as the positional thinking that creates "the ability to see the world from another's viewpoint". Hammond & Kim (2014) asserted that Nussbaum's position is much in line with Pinker's (2011), who also argued "reading is a technology for perspective-taking" (p. 175). Pinker in this instance spoke specifically about 17th century novels, yet it mirrors the way VR is currently conceptualized in the idea of engaging with fiction because it shrinks distance, in this case between the reader/viewer and the subject of the novel, into perhaps even a merging of views. Hammond & Kim (2014) connected both Nussbaum and Pinker's theorization to the "empathy-altruism" hypothesis and that reading literature or watching certain films are imagined as spurring altruism. Already universities have begun to implement literature courses as a way to humanize future technocrats, but other scholars, such as

Olson (2013), have criticized the optimism expressed in the position that art is inherently empathizing.

Critique of Art as Ethical Experience

In his work on cinema, Deleuze (1985/2013) stressed "if an art necessarily imposed the shock or vibration, the world would have changed long ago" (p. 162), yet he did not abandon hope for the political usage of such a "shock". For Deleuze, shock (in the sense of experiencing something new, not necessarily something upsetting or a spectacle) was still the key to cinema's emancipatory potential because the affective force of the images (and sounds) could, but not necessarily would, expand the viewer's normal framing of the world. Films, for Deleuze, were not examples of a certain phenomenon, providing buttressing to the rational argument, but rather alternative modes of thinking about issues themselves. The idea of film's affective force has long been key to film studies analysis of how films work.

Historical Approaches to Film Emotion

In one of the first works of film theory, Hugo Münsterberg, a psychologist who studied with Willhelm Wundt, (1916/2001), argued "to picture emotions must be the central aim of the photoplay" (p. 99). As films of the time lacked synchronous sound, Münsterberg contrasted the characters on screen, who had the close-up and repeated takes to give them multiple opportunities to perfect their approach, to characters on stage who could speak. He defined the former presentation as emotional and the latter as logical. He further broke film emotions into two categories. The first is "emotions in which the feelings of the persons in the play are transmitted to our own soul" (p. 104) and the second from "the standpoint of his independent

affective life" (p. 105), a division that mirrors the common division (Krznaric, 2014) of affective empathy, which is the sharing of emotions, and cognitive empathy, the understanding of why these emotions occur.

Münsterberg's first type of emotion was initially offered as both the medium's promise and its threat to society. For radical filmmakers, like Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein, the emotional potential of film seemed the perfect revolutionary tool. Eisenstein, citing Lipps, wrote, "emotional perception is achieved through the motor reproduction of the movements of the actor by the perceiver" (1924/2014, p. 48). He developed an aesthetic style around the montage, linking images that provoke emotional reactions in combination with each other to make political points rather than on making figurative recreations of reality. For Eisenstein, film editing allowed the visualization of dialectical materialism, that the display of contradictions in material circumstances could be simultaneously visualized and understood intellectually while also being felt by the audience. Eisenstein's theories are not dissimilar to the contemporary hopes for VR, but ultimately only demonstrated that there were no specific film techniques that necessarily created the sought-after shock.

Current Approaches

One of the branches of contemporary film is cognitive film theory, which aims at understanding film through analytic philosophy and cognitive psychology to explain how film viewers experience film narratives. Because media effects are generally not empirically provable, they are waved away as unimportant. The aim of much of cognitive film studies has been to "de-politicize" the study of the film while centring emotions, focusing on not what films

say, but how they say it. Film theorist David Bordwell (1983) argued cognitive theory should "lower the stakes" (p. 5) of film theory from focusing on the cultural and political significance of film. However, cognitivism as a theoretical approach has played a key role in introducing "empathy" into film studies, and through this route allows film studies to be re-politicized. If, as the introduction outlined, empathy is a positive political goal, then the work of cognitive film theory retains salience to cultural understandings of film.

Much of the work on cognitive film theory (e.g., Carroll, 2010; Gaut, 2010; Neill, 1996; Plantinga, 1999) focuses not on the un-settling potential of empathy, but on film-specific questions related to the larger theory-of-mind branch of empathy philosophy. While this body of literature has value in how film techniques may or may not be used, such as considerations of point of view shots (Smith, 1995) and close-ups (Plantinga, 1999) to elicit a sense empathy where the audience feels with a character, there is no political insight emerging from such empathy. Indeed, Smith (1995) gives a scene from *Strangers on a Train* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1951) as an example of how these techniques have no necessary ethical component. In the scene, the murderer Bruno (Robert Walker) attempts to retrieve a cigarette lighter he has dropped into a storm drain. While retrieving the lighter would enable him to frame the protagonist, Guy (Farley Granger) for murder, Smith argues the cross cutting between Bruno's desperate grasping down the drain and his determined facial expression create empathy for Bruno to achieve his goal, despite viewers knowing such an action will have negative results.

It is time to raise the stakes of film empathy from descriptive process to link back to the imagined potential of empathy.

Emotional Consumption

Carroll (2010) summarized the cognitivist viewpoint on emotions that "by exciting the emotions, moviemakers thereby render their stories accessible to many" (p. 19) and that makes movies "moral through and through" (p. 19) because stories often focus on making us sympathize with protagonists and have antipathy toward villains. Such morality, however, is often rather troubling, painting simple and often trite solutions to complex problems. Instead, the contribution from cognitivist film theory is that emotional experiences are a key attraction of films, but such conception provides little in the way of understanding where film's emotional power is directed.

Kracauer described films as:

> the mirror of the prevailing society. They are financed by corporations, which must pinpoint the tastes of the audience at all costs in order to make a profit. Since the audience is composed largely of workers and ordinary people who gripe about the conditions in the upper circles, business considerations require the producer to satisfy the need for social critique among consumers. A producer, however, will never allow himself to be driven to present material that in any way attacks the foundations of society, for to do so would destroy his own existence as a capitalist entrepreneur (1927/1995, p. 291).

Markert (2011) amended Kracauer's theory of film as a reflection of society to one in which it "refracts", which "suggests that recurring exposure to a film's message may not just reinforce existing attitudes and beliefs, but shape" (p. xx). Film production has become cheaper

since Kracauer's writing in 1927, but still remains one of the more expensive art forms. Because films are expensive to produce and distribute, their morality often reflects a common-sense view of society, that, much like the neoliberal empathy described in Chapter One, may wish for a kinder world, but not a world that is ordered in radically new ways. The vast majority of films are not even attempting to lead the viewer through a Deleuzian reframing of thinking.

Playwright and screenwriter Bertolt Brecht (1964) worried that emotional narratives created a bubble for emotions, leading audiences to be self-congratulatory for having feelings, but providing no impetus to act on them. "Feel-bad" media functions to satisfy "the need for social critique among consumers" which Kracauer identified (1927/1995, p. 291), and provides reassurance that the audience member is a "good person" because they have been appropriately moved. On a commercial level, "feel-bad" narratives have been popular since at least the 19th century novel, as Woodward (2004) identified Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the "ur-text of liberal compassion" (p. 62). Beecher, a white, Christian abolitionist, used characters who Hartman (1997) described as "antislavery blackface" in a sentimental melodrama to make white readers feel the immorality of slavery. As the urtext of compassion, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has achieved near mythic status as a vastly overstated contributor to the abolition of slavery, such as described in Pinker (2011). Yet the novel did not prevent subsequent anti-Blackness, nor has any novel in the subsequent 170 years been mythologized to such great effect.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the characters, being minstrel show stereotypes, fail to provide a sense of their inner life and have similar attributes as contemporary blackface performances,

where “affect, gesture and vulnerability to violence constituted blackness” (Hartman, 1997, p. 26). When the white reader filled in the gaps needed for characterization in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin,* this confirmed the slave as only a commodity for the reader’s moral awakening.

In 1955, writer James Baldwin critiqued *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its successors as:

> Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty (2012, p. 14).

In the protest novel (and films), characters are mere ciphers that oversimplify the complex web of social relations that lead to actual oppression, for example the very oversimplification the protest novel invokes. Baldwin continued in his argument that this form of “protest novel” is not only not a threat to hegemony, but is endorsed by hegemony as a false solution for the problem because the reader/viewer is not using emotions to make linkages to action, but is simply priding themselves on the ability to feel anything. As a novelist himself, Baldwin was not criticizing the entire art form, but rather particular popular formulas designed to elicit only emotion rather than emotion, reflection, and action.

As Hollywood sought to manipulate emotional connections from audiences, the adaptation of the sentimental protest novel was inevitable, and it remains a genre that is not only thriving, but often bestowed the industry’s top honour of quality, the Academy Award for Best Picture (e.g., *Dances With Wolves*, Kevin Costner, 1990; *Crash*, Paul Haggis, 2005; *Slumdog*

Millionaire, Danny Boyle, 2008; *Green Book*, Peter Farrelly, 2018). *Crash* makes frequent appearances in the literature on film, learning, and anti-racism. Chabot Davis (2014) recounted her white liberal students responding very favourably to *Crash*, precisely because of its pessimism at the possibilities of radical change, the suggestions "we're all racists", and the endorsement of a simple "neoliberal solution to racism… individual civility, color blindness, and tolerance" (p. 185). The fact *Crash* (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Guy, 2007; Stuckey & Kring, 2007) is so prevalent as a text used by white educators emphasizes how deep consideration must be given to films beyond simple critical and industrial acclaim. In response, Dei & Howard (2008) used *Crash* as a case study for the limitations of liberal race discourse. Kempf (2008) linked Baldwin's critique to *Crash*, recalling a conversation he had with a viewer who told him it "moved her" (p. 101). Inquiring where it moved her to, she responded "perhaps she was no different for having seen it, but that the movie had saddened her heart" (p. 101). In this way, films "about" issues are a product, with the feeling of "being good" a commodity unto itself.

Razack (2007) suggested that the hero in such narratives could be "us" and confirms our goodness that already exists, should it be forced into action, an action that is only necessarily in crises made clear by the hindsight of history. She illustrated this with two films on the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, *Shake Hands With the Devil* (2007), and *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), which focus on heroes in the midst of the horror, rather than causes. The audience feels pain, which confirms they are good, and a false faith that, when it is necessary in the most extreme situations, goodness will triumph. It is just not yet the time to do anything.

From Moral to Ethical Art

Bennett (2005) used Deleuze's theories to argue for a difference between moral and ethical art. This differentiation depends on Deleuze's usage of the terms, which differ from philosophical literature definitions of morals and ethics. Deleuze (1995) defined

> The difference is that morality presents us with a set of constraining rules of a special sort, ones that judge actions and intentions by considering them in relation to transcendent values (this is good, that's bad…); ethics is a set of optional rules that assess what we do, what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved (p. 100).

Bennett (2005) builds on this to suggest there is a difference between a "moral" and a "ethical" art. A "moral" art operates within given conventions and must find a solution within these parameters. A "moral" art invokes the liberal politics of charity and demands simply more kindness and more money to solve problems. Moral art, like the sentimental protest novels, provides solutions that typically depend on interpersonal relationships leading to better functioning of existing hierarchies of power. In contrast, ethical art is "invigorated by the capacity for transformation" (p. 15), questioning the parameters that confine "moral" art. The viewer is not placed to affectively respond merely to the morally good character, but to be cast into ambivalence within the filmic scenarios. Ethical answers cannot be given because they do not correspond to set transcendent values being communicated to the viewer, but rather are found in dialogue with the film, other viewers, and intertextual webs.

Rancière (2010) expressed his frustration with the above type of "moral" art, which he calls the pedagogical model of the efficacy of art, where art "shines a light" upon the hidden tragedy by exposing traumatic imagery. Both Rancière and Bennett's questioning of moral art is not about agreeing or disagreeing with the "message" of the art, but questioning the efficacy of it creating any change in the viewer's perceptions. While an audience must be literate in deciphering images, Rancière (2010) believed an appeal to the rationality of images will not succeed if it fails to produce what he terms "dissensus", the "conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it" (p. 147). Most "moral" art makes "sense" to viewers because it provides an answer within the parameters the viewer is already familiar with. But because the viewer enters already with those parameters, they actually already know what the answer to be given is. That this awareness exists, and the pleasure that viewing confirms, demonstrates how the given solution is not really a solution after all because everyone already, on some level knows it, but the problem continues. "Moral" art only functions if the recognition of "the stranger" was actually a failure to recognize, rather than already recognizing a character as strange (Ahmed, 2000). Dissensus instead would disrupt the logic of who is a stranger. Rancière (2010) argued that dissensus is key to politics because of the necessity to break "with the sensory self-evidence of the 'natural' order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled" (p. 147).

Aesthetic experience contributes to dissensus in that it throws the idea of destination into doubt. Rather than being a persuasive argument, it raises questions about what is the norm. Rancière suggested rather than identification, the affective goal should instead be dis-

identification which allows for transformation. His example is that the emancipated proletarian is a dis-identified worker. Rancière (2010) outlined "what comes to pass is a rupture in the specific configuration that allows us to stay in "our" assigned places in a given state of things. These sorts of ruptures can happen anywhere and at any time, but they can never be calculated" (p. 151).

Hollywoodization of Seeing

Hollywood films, despite being divisible into many genres, as a whole communicate to viewers' common interpretive patterns in a way which create expectations for what a film can and cannot be, and straying from these formulas may alienate the viewer not in a dissensus way, but in a way of not engaging at all with the film. There are countless screenwriting how-to guides, the most popular including Blake Snyder's (2005) *Save the Cat!: The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need* and Robert McKee's (1997) *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. While these may even be more formulaic than standard Hollywood fare, they all emphasize movies as being about conflict and the need for a hero. Snyder (2005) goes as far as to suggest there are 15 story beats every movie must include. Suderman (2013) analyzed the summer releases of 2013 to demonstrate how influential Snyder's process has been in modern Hollywood, being able to map them out almost beat for beat. The formula may provide a dependable return on studio investment, but is not conducive to creativity. While it clearly constrains creativity in production, it also constrains how audiences react to future works that may go beyond formula. Formulas teach audiences certain expectations for what a story "needs", shrinking the scope of what audiences expect and want from a film. As

a result, the entire conception of film becomes synonymous with the commercial fraction of it. One of my favourite directors, although not one whose films the participants watched, is Debra Granik. She said about her film *Leave No Trace* (2018), "It is dangerous to tell a story with no villain" because people are not bad (or entirely good), and doing so forces her to pay more attention to subtlety (Lazic, 2018). Having no villain complicates an audience reading which is educated by both industry formula and ideas of liberal self-agency. And, when there is no clear villain, audiences can create one out of a flawed character.

Sociological vs Psychological Storytelling

Technology scholar Zeynep Tufekci (2019) compellingly theorized that the initial popularity of HBO's series *Game of Thrones* was because it was sociologically focused rather than psychologically focused like most Hollywood media. However, after the show adapted all the published novels by George R. R. Martin, the showrunners, David Benioff and D. B. Weiss took over crafting the series' conclusion. Tufekci argued that Benioff and Weiss went into typical Hollywood screenwriter mode and wrote an ending that focused more on character psychology than the sociologically driven conflicts Martin had set up and the clash of styles led to viewer disappointment. Tufekci (2019) suggested the initial cultural phenomenon of *Game of Thrones* was that it was a rarity in the North American media environment, telling a sociological story. While many read *Game of Throne*s as a heroes-versus-villains narrative, the show's consistent undercutting of expectations seemed to only grow the audience because of the unusual approach to storytelling.

I use this example, not because I see much empathetic potential in *Game of Thrones*, but as hopeful evidence that viewer expectations can, over time, be more flexible than the good versus evil paradigm. It is also a leap to go from understanding the sociological motivations in the fantasy world of *Game of Thrones* to the world we inhabit, but Tufekci's (2019) key point stands: "If we can better understand how and why characters make their choices, we can also think about how to structure our world that encourages better choices for everyone" (para. 23). Under Benioff and Weiss, the conflict of the show became solely about personalities, and characters became caricatures of their past selves, which in turn led audiences to view the show less favourably. Tufekci (2019) cites Mill's (1959) concept of the sociological imagination —its capacity to think about how the social and historical context affects an individual's life—as a valuable skill. She writes in the context of her own work on the social impact of digital technology and machine intelligence. These issues are presented through debates if key technology figures like Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), and Jack Dorsey (Twitter) are heroes or villains and how their individual psychology explains their corporations, rather than the political economy of the tech industry. Once again, the framing of tech titans is a product of psychological storytelling, which in turn reflects a neoliberal culture more focused on individual agency than group interrelatedness, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Film and Education

Decoster & Vansieleghem (2014) examined how film can be used in education in two ways. First, there is the critical cultural studies approach, typified by Giroux (2002), who analyze film messages in relation to theoretical constructs. Decoster & Vansieleghem (2014) argued that

such an approach ignores the specificity of the medium. Decoster & Vansieleghem perhaps shortchange the value of critical studies because Giroux's approach is not learning through films. Rather, for Giroux, films are primarily of interest as cultural products at which we look to find the ideologies that permeate society. Such critique can be illuminating and is necessary in solving dilemmas, but understanding the content is not the same as experiencing transformation through viewing.

Decoster & Vansieleghem (2014) instead emphasized a second direction, centered on Deleuzian film theory, which stresses thinking through images, images that can never be satisfactorily translated into words and that create their own unique lines of thinking. Despite Rancière's critique of Deleuze's historicization of the action-image and time-image, Chaudhuri (2014) argued that Rancière's call to reframe thinking actually complements Deleuze's conception of the film's value being the affective power that allows reflection on what has been previously outside of habitual thought. For example, Italian post-World War II neorealism screenwriter Cesare Zavattini's (1953/2011) theorized "dailiness". Zavattini argued that showing everyday actions means

> it will become worthy of attention, it will even become 'spectacular.' But it will become spectacular not through its exceptional, but through its normal qualities; it will astonish us by showing so many things that happen every day under our eyes, things we have never noticed before (1953/2011, p. 919).

By associating the everyday to be worthy of the cinematic, a film invites deeper contemplation than the everyday reality that appears invisible before the viewer's eyes. Patterns of life that

seem so normal to people because it is how they have always encountered the world may be disrupted and made strange because their presence on the screen asks for attention and may disrupt the normality of what one is seeing. Without dailiness, characters seem mere puppets of the plot, with each action contributing only to plot concerns or mere symbols asking for the viewer's sympathy. With dailiness, the empathetic characters have space to reveal themselves as people and invite reflection on the lived experiences. It was within neo-realism that Deleuze (1985/2015) identified the ontological shift of 20th century cinema from the movement image to the time image. The movement image is typified by an interest in the human body's movement through the world and characters' actions create change. Conversely, the time image is concerned with how time, and by extension the social forces that operate within them, creates change upon the characters.

Despite the Marxist political project of neorealism, Deleuze's discussion of neorealism focused on formal advancements. He outlined Vittorio De Sica, director of archetype neorealist films like *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Umberto D.* (1952), as breaking the "action – situation – action" scheme perfected by Hollywood action image films. To Deleuze, the "dailiness" meant events are no longer causally linked but rather as "disperse, elliptical… working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events" (p. 1). Both Deleuze and realist film theorist André Bazin (1971) were fascinated by a scene in *Umberto D.* where a maid grinds coffee. Bazin identified this scene as being reality, but Deleuze instead saw this as a scene the film intentionally puts into one particular configuration to think with. The coffee grinding scene is not

about action. There is no suspense directed towards whether the coffee is made. Rather, the viewer must think about why the film includes such a scene.

Deleuze and Rancière's language use violent metaphors of shock and rupture, but they do not emphasize violent images as the ones which produce "shock and rupture". Rather they both suggest such images are often not conducive to transformation. For Deleuze, such images were part of the "movement image" (1983/2015), which emphasized how human bodies move and characters' actions create change. But it was the "time image" (Deleuze, 1985/2015), which showed how time, and by extension the social forces that operate within them, creates change upon the characters which was more revolutionary to him. Deleuze's example of the time image focus on domestic dramas from directors Vittorio De Sica and Yasujiro Ozu for many of his illustrations, films which lack violence. Rancière also categorizes violent and traumatic imagery as being didactic rather than dissensual.

Hartman (1997) argued that the empathetic appeals to white people during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade often tried to convey slaves' pain as if it was happening to a white subject. Hartman argued this confirms the slave Other as being unknowable and the pain only appreciated if it happened to a white person. Empathy is repressive when, for example, witnessing slaves' pain meant to generate empathy instead became a spectacle that confirmed racist implications of Black bodies being the object for white people's ability to feel good about themselves; and witnessing pain became a perversely pleasurable experience. Hartman outlined "this is not to suggest that empathy can be discarded… but rather to highlight the dangers of a too-easy intimacy, the consideration of the self that occurs at the expense of the slave's suffering, and the

violence of identification" (p. 20). Viewing pain and suffering is an affective failure because it reduces the Other to a mere body experiencing sensations. Nothing is learned because anything outside of one's own personal experience is still beyond comprehension. The viewer must already comprehend the Other as a moral subject to empathize with rather than simply recoil from base reactions to viewing pain. Despite pain and suffering's privileged status in empathetic media discourses, it is of limited utility. Rather, pain becomes either a commodity or a deflector, and in both cases ends, rather than opens, new ways of thinking. Instead, Hartman's (1997) project was to look at examples which illuminated "the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle" (p. 4) While I do not completely avoid the subject of violence in looking at film and empathy, I also view it with great suspicion and instead focus more on the "mundane and quotidian" in line with "dailiness."

Sinnerbrink (2016) asserted that Deleuze's theory raises many unanswered questions about how film can accomplish what Deleuze outlines, the need to

> consider more closely those narrative-related dimensions of cinematic spectatorship that are given shrift in Deleuze's vitalist-existentialist form of cinematic ethic: namely, the intimate and inseparable connections between affective responsiveness, emotional engagement, critical reflection, and moral evaluation" (p. 77).

Sinnerbrink then returned to cognivitism's concern with empathy to develop a theory he labelled "cinempathy", the "cinematic/kinetic expression of the synergy between affective attunement,

emotional engagement,[4] and moral evaluation that captures more fully the ethical potential of the cinematic experience" (p. 95).

For Sinnerbrink's three categories, I understand them as follows. First, affective attunement refers to the formal qualities described by cognitivist film scholars that focus on how films emotionally affect viewers. I do not assume these qualities are universally affective, but instead are guides put in place by the filmmakers in hopes of creating certain responses. Second, emotional engagement is where I potentially diverge from Sinnerbrink, as for me, such engagement refers not to the sentimentalism of the protest novel, but rather to the idea of films creating a dissensus within the viewer, partially through what Sinnerbrink described as the varying perspectives and contexts a film provides for its audience. Finally, third, moral evaluation returns the cultural studies approach back into the mix, not only in terms of analyzing content, but also by bringing attention back to the specific viewer subjectivity. Subjectivity has often in film studies been framed as either a dystopian (e.g., Mulvey, 1989) or utopian (e.g. Landsberg, 2004) loss of self while watching films that has allowed considerations of who is doing the evaluating to be left unconsidered. I will discuss more on subjectivity in the next chapter. Overall, cinempathy provides the affective attunement and emotional engagement necessary for the cognitive judgment Vetlesen (1994) described in his conception of empathy as ethics.

[4] The difference being affect describes the force that produces reactions while emotions are the personal reactions to affects.

The above theorization is open to critique of being a somewhat nebulous and murky understanding of learning through film. While part of this is the difficulty of capturing the experience of seeing images in words, much is also that the subject remains theoretical in film studies, often being an idealized construct to whatever purpose the author needs. My research attempts to understand more concretely how the above theorization plays out in viewers. Deleuze may have learned from film this way, but how do his theories explain other viewer's learning?

My intervention is that the films that provide feelings need to have these emotional prompts directed somewhere. In his writings, Deleuze did not acknowledge that he has a large bank of contextualizing information from which to draw upon and understand the films. He is not depending on fiction and aesthetic experience alone. Kaplan (2005) coined the term "empty empathy" for images "elicited by images of suffering provided without any context or background knowledge" (p. 93). She provided as example images of refugee camps in Darfur, which focused either on the mass sea of people, the face of the distraught child, or the overwhelmed white doctor. The feelings of these images dissipate into inaction because there is no potential for the viewer to do anything or recognize how these images were created. She argued these invoke feelings of sympathy, which could transform into empathy, but instead the images are so brief as having time only to emphasize the viewers' sadness before fading into the next issue. The lack of any suggestion of context and the emphasis on the individual rather than systemic solution can lead to a sense of hopelessness (Boltanski, 1999). Chouliaraki (2006) suggested this leads to the normalization of suffering as a banal aspect about life in "those places".

Olson (2013) dismissed the idea of students becoming more empathic simply through reading or watching fiction as "wishful thinking" (p. 170). Olson's quote is reminiscent of Freire's (1992/2014) argument "the idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naiveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism… hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice" (p. 2). The next chapter on methodology builds on what practices have been suggested as anchors for films to avoid a dissipation of empty empathy and outline the method for this research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began by examining the history of the idea of film as an "empathy machine". I examined the history of scholars considering the emotion impact of film on audiences. The chapter next considered modern approaches to studying film emotions. I examined how certain films constrain their emotional impact through didactic and formulaic storytelling before offering a statement, based in the film theory of Deleuze, Rancière, and Sinnerbrink, to make suggestions about how certain aspects of film may be more conducive to transformative learning.

Chapter 4: Methodology

As outlined in Chapter One, this research set out to explore how film viewing in a formal and/or informal learning space can create empathetic responses in the sense of a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166), from a transdisciplinary lens. In doing so, I was first drawn to Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for the method's ability to frame and facilitate transdisciplinary meaning making – especially in fields such as critical media studies, film, and education. As I explored CDA, Fairclough's (2016) dialectical-relational version of CDA provided further clarification. He stressed this approach is a "methodology" rather than a "method" in transdisciplinary social research because methods are selected in accordance with the object of the research and that using CDA is a process, or set of stages, that should not be reduced to a prescribed formulaic order (Fairclough, 2016). He further outlined that CDA grew out of Bhaskar's (1986) explanatory critique stages. These four stages are:

1. Focus on the social wrong, in its semiotic aspects
2. Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong
3. Consider whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles

Fairclough (2016) stressed that while these four stages inform CDA, they are not prescriptive and do not need to flow in sequential order. Fairclough (2001) also noted that in addition to these four stages, a final fifth stage was needed to reflect critically on the stages (1-4) and determine "how effective it is as critique, whether it does or can contribute to social emancipation, whether

it is not compromised through its own positioning in academic practices which are nowadays so closely networked with the market and the state" (p. 127). Because this research is both transdisciplinary and the central research question was framed as exploratory, CDA provided an appropriate methodology.

In this chapter I draw on the four stages to outline the research design. I narrow the scope of empathy to better focus on the social wrong and position the study's central research question. I identify the obstacles in addressing the social wrong in context to this research by defining empathy and outlining the context for an understanding of how we encounter each other within the Canadian state. I discuss "intercultural" films in order to provide insights that informed the selection of the films used in this study. I also describe how researchers in general study and comprehend viewer's film viewing experiences and I discuss the rationale behind the research design. I describe each stage of the research process, which includes its design, ethical considerations, film selection, participant selection, establishing the research environment, and data collection. The chapter concludes by outlining the process for data analysis, interpretation, and validation.

The Social Wrong: Empathy for Who?

Through the literature review it was evident that empathy can take on many different meanings. Before narrowing the explicit scope of how empathy will be defined and positioned within this study it is important to return to the to central research question, outlined in Chapter One framing this study as: How can film viewing for adults in a formal and/or informal learning space create empathetic responses in the sense of a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience"

(Pedwell, 2012, p. 166), and produce what Rancière (2010) called dissensus, or the sensory break with the normal order of things to imagine new possibilities?

This question places creating conditions where viewers have to potential to have empathetic responses as a key element in the film viewing experience. However, reflecting on the challenge to foster the ability for viewers to imagine new possibilities, there is need to narrow the scope of empathy and address who is the empathy for.

Suggesting outsiders have empathy for a group who may not be asking for such feeling removes the group's agency and turns empathy into yet another excursion into the liberal politics of charity. Instead, what can we learn through empathy when the emotional connections focus upon inter-relatedness and collapsing the idea of separateness? Thobani (2007) argued that "the prosperity and living standards of citizens in the hypercapitalist world are directly and concretely underwritten by the land, labour, and resources of dispossessed Others" (p. 71). This reality is intentionally ignored in liberal discourses. In turn, Thobani outlined that the "citizens in the hypercapitalist world" are already in an intimate relationship with Others because they benefit from the dispossession of globalization. In such a context, I emphasized for this study films that could, in some way, reflect one of these hidden relationships.

I framed the film viewing through a term with currency in contemporary education settings, intercultural. Alred, Byram, & Fleming (2002) define "intercultural" as "the capacity to reflect on the relationships among groups and the experience of those relationships. It is both the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyse the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings" (p. 1). At the site of the research, the

University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), students must demonstrate "intercultural engagement" as part of their Bachelor of Arts Degree. UFV defines intercultural engagement as the ability for students to: 1) "identify their own cultural norms and biases"; 2) "articulate characteristics and features of another culture"; 3) "interpret intercultural engagement through more than one cultural perspective"; and 4) "articulate similarities and differences between cultures in a non-judgmental way" (University of the Fraser Valley Faculty of Arts, n.d.). Students may demonstrate this either through taking specific courses, participating in relevant volunteer experience, or doing an exchange semester abroad. Because of the requirement, faculty, staff, students, and others in the university community have intercultural competency as a focus, and there is an interest in figuring out how to deliver educational materials to meet this requirement.

Part of the impetus for intercultural competency is due to globalization, the perceived need to train future employees to communicate with other cultures in ways that benefit multi-national corporations. Calloway-Thomas (2010) emphasized that because globalization creates a flow of people and capital across nations, this increased contact necessitates a more empathetic world in order to ensure such a global system can function. This is an example of common-sense liberal globalization theory and suggesting that empathy is deployed there as a foundation for intercultural communication, which is, in turn, added to policy, like at the research site. I used the term at the research site not as an endorsement, but because the university's intercultural initiative was a way to attract participants interested in meeting the competencies. One goal was to show how meeting this required competency can be a subversive way in which to work

towards true justice and incorporate explicitly anti-racist education, rather than work to emphasize the band-aid system of charity prescribed by globalization common sense.

"Intercultural" as a term works similarly to "multicultural". Canada has defined itself as a "multicultural" nation since Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau declared multiculturalism official policy in 1971 and enshrined it in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 (Thobani, 2007). Yet Canada is a white settler society, created out of a long history of resource exploitation, genocide of its Indigenous population, slavery, and exploitation of racialized immigrations. To reconcile this founding white myth with the racial realities of the populace, the Canadian state adopted official multiculturalism. The Canadian state attempted to consign the racism of the past explicitly white supremacist groups, while what Bannerji (1995) called the "common sense racism" (p. 45) of capitalist norms created by European imperialism remains the unquestioned basis of society. Bannerji (2000) emphasized that whiteness is prioritized as the true Canadian culture, while everyone else is part of "cultural fragments" (p. 10) making up the so-called mosaic. Despite Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's (Lawson, 2015) declaration there is no "core identity" of Canada, the implicit Canadian "norm" is a white one, as the official language of "visible minority" betrays the half-hearted hiding of whiteness by emphasizing everyone but white people are "visible". Whiteness is the "invisible" racial construct of society, where the historical white domination of society (Roediger, 1991) has created power relations and cultural practices that privilege white people as the unspoken norm of society (Dyer, 1997; McIntosh, 1997).

Thobani (2007) labeled multiculturalism the "rescue of whiteness" from a post-World War II, post-colonial Canada seeing an influx of immigrants to both meet labour demands, a rise in refugees from the crises of neo-imperial opening of markets, and the political organization of Indigenous peoples. Multiculturalism is then not a radical break in the history of Canadian nationhood, but a new technique for managing subjects. As Thobani (2007) observed, the architects of multiculturalism and white supremacists, though both imagined different directions for Canada's future, both "shared the basic assumption that racial communities were the bearers of difference, and both imagined the national space as essentially white" (p. 154). Walcott (2014) summarized that under the official multiculturalism policy

> French and English/British-Canadians are produced as without race/ethnicity contra immigrants; and, second, citizenship is produced as requiring cultivation. Significantly, then, the state apparatus exists to manage and determine what remains unsaid: that the "other ethnic groups" require stewardship into Canadian citizenship, while it is inherent for the French and the English/British (p.130).

Walcott argues this policy is "simultaneously managing race and making it disappear" (p. 132) because there was "no intention of allowing those racialized as others to participate or shape what the nation might become" (p. 131).

Trying to help white people learn to dismantle the hierarchy is difficult due to how "helping" is part of being the good, middle-class, liberal, white, Canadian subject. Canada's official policy of multiculturalism often allows the privileged white subject to imagine their

tolerant liberalism is sufficient to end oppression, while simultaneously allowing only white English/French (and those who pass as) Canadians as full members of the nation. Thobani (2007) echoed Hagg's (2000) work on Australia and Skegg's (2004) work on the United Kingdom to examine how educated middle- and upper-class white people supported multiculturalism as a form of cultural capital to make them seem tolerant and cosmopolitan. White subjects could imagine themselves as good precisely for acknowledging the humanity of the Other as a choice they have to extend. Indeed, Ahmed (2004) suggested this "may even provide the conditions for a new discourse of white pride" (p. 184) around declarations of goodness that stand in for any actual action. Thobani (2007) called such response the "suffocating blanket of compassion imposed by nationals upon Aboriginal peoples and immigrants" (p. 252). That white subjects can imagine themselves as good precisely for acknowledging the humanity of the Other as a choice they have to extend rather than a relationship that they are already implicated with.

The idea of feeling bad to ultimately affirm one's goodness extends to a self-help culture approach to anti-racist work. In the summer of 2020, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* rose to the top of the New York Times best seller list (Wyatt, 2020) as part of the surge in book sales after widespread Black Lives Matter protests. While I have drawn upon DiAngelo's concept in the early stages of preparing this dissertation, the book's widespread popularity represents how easily a text becomes a symbol of being a good [white] person. As writer Tre Johnson wrote in *The Washington Post*, "When Black people are in pain, white people just join book clubs" (2020). He described "a racial ouroboros our country finds itself locked in, as Black Americans relive an endless loop of injustice and white Americans keep revisiting the same performance"

(para. 9). To show how empathy fails as an endpoint, Grundy (2020) emphasized that the discourse around these books' popularity is the "idea that broader knowledge of systemic racism will bring about meaningful social change for Black communities" (para. 3). Consciousness raising politics were originally meant to connect individuals to understand their relationship to social structures (Freire, 1970). Freire also imagined this as an active dialogue rather than a mere intake of information. However, consciousness raising has been easily co-opted to stand in place of material change. Grundy (2020) pointed to mega-corporations like Amazon that simultaneously exploit workers while inviting academics and activists to help the corporate leadership at a "Conversations on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) conference" (Gillespie, 2018). Returning to a Canadian context, Mahrouse (2014) found the belief in Canadian goodness is so exceptional that volunteers imagined themselves as better than even other privileged Western states.[5]

Universities, as noted in Chapter One, have significant work ahead of them, as they often focus on introducing new information and incorporating symbols into the existing epistemology of teaching and learning in an education system built over centuries, which has implicitly prioritized whiteness as the norm rather than materially challenge dominant power structures. Bannerji (2000) emphasized that introducing cultures as having separate symbols and facts creates the ahistorical notion that cultures are their own monoliths rather than intertwined in relations of power. Difference is emptied of political, or even true cultural, dimensions because

[5] Mahrouse provided the example of interviews with several activists who relate stories of people in Palestine and Guatemala praising Canadians, particularly in contrast to Americans. This gave the activists the perception Canadians are "exceptionally benevolent" (p. 108-109).

there is no analysis of how difference is a socially constructed set of practices. Difference becomes reified in the language. Addressing the problem functions too often in practices that result in a reductive analysis of race which turns all non-European cultures into monolithic identities and fails to address anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity.

Official policy can easily slip into what Razack (2001) called "the management of diversity", through a focusing on symbols from other cultures. The management-of-diversity form of learning "produces a refined catalogue of cultural differences" that allow cultural differences to remain "merely different" (p. 8) rather than to recognize the systems of domination at play in their relationships. She also noted that "cultural sensitivity, to be acquired and practised by dominant groups, replaces, for example, any concrete attempt to diversify" (p. 9). The use of intercultural in the university's policy seems aimed to be an example of "management of diversity." The notion of intercultural assumes a clear boundary of culture to be "inter". "Intercultural" in the policy is not connected to concepts of race and anti-racism, it only makes vague reference to an awareness of "otherness", which is how race is socially constructed (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

The individual films selected for this study were not a focused series on learning about a specific group of Others, but instead looked at connections through different lenses, all with the goal of challenging the common-sense white supremacy behind Canada's multicultural facade. The focus of this is primarily on race in the Canadian context because of (primarily) white, liberal Canadian's emphasis on the nation's multiculturalism as an inoculation against racism (Gulliver, 2017). As noted in Chapter One, the intrigue that led to this study was to learn more

about how film viewing can contribute to creating more inclusive curricula, as well as more representation of racialized communities and opportunities for both educators and learners, whether in a formal or informal learning space, to reflect together on their individual experiences that enables collaboration and collective meaning making that can foster a more equal and inclusive world (Ahmed, 2012). As a result, the research design needed to position the study to answer the question within this context.

However, there is also an opportunity to take the mandated idea of intercultural competency into transformative directions. As noted earlier in the chapter, working with the term intercultural is not ideal, and is misrepresentative of anti-racist education. I used the university's intercultural initiative as a way to attract participants interested in meeting the competencies with the goal of showing how meeting this required competency can be a subversive way in which to work towards true justice and incorporate explicitly anti-racist education, rather than work to emphasize the band-aid system of charity prescribed by globalization common sense.

It is because this study set out to gain insights into how adults in the formal and/or informal learning spaces can be offered ways to engage in affective experiences that have the potential to imagine and create a more inclusive world. Narrowing the scope of empathy to interconnection empathy was important as part of the research design.

Intercultural Films

In contrast to the use of the word intercultural in the university policy, film studies' use of "intercultural" also added clarity to positioning the research design. Film scholar Laura Marks (2000) provided a clear definition of "intercultural" in relation to film, to mean films that

"attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American west" (p. 1). The body of films she encapsulated within this term she noted, have also been referred to as third world, third cinema, fourth cinema, minority, postcolonial, transnational, antiracist, multicultural, and hybrid cinema, all contested and imperfect terms. She proposed intercultural as films that mediate in two directions, forming an encounter "between different cultural organizations of knowledge" (p. 2). Marks emphasized that this term avoids "positing dominant culture as the invisible ground against which cultural minorities appear in relief" (p. 7). Rather, while the sites of encounter are in no way politically neutral, it does entail exchanges of perspective. Marks also favoured "intercultural" as offering no easy solutions, "neither to seek inclusion for another cultural group in the national mosaic (multiculturalism) nor to posit an alternative nationalism (separatism)" (p. 9). For Marks, an intercultural film is one in which "meaningful knowledge" (p. 2) is located between cultures and "so can never be fully verified in the terms of one regime or another" (p. 24). Instead, following Deleuze, Marks saw intercultural films as producing "languages to think with" (p. 29), providing alternative ways to think about the colonial histories minority stories are framed in by white colonial terms.

Marks primarily focused on non-commercial work, including experimental and video work, but also noted in 2000 that intercultural cinema was becoming more mainstream. However, she was also concerned that the popularity of intercultural cinema could dull its critical formal potential and this opened an opportunity to see how during this study the film viewing might have this same dulling impact. Marks (2000) noted that "intercultural cinema assumes the

interestedness, engagement, and intelligence of its audience" (p. 19). To this, I would add an investigative component, the intention to seek out intercultural films. As Marks (2000) outlined, these films were found in small venues – universities, museums, community centres. Intercultural films, like almost all non-commercial films, require someone to be looking for them. Such seeking may not be more than a Google or library database search, but this is a more intensive process than how many people discover films. While this study uses Marks' definition of intercultural, my interests depart from Marks here, as her focus was on the hapticity of intercultural film, which aim to engage the senses through formal experimentation. Marks described film as a "portable sensorium" (p. 243).

In preparation for entering the research field I selected films which were more mainstream in aesthetic and more for subject than style than what Mark's described, although I intentionally sought films with three different aesthetic approaches because the study is focused on the viewing experience, and not the style and aesthetic of the film. I was also curious to learn more about how films could help stimulate discussion that could inform CDA's stage three of considering whether the social order 'needs' the social wrong. As Fairclough (2016) outlined, exploring whether a reason for thinking that contributes to reinforcing a particular relationship between power and/or dominant structures has the potential to open new opportunities for meaning making. As a result, the purpose for film selection was to help shape the post-film reflections and discussions around the impact of experiencing the story or receiving the messaging the film offers and not solely around "I liked how the action or the lighting was cool.

However, using CDA also allowed for an important examination of imagines and visuals as rhetorical practices influenced the participants, but it was not the sole determining factor.

Another factor that was critical to understand before entering the research field was the role of the researcher and how best to study viewers when exploring empathy. The next section provides a thorough overview of methods related to studying viewers.

Studying Viewers

Understanding viewer's engagement with a film is a methodologically fraught problem, especially when the focus is upon locating moments of dissensus. Hall's (1980a) encoding/decoding model of communication outlined how while the encoding process of a text has important weight on its interpretation, viewers bring their own experiences into conversation with the text. Viewers both use the text to defend their beliefs and defend themselves from uncomfortable possibilities raised by the text. Hall (1980a) outlined three predominant ways of reading; 1) the dominant-hegemonic position, or how producers want viewers to interpret the text; 2) the negotiated code, where the audience acknowledges the hegemonic positioning of the message but focuses on, often personal, exceptions; and 3) the oppositional code, where the audience reads against the text as a way to struggle against hegemony. Initially applied to television news media, Fiske (1989) was instrumental in expanding Hall's theorization to all realms of popular culture. Hall's (1980a) work is important because he emphasized that not only do the "frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, and technical infrastructure" (p. 131) create the meaning encoded in texts, as both traditional Marxist critique (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947/1997) and semiotics (Barthes, 1957/2012) had explored, but these same structures

influence the subject who decodes the texts. Attempts to empirically capture this theorization have been difficult and the failures of the past illustrate important lessons for contemporary research.

As I have outlined, the conversation between viewer and film is complex because the film is just one more of thousands of variables that impact people's lenses of the world. Psychology and media studies have been concerned with the "effects" of film viewing since the beginning of the medium, often granting the medium a theoretical strength that ultimately could not be backed up with empirical evidence. The lack of evidence mirrored Lipps' futile struggle to demonstrate Einfühlung, as discussed in Chapter Two. With an intensified concern arising over the effects propaganda had on the public during the First World War, the general academic consensus was that audience members largely received messages in the same way and these messages caused a strong and direct effect. However, researcher Paul Lazarsfeld noted the difficulty in designing specific messages that could empirically show changed attitudes. In 1949, Lazarsfeld's student Elihu Katz argued this could be framed as a positive sign of liberal democracy rather than simply the failings of bad message design and further argued that media has limited effects (Pooley, 2006). Sociologist Todd Gitlin (1978) argued that studies finding limited effects were designed in a particularly behaviourist way that defined effects narrowly, and over such a short time period that the results would inevitably be that media had little effect. Current emphasis on media effects focuses on long-term exposure to media messages. Examples include cultivation theory, which suggests that the more a viewer engages with media, the more

that media shapes their view of the world, and agenda setting theory, which holds that the media prioritizes *what* to think about rather than *how* to think about something (Bryant & Miron (2004).

Radical criticism has been much slower to move past strong determining effects, with psychoanalytic approaches still emphasizing Lacanian theories of subjectivity found in the work of film theorists including Silverman (1996), Žižek (2001), Doane (2002), and Wilderson (2010). Doane (1990) typifies the psychoanalytic argument against researching audiences at all when she argues they only reveal the conscious rather than unconscious "truth". Hall (1980b) criticized psychoanalytic theory, as it "cannot explain the pertinent difference between different patriarchal ideologies in different social formations at different times" (p. 161). Morley (1980) additionally took issue with how this approach denies audience agency because it operates under the assumption that every text isolates the viewer from all other historical, social, and textual structures in their lives. Finally, passivity itself must be challenged, because as Rancière (2009) emphasized, viewing is not as unique or passive as many have imagined. Rather, it is the default position with which we encounter the world.

Theoretically, the predominance of psychoanalysis in film studies has been challenged by phenomenological and cognitive methods towards viewer reception. Phenomenology aims to move film away from being the object of vision to a subject of vision (Sobchak, 1992, p. 304), which locates the spectator as an active participant in the production of meaning. Sobchak (1992) theorized that every reader is a negotiated reader because of their unique embodiment and experiences, where every film is a collision between two perceptions, not perceptions forced by either the screen or the spectators. Rather, Sobchak optimistically suggested it is not about

"teaching spectators to 'see' against the grain. Rather we need to offer to their attention and reflection the existential fact of what they already do" (p. 307). Sobchack believed, echoing Merleau-Ponty (1968), that film provides us with insight and visualizes the "reversible, dialectical, and social nature of our own subjective vision" (2004, p. 309). Scholars such as Marks (2000), Stadler (2008), and Laine (2011) have built upon this work, focusing on how sensory reactions to films occur. The limitations of phenomenological film studies often remain exhaustively detailed accounts of experience, but intensely subjective and lacking in explanatory potential.

Cognitivism has been the dominant theoretical and methodological approach to film studies of recent decades, even if its popularizers claim it is an approach to film studies "after theory" (Bordwell & Caroll, 1996). Drawing upon cognitive psychology and philosophy of the mind, it challenged what Bordwell derisively called SLAB[6] theory. Sinnerbrink (2015) identified cognitivism as a "naturalistic" theory, seeking to explain film viewing as having natural reactions rather than one learned through historical and political circumstances. As Sinnerbrink noted, this cannot account for the ethical and political aspects of film. However, it also does not have to, as cognitivism can work to explain how perception, emotion, and cognition work for viewers to understand films. As an endpoint, it would be reductionary, but Sinnerbrink (2015) has suggested it is a starting point to provide an "empirically-grounded basis for theorizing the role of affective response" (p. 85). However, there is not necessarily a contrast between cognitivism and critical theory in film research. Instead, Sinnerbrink argues for using both phenomenological and

[6] Film theories based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, and Roland Barthes.

cognitivism theory to provide a ground layer in research into how affect works in the particular process of film, while then using critical theory for further elaboration.

Audience effects research also continues in experimental psychology. For example, Hakemulder's (2000) meta-analysis of 58 studies from 1944 to 1991 on the ethical effects of literature suggested there is a positive correlation between reading and feeling empathic concern, but the studies can offer few insights into how, why, or even what specific forms of literature create this correlation. A typical approach, used in Hakemulder's (2000) own studies, is to have one group read an essay, one read a fiction piece with the same relevant content, and one group read nothing. Each group then fills out the same questionnaire at the end. To test whether the subjects knew what the researchers were looking for, the subjects filled out what they believed the study to be about (12 of 56 participants guessed correctly). Caracciolo & Van Duuren (2015) argued that these studies tend to generalize for all fiction based on only one to three short works, typically in the late 19th century realist tradition, and do not consider how different genres and lengths may create different results. Caracciolo & Van Duuren (2015) also emphasize the importance conversations people have around what they have just viewed with other viewers.

Theoretically, the audience survey approach fails to address what Gitlin (1978) critiqued, that with every person being so different in how they live in media saturated environments, determining results from a single text would be impossible. Instead, we need a theoretical conception of subjectivity and a qualitative observation method to receive data. Can the theoretical impasse be broken between, on one hand, aesthetic experience providing the affective jolt, and on the other, it being incalculable and unable to be crudely measured? Caracciolo &

Van Duuren (2015) advocated for qualitative data to complement quantitative survey methods used by the type of research Hakemulder does. They argue research on readers should

> (1) build on careful conceptual analysis… and (2) start at a relatively idiographic level—by investigating the experiences of individual readers—and look for patterns and structures emerging from those experiences instead of seeking confirmation for the researchers' presuppositions. (2015, p. 528)

Using an Interview Model

Current work in audience studies uses either ethnography or interviews as a method. Ethnography (foundational examples include Morley, 1980; Walkerdine, 1982; Mankekar, 1999) is better suited to observe relations as they occur and where the researcher is attempting to limit their presence. As the emphasis in this research is focused upon learning strategies related to the use of media, the other dominant method, interviews, were more appropriate. Audience interviews are usually open-ended discussions (Rose, 2007). They can be one-on-one or with pre-constituted groups that allow social interaction to play a role (Morley 1980, 1992; Rose, 2007). Morley (1980) cautioned against multiple-choice questionnaires because the same simple answer can be arrived at for a variety of complex reasons. Interviews are used to collect the "how" of watching, and the conscious reasoning behind them. They depend upon the interviewee having no reason to offer misleading or what they believe to be "correct" answers. Rose (2007) argued that while there are theoretical advantages to ethnography to grasp the full set of social relations involved in decoding, there are significantly fewer studies conducted due to the time-

intensive process and intrusive access to often private spaces where viewing occurs. For the above reason, I used interviews.

Rationale.

In learning, getting to admittance of anti-racism is not a goal, as that is already the normal discursive formation. Goldberg (2015) suggested that admittance of being against racism is often framed as post-racial, in which race is imagined as having been transcended and no longer a salient factor in social structures. Instead, the goal is towards actions that address material changes. My discussions of the films and responses were attentive to these and other intersectional issues (Crenshaw, 1989) in race and calls to more fully understand the viewer's experience. I view the goal for empathy as being the capacity to visualize the dialectical nature of how difference is constructed, rather than simply to learn about the Other. It would be a failure to see empathy as a bridge because the question is: why is such crossing necessary in the first place?

The ultimate goal is working towards the replacements for multiculturalism suggested by Bannerji (2000), Razack (2001), and Ahmed (2004). Bannerji (2000) called for recognition, which "needs respect and dignity, its basic principle is accepting the autonomy of the other, and being honest about power relations which hinder this autonomy" (p. 149). Razack (2001) advocated moving from inclusion to accountability, that "begins with anti-essentialism and the recognition that there is no one stable core... Equally important, it is a politics guided by a search for the ways in which we are complicitous in the subordination of others" (p. 159). Ahmed (2004) concluded with "a demand for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility

that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one" (p. 196). The unifying theme of these three theorists is an understanding that people are already intertwined in the social web and must not only recognize connectivity and limitations, but understand how it limits the autonomy of others.

With this in mind it was critical that the research design facilitated exploration of the greater goal – capacity building for participants to imagine new possibilities. Malin (2003) pointed out "there is no one type of research that is closer to enlightenment than any other, but that certain kinds of research are better able to answer certain kinds of research questions" (p.21).

Commonly, a measure of how the film is affecting viewers is to "test" the theory that film's affective measures create what Deleuze (1985/2013) theorized as new ways of seeing. Do participants resort to the feeling good about feeling bad pattern Hollywood films try to evoke or do the films lead them to put together new formations of thought; and ultimately, can they answer along the lines of "where they were moved *to*"?

As it is impossible to directly ask participants about beliefs, given the divide between the "correct" thing to say and the "common sense racism" of actions, my rationale for the research design was to follow Creswell (1998) advice and not "test" but remain open and attentive to learning how each participant accounted for new learning or change as a result of film viewing. This used a qualitative approach because of its unique potential to examine the intense experience of the essence in the research question. For example, by way of post-film viewing

discussion and personal reflection what did the participants report over the weeks as indicators that they were moved from the [neo]liberal mode of individual charity to asking questions about structural solutions and interrogating their own complicity.

Research Process

This research was not designed to determine if viewing a specific film causes transformation in the individual viewers. Instead, it was designed to examine *how* film viewing did (or did not) in a specific context create opportunities for viewers to have affective experiences in response to empathy. This study was influenced by Roy's (2016) work that examined the transformative learning that occurs at Canadian documentary film festivals. She formed the position that learning definitively happens in some form in viewing films. Roy collected data through exit, group, and in-depth individual interviews, and analyzed the responses "in light of Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory to discern the learning that took place as the limitations of this type of event" (p. 13).

Study Design

The literature emphasizes that the transformative potential of film requires appropriate pedagogical settings. The setting can be led by an instructor inside a formal educational institution (Brown, 2011; Chabot Davis, 2014; Lemieux, 2017; Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014; Ngcobo, 2015) or by a discussion organizer and moderator in an informal film space (Chabot Davis, 2014; Kashani, 2015; Roy, 2015). An example of blending film and education is in Brown's (2011) graduate-level education and film class. Brown provided contextual information about the film and its historical circumstances and afterwards served as a facilitator

for students' dialogue. He hoped to have students question the "common sense" notions also challenged by the films, but did not try to push them in any certain direction. The emphasis on environment echoes a key part of Third Cinema[7] (Solanas & Gettino, 1969/2011), where the film itself was only one of three requirements, as a "detonator" (p. 937) for discussion. The other two were participants and free space for discussion. The idea of "detonator" paralleled Freire's (1970/2000) "coded situation", in which a portrayal of familiar reality is used to "decode" the abstract ideologies that form a hegemonic understanding of the world. hooks (2009) reflected on her use of films in teaching, which allowed her students ways into discussing the complex theoretical issues that had only created classroom silence.

As the field work portion of this research took place over only a month and with participants who generously volunteered their time, this analysis is not meant to demonstrate what transformative (if any) changes occurred in a short window of time, but rather is framed as a case study to explore the "how" of film viewing that serves to addressing the central research questions as outlined in Chapter One.

Ethical Considerations

My research was deemed as minimal risk to participants by the Human Research Ethics Boards at both McGill University and the University of the Fraser Valley. Participants were informed:

[7] Third Cinema was Solanas and Gettino's term for radical, collective cinema. First Cinema referred to Hollywood films and Second Cinema to, primarily, European "art" films.

> The films we will watch may include some potentially traumatic content. All films are commercially released and this risk is no greater than watching a film in a public theatre or at home. Before each screening, there will be a content forewarning if the film contains such scenes. The film discussions may be uncomfortable, but will be handled by an experienced facilitator who will ensure the conversation is moderated and respectful.

Additionally, after the content forewarning, I checked for verbal confirmation that all attendees were ready to begin the film.

The Three Films

A limitation to my research is that I was the only person who selected the films, informed by the theme set out by my partnership with UFV, which tied into their focus on intercultural competencies. I did not consult with the participants about what they would like to learn/view. However, the participants attended based upon the theme, so it was overlapping with their interests. I brought particular knowledge about what films can be retrieved from the archive. While I selected films for their thematic and aesthetic styles, I am not making any claim that these are the films best suited to dissensus experiences, or should be used in future educational settings. Each film is limited in perspective and meant as potential pathways to empathy, not as definitive guides. With my theme being interconnection empathy in Canada, I turned to modern Canadian cinema for examples. I selected one film on Indigenous issues and another about Chinese immigrants to Vancouver, pertinent to the local area of the series. For the third example, I wanted a film specifically about white people's inter-relation with racialized communities,

which centres on whiteness as a "problem". I could not find a Canadian film that fit with this theme, so I turned to the Finnish film I first saw by covering it as a film critic in 2018 at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), *Stupid Young Heart.* The group viewed in order *Stupid Young Heart*, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, and *Meditation Park.* I selected this order, beginning with the realist drama focused on Whiteness and the one that has the least genre elements similar to Hollywood films. I then selected *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* as the middle film, as being the most graphic and potentially raising the most unconformable questions, I wanted to establish some comfortability within the group before approaching this film. This left *Meditation Park*, which was well received by the group, feeling its more hopeful tone contrasted well with the bleakness of the prior two films as the last film. The following sections include summaries of the film. However, their plots are only part of why they were included. As the goal was to move beyond what frustrated Rancière (2010), the pedagogical model of the efficacy of art, where art exposes the hidden tragedy by exposing traumatic imagery, the importance of the films is as much about how they present the story, which is not accurately captured in a plot summary.

Summary of Stupid Young Heart.

Stupid Young Heart focuses on a 15-year-old white working-class boy, Lenni, (Jere Ristseppä) who believes he must become a "man" to support his far more capable pregnant girlfriend, Kiira (Rosa Honkonen). Lacking role models, Lenni is taken under the wing of carpenter Janne (Ville Haapasalo) who first introduces him to martial arts classes, and then later to white supremacist meet-ups. The film rejects didactic storytelling in favour of an

observational aesthetic in service of exploring both how extremism preys on precarity and emotional vulnerability, and how to most of Lenni's white acquaintances, his racism is not recognized as a "problem" until it reaches an extreme form. The film shows white supremacy as an affective, communal experience more than a set of clearly articulated views. I interviewed director Selma Vilhunen and writer Kirsikka Saari in 2018 at TIFF about creating the film. Vilhunen explained how one of the actors playing a Somali immigrant in the film told her the film is "another white people film about a white boy coming to terms with his own feelings and the Black characters are, to be very harsh about it, they are dramatic tools in a white boy's journey." (Vilhunen in Pardy, 2018). This comment led to revisions in the film script. The "journey" additionally has no clear redemption arc, leaving Lenni's future hanging in the final scene. Vilhunen further elaborated

> All I could say was to admit that that is true. This is the white boy's story, made by white people. And then, having admitted this, I still wanted to do my best in portraying them as well-rounded as I can within the screen time that they have. (Vilhunen in Pardy, 2018).

The film does attempt to see them as more than tools for Lenni's moral playground by including several scenes of the characters with their family, living their daily life, that do not serve the plot. Discussing this limitation was an important component in our post-film discussion. Being the only non-Canadian film of the series, *Stupid Young Heart* allowed Canadian viewers to potentially exercise the feeling of Canadian multicultural superiority, countering the notion that "we" do not have the racism problems they have elsewhere, and that such a thing can never

happen here. This sense of superiority is often directed towards the United States, and with the film being from Finland, a country that the participants did not have close knowledge of, but viewed favourably, there were no reactions indicating Canadian superiority.

Summary of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*.

Rhymes for Young Ghouls departs from the realist films typically used in educational settings as Mi'kmaw director and writer Jeff Barnaby's film draws upon various genre imagery, from 1970s era revenge films to zombie horror to post-apocalyptic cinema, to tell the story of a teenage girl's rebellion against her reserve's Indian agent in 1976. Aila (Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs) avoids being sent to residential school by paying off the local Indian Agent, Popper (Mark Anthony Krupa) with her proceeds from dealing drugs. When her money is stolen, Aila is sent to the residential school. She manages to escape, and in a violent, but cathartic ending, a young boy on the reserve saves her from Popper by shooting him dead.

Rhymes portrays a traumatic economy, where people on the reserve drink and use drugs as a way to handle trauma. The drugs are sold by people trying to scrape enough money for themselves to survive. The Canadian state policies worked to turn what was once a mutually supportive community against itself, where Aila takes advantage of other's trauma to avoid the prime source of community trauma, the residential school.

While violent, the film does not revel in the violence, particularly violence to the Indigenous characters. We see the effects of violence – the cuts, the bruises – but usually only hear the physical blows. The only violence on-screen is against Popper's white body. The way the violence was handled, between the distance of real violence done to the Indigenous

characters, and the violence more in line with a revenge movie aesthetic against Popper was an important conversation post viewing.

I was introduced to this film at McGill's Department of Integrated Studies in Education Artist-in-Residence Lori Beavis' Weekly Indigenous Film Series in 2016. The series as a whole served as a major inspiration for my format. After we viewed the film at the McGill series, we had a discussion about the genre aspects of the film and how they helped or hindered viewer's engagement with the film, something I aimed to explore more with the participants of this study. Participants in my research were not required to watch *Rhymes*, although all did. Choosing a genre film where violence is potentially cathartic may be a surprising choice for empathy. While the violence may turn away some viewers, genre cinema also has many fans, who may find this a more engaging film than slower paced realist dramas. More post-film discussion may be necessary with genre films as there is high potential for a surface-level reading of endorsing the individual agency of celebratory violence (with unseen consequences).

In examining the reaction to *Rhymes For Young Ghouls*, I paid close attention to the fact that, of the three films, this is the only one with traumatic images, which have been granted a privileged place in affective art discussion (Bennett, 2005; Boltanski, 1999; Chouliarki, 2006). In contrast, traumatic images have also been criticized for producing only a fleeting sense of empathy. Chouliarki (2006) in the context of news reporting, wrote of such images: "the spectacle of suffering is not doubted in terms of its veracity, but, on the contrary, passively accepted as the truth of television and, indeed, of life" (p. 33). Considering this happens with images audiences recognize as real, the traumatic image in fiction films may have a similar

numbing affect or, as described in Chapter Three, a confirmation of the viewer's goodness for feeling horrified. Either reaction serves to close off affective potential rather than enhance it and exploring these reactions was an important part of the discussion.

Summary of *Meditation Park*.

Mina Shum's 2017 film *Mediation Park* was the most commercial of the films in the series. While in her otherwise positive review, *Globe and Mail* film critic Julia Cooper (2018) called it "a bit too hammy at moments", this tone is also part of the charm. The film is a rare film that is actually set in nearby Vancouver, and familiarity with the locations depicted on the screen may influence viewers' responses. Figuring out where exactly certain scenes took place was one of the opening parts of our post-film discussion. *Meditation Park* looks at 60-year-old Maria's (Cheng Pei Pei) burgeoning independence. Maria immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong 39 years ago and since then has lived a very insular life, relying upon her husband Bing (Tzi Ma) for contact with the outside world. After Maria finds evidence Bing is having an affair, she seeks independence, helped by her daughter Ava (Sandra Oh) and other Chinese-Canadian women in her neighbourhood, with whom she sells illegal backyard parking spaces to attendees of Vancouver Canucks hockey games.

The strength of *Meditation Park* is that it is a story about immigrant empowerment that focuses on joy, while not ignoring the systemic barriers immigrants have. "Feel good to feel bad movies" typically raise problems, but then suggest individual actions will solve them. *Meditation Park* is a "feel good" movie in the end, but Maria's solutions do not fix the problems of isolation, discrimination, and sexism, but allow her to survive. The contrast between solutions involving

the character's relationships and those involving systems was emphasized in the post-film discussion.

Setting and Participants

Following Taber et. al.'s (2014) work on discussing media with post-secondary students, I turn to Merriam's (1998) sociological interpretive case study, where data was used to develop categories, and support or challenge the theoretical assumptions in the project's design. Case study sizes can range from three (Taber et. al. 2014) to the size of a classroom (Brown, 2011; Chabot Davis, 2014). There is no generally accepted number, with minimums suggested ranging from five or six (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998) to 12-15, at which point, in the context of health research, Guest et al. (2006) found data saturation. Crouch & McKenzie (2006) emphasized 20 is the maximum a researcher can create relationships with that invite honest exchange, which was necessary to collect the data and analysis for this study. Consequently, the selection of participants focused on the participant's ability to commit to the project and interest in establishing relationships.

The films were screened in a classroom reserved on the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) campus. UFV is in British Columbia (BC) and is a teaching intensive university which serves 18,000 full time students. To recruit participants, I used snowball sampling through two colleagues at UFV that reached out to people who they thought might be interested in film and/or intercultural learning. The participants were not a random representation of the university's student and faculty body, but rather were self-selecting individuals interested in learning about film and/or intercultural education. The participants brought to the study a clear range of

different frameworks around a critical enthusiasm for interculturalism. Twelve participants began the study, with ten attending the full series and completing both the pre- and post- session interviews. The other two participants unfortunately had to miss one or more steps in the data collection process, but still contributed valuable input during the post-film discussions. Table 1 outlines the participants who complete all data collection steps, using their pseudonyms and indicating their role in relationship to education.

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant (Pseudonyms)	Age Range by years	Role in Relationship to Education
1. Diana	40-50	Academic Advisor
2. Sara	30-40	Sessional Instructor
3. Yusif	40-50	Associate Professor
4. Amy	40-50	Associate Professor
5. Jane	50-60	Academic Administrator
6. Kim	20-30	Recent BA graduate
7. Matt	30-40	Recent BA graduate
8. Joe	20-30	Current BA student
9. Mark	20-30	Current BA student
10. Bruce	50-60	Unaffiliated to the university – held a MA in a STEM field.

Data Collection

Data was collected from the participants in three ways:

1) A pre-viewing questionnaire collected background information about the participants and asked them to describe their interests and views on what intercultural means to them.
2) Following each film viewing, I facilitated a post-film discussion. My role as researcher was to deeply listen, pose occasional open-ended questions aimed at extending the

dialogue, observe the participants engage and challenge each other, and take observational notes.

3) I conducted a post-viewing semi-structured interview with each participant where they were able to talk about their experiences with how film viewing provided them an affective experience and what they discovered about themselves and their use for film. Each interview included the four sub-questions outlined in Chapter One. The interviews were held at location comfortable for the participants, and took approximately 60 minutes, with a few being a few minutes longer due to the conversational tone of the interview format. Each interview was transcribed.

Step 1: Prior to Viewing the First Film

Prior to the first film viewing, I collected the following information through a questionnaire. Participants were informed they could answer in as much or little detail as they liked.

Age:

Role:

Cultural Background You Identify With:

1. What interested you in attending this film series?
2. Have you taken formal coursework on decolonization or intercultural issues?

   2B) If the answer is yes, "please describe?"
3. What does intercultural mean to you?
4. What is your prior experience with intercultural films?

5. How do you currently engage with news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues? What do you see as the major issues? Do you see yourself as connected to these issues?
6. What do you hope to get out of this film series?

The above information provided a sense of where the participants were starting from on their journey to exploring how film can shape their own learning. Question two provided a sense of what formal education each participant felt counted as intercultural. Question three provided insight into varying definitions people have of the term "intercultural" and enabled me to work critically with their definition to understand how the term is deployed in practice and not just theory. Question four built upon this definition to see what type of films participants imagined as intercultural films, and what level of engagement they had previously with film viewing. Question five was the key question in the initial questionnaire, as it hints at how participants understand their already-implicated status, either through an acknowledgement of deeper connections or through the liberal idea of floating independent contracts. Question six allowed me to understand why participants were engaging with the study, and helped me attend to their expressed concerns. I intended the series to be mutually advantageous. I did not want the film viewing process to be interpreted as a unidirectional "taking" from participants' experiences.

Step 2: Film Viewing Discussion

There were three film screenings held in the early evening on the UFV campus over the course of five weeks. The room had a large screen and comfortable sitting suitable for film viewing. Each film was followed by an immediate post-film group discussion. Light

refreshments were provided and the aim was a casual conversational environment. As the rooms were booked as the last event of the day, the end time was determined by participants. This prevented the sense of being rushed and to decenter the regular pattern of a classroom learning space. The participants determined the length of the discussion. The post-film discussions lasted between 45 and 75 minutes.

After the film concluded, I asked a very general question and adopted a position of intentional listening. After everyone else contributed, I would then add something, which went in either of two directions. The first, to emphasize I was not fishing for the labelling of problems, I asked something light that also related to the film in some way. For example, I mentioned *Meditation Park* star Cheng Pei-pei, who played Maria, was a martial arts star earlier in her career, appearing in classic wuxia films like *Come Drink With Me* (King Hu, 1966). By bringing this up, Amy responded that she noticed how Maria in the film moved. This was a perfect hook, as it led to a detailed discussion of how Maria became more assertive in the space of her home as the film went on, and how that related to the barriers she was facing. After the general questions, I used two of the research sub-questions, as outlined in Chapter One, to stimulate discussion. These questions were

1. How prepared, ready, or open were you to receive the film?
2. What avenues for future learning, curricula development, or teaching and learning strategies would you suggest?

However, the main design focus was to create a conversational tone and as such the discussion was free flowing and digressed to include the topics the participants wanted to discuss.

Step 3: Post Viewing Individual Interviews

Once the complete three series viewing was complete and participants had several weeks of personal reflective time, I sit down with each participant for a recorded interview. The time between the end of the film viewing and the start of the individual interview process provided time for reflection and an opportunity to learn more about what faded and what remained in participants' memories from what they shared immediately after viewing the film. The concluding one-on-one interview also allowed participants to get beyond the group's discussion and provided them a freer space to offer potential dissention. The follow-up interview consisted of initial guide questions emphasizing the film, followed by an opportunity for participants to link the film to the wider context of social significance and relatedness to their own actions (Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014). Follow-up interviews lasted on average 60 minutes. The interview was structured as followed:

1. Are there individual scenes that have stuck with you? If so, why do you think these scenes matter to you?
2. Did the post-film discussions add to or change your understanding of the films? If so, how?
3. Has discussing and participating in the series led you to seek out more intercultural media than you would have before viewing the films?
4. Have you applied, or do you see how you could apply, anything you learned from viewing and discussing the films to situations in your life?

5. How has viewing and discussing the films re-contextualized your engagement with news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues?
6. Overall, what have you learned or taken away from the experience of engaging with these films as part of a discussion group?

Question one was a warmup question that allowed me to go back and watch the specific scenes noted by the participants to see if there were any common elements from either an aesthetic vantage point or a storytelling method that could be associated with a key message being memorable. Question two allowed me to evaluate what participants thought about discussing the film as a group and/or within a learning space, and what format suggestions they might have to better inform how film is used as a teaching and learning strategy. With question three, I recognized that for some participants it could be too early in the transformation learning process for them to realize significant change in their thinking or behaviour, but asking the question allowed me to understand if something about a particular film or the viewing experience hooked them and what motivated them to learn more on their own. It also led to a robust and fruitful discussion on where viewers look for media and how that helps or hinders exposure to intercultural media. Questions four and five were the key responses because they allowed me to compare the participant's responses with their pre-viewing questionnaire comments and attempt to understand how the films created new ways of thinking. Finally, question six allowed participants to evaluate their own experience, as well as open an opportunity to address any other thoughts they had about the series.

Data Analysis

Data Management

The introductory questionnaire responses and the notes I took during the film viewing group discussions were stored as electronic copies. The final individual interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed and retained electronically. Data was arranged and filed by the participant's pseudonym. All data collection and interactions with the research participants were conducted under the conditions set out in the individual ethics approval agreements.

Analysis, Interpretation and Validation

To analyze the data, I used the opening questionnaires, my observation notes taken during the film viewing group discussions and responses to the final one-on-one interview as "text," defined by CDA. I applied Patton's (2002) rule that analysis should be focused on identifying similarities, traits, and analogies within diverse data, as well as applied a critically reflective practice as outlined as stage five using CDA. For interpretation, I took into account Brown & Gilligan's (1991) suggested approaches to listening for meaning making when participants share personal reflections using a narrative style. To do this, I took time to read and/or listen to the interview transcripts four different times and each time listen/read from a different perspective. For example, at first, I listened for the contextual factors that each participant used to describe their own knowledge construction. I listened as a film critic and scholar. I engaged the data as a researcher looking for patterns, recommendations, and common traits. The fourth and final time was completed after an initial draft of the dissertation to re-view and re-assess what the participants actually said against my interpretations I had written into the

draft. The notes from my four review listening practice helped to thematically comprehend data or, as Glesne (1999) noted, make connections among the stories being told to demonstrate how those stories connect, form patterns and shape data.

I also contrasted how participants answered the introductory questionnaire with each of the interview questions reading and listening for various insights that illuminated how they currently engage with media and institutional policies related to intercultural issues. I looked for patterns on how they see themselves as connected to these issues. I further compared their initial definition of intercultural and what intercultural media they had engaged with as reported on the introductory questionnaire with how they, during the final interview stage, defined intercultural, and how intercultural media following the film viewing was discussed by the group. I first organized the data to reflect the common patterns that emerged and then taking a transdisciplinary approach, as outlined in Chapter One I further organized it to utilize the findings, contrasts, and themes as a form of text to further apply CDA. Throughout the analysis, I practiced what Fairclough (2001) described as the

> oscillation with CDA between a focus on structure and a focus on action – a focus on the structuring of orders of discourse, and a focus on what goes on in particular interactions. The obstacles to tackling a problem here are in part to do with the social structuring of semiotic differences in orders of discourse…. They are also in part a matter of dominate or influential ways of interacting, ways of using language in interactions. This means that we need to analyse interactions. ('Interaction' is used in a broad sense: a conversation is a form of interaction, but so too, for instance, is a

> newspaper article, even though the ‘interactions’ are distant in space and time. Written as well as, for instance, televisual or email texts are interactions in this extended sense) (p.6)

Using the process enabled me to ground my analysis by working through each of the five CDA stages as outlined in Chapter Four, and it opened opportunities to revisit the literature and the films as sources of data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodology used to conduct the research and provided additional context to position critical discourse analysis (CDA), define empathy aimed at recognizing interconnection, and clarify the film selection purpose. It has also briefly introduced the participants who engaged in film viewing at a Canadian teaching intensive university in BC. The next chapter will share the participants’ insights and outlining the findings in response to the central research question.

Chapter 5: Findings

This study explored how film viewing for adults in a formal and/or informal learning space create empathetic responses in the sense of a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166), and produce what Rancière (2010) called dissensus, or the sensory break with the normal order of things to imagine new possibilities? It also included the four following sub-questions:

1. How prepared, ready, or open were the participants to receive the films?
2. What strategies did the participants report as critical to their engagement in new learning and meaning making?
3. What role did post-film viewing discussion and reflection have?
4. What avenues for future learning, curricula development or teaching and learning strategies did the participants suggest?

As noted in Chapter One, I also theorized that empathetic imagination is directed towards "how do I contribute to this already created situation" rather than "how can I fix it"? This curiosity guided the inquiry and was answered in a variety of ways by the different participants.

This chapter begins by introducing the participants, their roles, and experiences. I outline the themes that emerged from the data and then describe in detail the key findings. To facilitate this, I drew on specific participant quotes and stories to situate and contextualize the meaning making process. To extend the analysis of the participant texts, this chapter also returns to the literature and the individual films viewed as texts in the CDA analysis stage to gain a deeper understanding of the respective three films in relation to how the participants engaged with each

film to construct new meanings, gain insights, and/or shift personal perspectives. The chapter concludes by employing the final fifth CDA stage of critical reflection as a way to summarize the key findings and articulate how the data responses to the central research question.

Core Themes

The participants' responses and stories illustrated that each participant had a unique perspective on the film viewing process and where they positioned themselves on the path to intercultural learning. There was no correlation or clear indication that factors related to age or gender influenced the results. The four themes that emerged were: 1) readiness to receive film; 2) unlearning; 3) film literacy; and 4) the learning environment. Using these themes this section shares the participants' experiences, comments and insights as data or CDA texts, and incorporates an analysis of the films viewed and related literature to illuminate and respond to the findings. Following the next section that introduces the participants, I will describe each of these four themes in detail.

Participants

Chapter Four, Table 1 provided a general overview of the participants in terms of age, gender and association with the educational setting. However, to provide context related to each of their responses and stories, it is important to introduce each participant as an individual because each responded to the research not only framed by their role (e.g., faculty or student etc.), but also in response to their own lived experiences outside of their association with the educational setting. Their individual experiences with past and present exposure to viewing film,

as well as their intercultural educational activities, also generated insights that informed the results of this study.

As outlined in the previous chapter this study included participants from both sessional and tenured faculty, students ranging from second-to-fourthth year and recent BA graduates, one senior academic leader, one academic advisor, and one community member not specifically involved professionally in the educational setting, but associated to the university through community engagement. Other than the students, all the participants held graduate level degrees. Four participants held Master's degrees, of those four, two were currently working on doctorate degrees, and two participants held PhDs. Of the students, Mark was a fourth year Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) student, Joe was a second year BA student with an undeclared major, and Kim and Matt were recent BA graduates with different majors. Nine of the participants had liberal arts degrees and one had a science engineering graduate degree. Nine of the participants identified as white and one as Middle Eastern. Three participants were between the ages of 20-30; two were between the ages of 30-40; three were between the ages of 40-50 and two were between the ages of 50-60. Each member was engaged and demonstrated an eagerness to explore new films and came into the research field with an openness to learn and discover.

Readiness.

Mezirow (1995) pointed out that long before change on any organizational level can take place, whether within a family, a community, or educational setting, authentic transformation and resulting positive change begins with the individual. As a result, I started analysing the data collected from the individual participants using the introductory questionnaire, post-film viewing

discussion observations and notes, as well as the individual interviews to address the first sub-question – how prepared, ready or open were the participants to receive the films?

As the theme of the selected films was framed as intercultural competency, before watching the films, I asked each participant a series of questions that they responded to using the introductory questionnaire (Appendix 1). The first question asked them to define intercultural in their own words. Their individual definitions varied greatly. For example, Bruce responded with a blunt "not much". Whereas the other participants responded with more detailed answers that focused specifically on interactions and communication across cultures (Mark, Amy, Yusif). While I intentionally did not define what "culture" was for the participants in the questions in order to gauge if there was a common understanding among the group, and to determine if through the film series would this be a point of discussion that would require facilitation. I was also interested in how they defined the idea of "intercultural", given that despite the university demand for competency in it, it was vaguely defined. Seven of the ten participants defined intercultural as something that has apparent boundaries and the idea of intercultural as making an effort to communicate across these boundaries. For Dianne, Sara, and Matt the boundaries were thought of as geographic, for example people coming from different communities, such as international students. Several responses (Diane, Matt, Kim, Jane) indicated an acknowledgement of the multiplicity of cultures that surround them. Amy mentioned intercultural "does not privilege one over the other, but instead it allows all to exist simultaneously". Diane explicitly mentioned empathy, as in being able to empathize with the conditions (good or bad) of another person from a different culture. She reflected on programs in

student affairs where advisors and counsellors are challenged to “walk in the shoes of a perspective student” as a professional development activity. She thought this example applied to learning more about people with cultural practices different than her own. Matt, Joe and Kim explicitly mentioned multiculturalism, but were unable to articulate the differences between it and intercultural. They appeared to understand these words as interchangeable.

To further explore the entry points or readiness of each participant, I also asked, “Have you taken formal coursework on decolonization or intercultural issues? (and if the answer is yes, please describe)”. Collectively the participants identified various prior learning experiences that included a wide variety of learning opportunities such as intercultural literature courses (Amy & Sara), Education courses (Amy & Jane), History courses that emphasized Canadian colonialism (Matt & Joe), Art History courses (Mark), as well as workshops on diversity training (Kim). Diane reported that while she had not taken formal coursework, she had experience living in another country, which led to many informal learning experiences. Yusif described the informal learning he had done as a result of immigrating first to the United States (US) and then Canada. He provided specific examples of what he learned when he moved from his country of origin to the US, and what he had to learn again when he moved from the US to Canada.

I inquired about their prior experience with intercultural film. Because Bruce had not thought about a definition of intercultural, he narrowed his response to “I am not sure. Would films made about people in two different countries count as intercultural?” Mark, a fine arts student, said he watched a lot of films from different countries, but wondered if the term intercultural applied if the film was centred around one culture or geographic place. Yusif used

this question to describe his own experience participating in the making of a documentary about migration, but he did not mention films he watched in general. Joe answered he had not seen intercultural films. Five participants mentioned they thought they had seen a few intercultural films, but asked how they would know for sure. Amy responded with

> I am unsure how to explicitly define the term and so I think I might have, but engaging in this research would be the first time seeing a film where I know for sure because it will be specifically framed as intercultural.

I further asked, "how do you currently engage with news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues?" This question stimulated a significant response where each participant reflecting on either their individual roles within the educational environment, or their own personal experiences. Jane, Yusif, and Amy expressed frustration with institutional policies (or lack thereof). Mark and Kim described how they received news through social media, but at the same time described how stressful it can be for students to follow intercultural issues if social media is their only source of information. Bruce and Joe reflected on the fact that their trusted sources for news comes from television or popular print media, whereas Sara outlined she also uses these same media channels, but joked about them not being as accurate as they could. Keywords and/or phrases pulled from the participant responses to this question included:

- social conservatism,
- capitalism,
- ignorance,

- systemic racism,
- social media vitriol,
- outdated stereotypes,
- colonialist structures,
- gang violence,[8]
- lack of resources and social opportunities, and
- the differences between collective and individualist cultures.

Finally, to gain insight into how the participants actually frame their own engagement with intercultural issues (as they defined them), I asked them to outline how they saw themselves as already connected to intercultural issues. The participants [Sara, Yusif, Amy] who were instructors at the university all framed their engagement through the lens of their faculty role. Amy mentioned how many of her classes were enrolled with a majority of international students and suggested that the university's embrace of globalization for financial reasons was "exceeding our preparedness" to welcome students into a setting of unaddressed "systemic racism". Amy further outlined they were looking for a way to engage other instructors about becoming aware of, and changing, their narrow cultural lens, particularly in regard to how it was being applied to international students. Yusif noted "the lack of attention [at the institution] to the differences between different types of non-western cultures in the classroom".

[8] There is significant media attention and police public relations efforts in Abbotsford and surrounding communities about gang violence.

Jane extended Yusif's comment about the extreme lack of attention to acknowledging non-western recruitment practice, hiring practices, academic policies, and assessment practices, and expressed at the same time there is extreme pressure to increase enrolment and diversify hiring. She reflected:

> "Filling seats with international students is the name of the game for administrators these days. This is a clear target in most Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) plans. Unfortunately, faculty are not consulted about SEM and the first time they learn about the students being recruited into take their classes is when the students show up the first day of class. There is little to no support for faculty when it comes to understanding what intercultural engagement on campus means. All they often get (if that) is a quick workshop –that is very thin on authentic learning. And even more sad is that the faculty that attend the "quick fix" workshops generally are not the faculty I [think] need to attend. It is whole other story trying to get faculty who think they have nothing to learn in this area to go".

The participants in education roles (Diane, Sara, Yusif, Amy, & Jane) all commented on how the one-size-fits-all is not the best approach when it comes to teaching and addressing the needs of students and that they saw their engagement in intercultural issues related to pushing against policy, advocating for greater awareness and trying to change systems.

Another participant, Matt, who works in a non-teaching role, saw his role in learning about intercultural issues so that he could "be an ally in public and at work whenever I can". He expressed his aim for participating in the research was to share knowledge with "friends and

family who are xenophobic". Matt, also expressed that he did not just himself as someone how completely "gets it", but also responded stating "I would also like some of my own held biases and prejudices to be challenged by what we watch."

While agreeing to participant in the research because of interest in the topic and film theme, Matt was the only one to explicitly suggest he was seeking to actually be unsettled and looking to the film series to provide this learning opportunity.

Section Summary.

I applied the CDA stages to reflect on the individual readiness of the participants to receive the films as an opportunity to explore interconnection empathy several key points were raised. First, like in a classroom setting, it is difficult to make the assumption that those entering the learning space are at the same place of understanding and exploration. The participants of this study demonstrated that even though they were various ages, and had different levels of education, they each had questions about what 'counts' as intercultural, and how to determine if they were applying it correctly to film viewing. Their responses indicated they were approaching the research at various entry points into the exploration of Otherness. Nine of the participants had different levels of experiences with prior film viewing representative of intercultural issues and two had no experience. Overall, it would be fair to assess the participants film viewing experiences as limited. And although Matt was the only participant to explicitly express he was hoping the film viewing would provide an unsettling experience in which new learning could be generated, the others implied they were curious and open. Each of the participants, informed by different semiotic aspects in their own way, were focused on a "social wrong." Their responses

indicated an awareness of how the learning setting around the film and the framing the viewer brings to the viewing experience affects their reaction. However, the responses also suggested that the participants expected intercultural attributes to be a clearly defined set of interactions modeled within the film, rather than a looser definition which emphasizes interrelatedness between two groups.

The participants were also able to describe barriers to addressing the social wrong such as their own lack of exposure to intercultural learning, limited understanding of definitions, rhetoric media practices, or as in Amy, Yusif, and Jane's engagement example - institutional practices. The list of keywords that was generated indicated the participants were familiar with the language of both liberal politics and liberal arts university discourse, consistent with their degrees and occupational backgrounds.

Common across the participants, even for those that held doctorate degrees, was an acknowledgement that we were unsure of how to define intercultural in relationship to film viewing, and other than Mark, all had limited experiences with intercultural film viewing. However, the participants' questionnaire responses provided strong evidence that they saw the film series as a potential learning opportunity for them on a personal level. And while not as explicit as Matt expressed his hope to be unsettled and his thinking challenged, the other nine participants expressed interest in not simply learning more, but also to be in an environment for unlearning.

Unlearning

As illustrated in the last section, the participants entered the research space with different understandings, and ways of knowing and questioning. These different entry points provided excellent opportunities to gain insights into the multiple perspectives participants bring to both learning and unlearning opportunities.

By framing their participation in the film series as needing to know more rather than just needing to know, the participants position themselves at a point slightly beyond what frustrated Rancière (2010), as outlined in Chapter Three about moral art, the belief that all art needed to do to achieve change was to bring to the surface oppression and atrocity. The issue the participants identified was not that they did "not know", but that they were seeking to understand better. However, seeking to understand better was contextual in relationship to each participant. For many their engagement with making a difference was also towards furthering understanding on a professional level, whereas for others it was on a personal level.

Surrounding the dialogue about learning and unlearning, Sara, a white instructor, bridged these two positions, saying

> I recognize the ways in which I benefit from privilege, and therefore do not want to take up space where others deserve it, but also I feel my role as an educator is to talk about these issues critically and constructively in the classroom.

Sara reported participating in the series because, "I encourage my students to engage with their media critically, so this was an opportunity to be an observer as my students would, and engage in the types of discussions that ensue". Sara used the post-film discussions to

demonstrate she had empathy with students by reminding herself what it was like to participate from a place of learning rather than teaching or facilitating. Uniquely, throughout the study she was one of the few participants that was never able to articulate what actions or changes she would make to her own teaching practice because of having had this experience. Instead, her comments aligned more with 'how can I fix it' in terms of 'how can I get my students to be more intercultural'.

The other participants, in one way or another, demonstrated a stronger link to the films helping them take action or in other words respond to 'how do I contribute to this already created situation'. During the post-film discussions, a common lead-in question was "how has this film viewing experience and discussion re-contextualized your engagement with things like news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues?" Yusif, Matt, Mark, and Joe discussed the film series as providing them an opportunity to unlearn some of their former media habits and to add new approaches better informed. Amy and Sara said they felt less complacent than they had been in the past and talked about being empowered to take action and challenge their extended family about racism. Sara's interview was just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit North America and she discussed pushing back against her parents' racist comments about the virus' origins.

> Last week we had a family dinner and my parents were angry about China "spreading" the virus. I pointed out that such a thing could happen anywhere and wasn't some cultural issue. It might not be much, but I have a role to play in helping

him learn – if not for himself, but for the nieces and nephews around the table. And if not me who?

Kim said that the series led her to "think more about what I do, to be more conscientious". Jane also shared with the group that

> sometimes as an administrator you go along to get along, but in reality if I don't speak up or take action I contribute to the already poor situation. It was not until I experienced characters in these films going along to get along did I realize the harm not taking action does.

Another area that unlearning was present with the participants' discussion on the value of film. Bruce, Matt, Diane, Joe, Sara and Kim acknowledged that film to them was entertainment or a way to "shut down and turn off" [Matt]. Others such as Amy, Yusif, and Jane talked about film for learning as documentary and separate from film for entertainment. This might have been because they were thinking in their educator roles. However, only Mark commented on film as art or similar to literature. Through the post viewing discussions, the participants began to realize the impact and power of film as a "text" or as something that can share experiences or communicate complexity.

Bruce commented that he had never watched a film with subtitles because he did not want to "read" during a film and also had assumed American and British productions were the highest quality. However, after the film viewing he reported

> I am really surprised that so much more is communicated in the film visually than by words alone. I hardly noticed the sub-titles. It was easy to keep pace and I came

away thinking even if I did not read the sub-titles I would have still understood film. This really surprised me. And it introduced me to so many more films I can watch.

This example pointed to a moment in which Bruce had to unlearn or question his film viewing assumptions, but more significantly demonstrated how his unlearning could lead to new learning and new ways to engage with film. Jane reflected on how she was puzzled by the flow or pace of the films.

> They can be so slow – like watching someone do just an ordinary task – and I could not believe they film it. I have not seen films where this is the case. At first, I thought it was boring. But then I came to realize that seeing someone do normal stuff made them more relatable and I could forgot about them as a "character".

Likewise, Kim further reflected having to unlearn how she sees. For example, during the post-film discussion she said:

> I watched the film and thought I had it all figured out, but when people started talking realized there were other angles and the film felt much larger.

Diane and Yusif engaged in a discussion about unlearning standard film practices or what I labelled Hollywoodization. Sara pondered about what she would need to know in order to get her classes as engaged in deep dialogue as the post-film discussion group was. Kim, Matt, and Joe suggested students would respond well to film viewing, but they would need coaching otherwise they would consider it another "fly by" (Kim) media.

At the end of each film viewing, I asked the participants during the discussion to pause and reflection on what they had hoped to learn from the film and consider what type of learning (if any) that occurred for them. They reported they learned:

- there were many more films than they thought existed (nine participants);
- that storytelling and meaning making in film does not always follow expected conventions;
- they were unaware that viewing film was as complex;
- new examples and techniques to communicate with students- especially about complex subject matter (four participants);
- there was much more to learn before they could confidently say they understand intercultural issues (ten participants);
- they need to continue to challenge their own biases and prejudices (three participants); and
- that unlearning is fostered when having intellectual stimulating conversations with friends (four participants).

Overall. the most significant findings the group expressed was their strong interest in learning more about:

- film viewing practices,
- what they were missing by understanding film as only entertainment,
- how to create learning conditions using film,
- continuing opportunities for intellectual discussions as an unlearning exercise.

Section Analysis.

This section illustrated the various entry points and opportunities the participants reported as contributing to their new learning or helping them to unlearn either long held assumptions or even how they framed their engagement with media like film. It demonstrated the participants' interest to explore film more deeply both for professional and personal reasons. It also suggested there was value in the post-film discussions as an unlearning space. For example, had the participants just seen the film without the post-film discussion, they could have walked away with it adhering to their existing frameworks and there would have been a missed learning opportunity. The participants also clearly acknowledged that film viewing is more complex than what they first expected and learning to enhance their seeing, and understanding of the meaning making potential of film would contribute to their own learning and their ability to engage students, family members and colleagues. In response to the participants' suggestion that exploring film viewing more deeply would enhance meaning making, I framed the next two sections by incorporating the participant texts with an analysis of the films viewed, and at times connections to new literature. The incorporation of including film analysis as CDA texts was done in tandem with the post-film discussions and shared with the participants. The next two sections outline the final meaning making processes and weave together the participant and film analysis data into the findings.

Film Literacy

The participants viewed three films that did not have a conclusive ending, which initially caused some consternation in the post-film discussion group. I believed this element was

conducive for the films to be the ethical art I described in Chapter Three, where the films do not try to offer clear and easy solutions around solely personal agency, but raise questions outside the normal parameters of the feel-bad-to-feel-good film. In this section, I synthesize the participants' data with an analysis of the films as text.

Reactions to Films.

The films did not tell didactically the participants how to think. As a result, their first reaction was often to make sense of what they had just seen through existing frameworks. In the last section Jane's realization that films don't always cut and move past the routine actions of people is an example of how the participants struggled with making sense of what they were seeing. Kim noted

> I often wondered why various scenes were included in the film in the first place. I thought maybe it was because films from other countries don't edit. But then weeks after viewing the film I could still remember the scenes. This got me thinking why don't I remember more scenes from movies – is it because they go by too fast - I don't know.

While these are two explicit examples, the majority of the participants reported they approached the films through the Hollywood conventions they are familiar with and did not stop to question there was any other way to present film. Joe, Matt, Kim, Diana, and Sara immediately tried to make sense of the films by reading the films as a hero versus villain clash of individuals. In the terms of Vetlesen's (1994) moral judgement, participants directed empathy toward certain characters through a combination of affective attachment to character, plot points,

and existing frameworks for understanding stories. Rather than emotionally connect with several characters and balance their viewpoints, the participants had a tendency during the post-film viewing discussions to empathize heavily with just one character in each film. For example, collectively they immediately identified Kiira in *Stupid Young Heart,* Aila in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, and Maria in *Meditation Park*.

While Aila and Maria are the protagonists in their respective films, Kiira is not. Kiira is the most traditionally sympathetic character in *Stupid Young Heart*, a teenage girl trying her best to deal with an unexpected pregnancy and getting little emotional support from anyone. However, the film also reminded the participants that she is still not far from being a child, such as when Kiira and Lenni go shopping at a furniture store, she is insistent she buys a flowing canopy for their bed. She mentions she's "always wanted one" and her absent father had promised to buy her one, but never did. While this scene can easily go unnoticed, when discussing it afterwards several of the participants acknowledged they saw a brief flash of youthfulness, but did not bother to 'read' meaning into it.

Further discussing their focus on empathizing heavily with one character suggested that complicated characters had their faults exaggerated and the film's portrayals of their complexity ignored. For example, in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, such reading did little to affect the film's empathetic potential, as Popper is unambiguously villainous. In the case of the other two films, the film text itself was more complicated in regard to characters the participants reported dislike for. Lenni is the protagonist of *Stupid Young Heart* and the film focuses on how social structures of economic precarity and masculinity lead him to look for answers among the xenophobic far-

right. Lenni is an example of a character who is not sympathetic in his actions, but who the film builds empathy for by examining him in his social context.

As Sara and Mark said at the screening, Lenni is reminiscent of many disaffected teenage boys. He is insecure about his masculinity with his short stature and thin frame. He is interested in skateboarding, mixed martial arts, and video games. During this same post-film discussion, the participants all mentioned knowing boys like Lenni, but also noted most boys like Lenni do not become white supremacists. *Stupid Young Heart* examines how this type of young man is vulnerable to indoctrination, given how popular codes of masculinity emphasize a rugged individualism that makes those who do not succeed feel as if something is lacking.

For example, during the discussion, Yusif and Matt opened a dialogue to deconstruct why Lenni , frustrated at being unable to find a job or an apartment, is brought under the wing of local carpenter Janne, who is into mixed martial arts… and white supremacy, offering him a false explanation for the struggles Lenni faces by blaming racialized immigrants. This discussion caused the participants to ask several questions about the film and I took the opportunity to point out the fact the film does not portray Lenni as a likeable figure is one of its strengths. I explained it is not asking for pity, but an understanding of how the loneliness and lack of community in the world of being "the entrepreneur of the self" (Gordon, 1991, p. 44) is the ideal recruiting ground for extremist ideologies. While Lenni joins a white supremacist group, Yusif shared with the participants a personal story and noted how the film had reminded him of how young men he knew had joined a nationalist group in the newly post-Soviet republic, which became increasingly extreme while he was a member. From here the post-film discussion digressed into

a variety of topics related to young men/students, white supremacy on campus and in the media, and the various roles educators might play.

Another example of over-simplifying a character and not being able to fully read the film's message occurred in the post-film discussion around *Meditation Park*. Before the participants' comments can be easily understood it is important to provide an overview of the particular scene the stimulated their deeper discussion. Maria's husband Bing is the film's antagonist. He is the archetype of the hard-working immigrant who has sacrificed a lot to provide a better life for his children. The conflict of the film is Maria discovers Bing is having an affair and begins to think about how her income and her social life is dependent on her husband, which would be in jeopardy if he left her. Maria does not confront Bing, but does follow him and finds his mistress, Ji (Jemmy Chen). Ji, scared at meeting Bing's wife, tearfully expresses her loneliness to Maria, but also ends her relationship with Bing. Bing responds by being only more controlling, leading his daughter Ava left to confront him.

In a pivotal scene, Ava says "I need to talk to you about an invitation", which shocks Bing. Ava is too nervous to look her father in the face and so walks behind the chair and looks at the floor. The camera focuses on the two of them so we can see both their faces, despite neither of them looking at each other, emphasizing the tension of the scene. She relates that he worries about her two kids and asks if he worried about them when they were young. The scene cuts to a close-up as he turns around to make eye contact, saying "of course I did". Bing recalls when he first moved to Vancouver from Hong Kong he took the only job he could attain. Ava walks by him, again out of eye contact, saying "yes, slaughtering chickens, I know", as if this story has

been told a thousand times, as if he has held this sacrifice over them in the past in a way to avoid being questioned. Yet this time he explicitly challenges her with "You know? You know!". He leans in and stares at her, responding:

> I killed for eight hours a day. The smell. The blood. Just so I could put a roof over your head. You think I liked doing that? I was a math teacher. All I could think of was you children and you asked me if I worried about you. Every choice I made, I made for this family.

Ava is surprised at the lecture, and the film cuts to a close-up of her asking, "Why are you getting so upset?", which is followed by a cut back to a close-up of his face as it melts from anger to a confused sadness, and he turns in his chair, saying, "I don't want to talk anymore". The two sit in silence for several seconds until Ava takes a deep breath and moves closer to him, sitting on the arm of the chair and saying, "This is really important." Bing, staring at the camera rather than Ava, whispers, "My father was such a strong man, never afraid, never weak…" before the scene cuts again to a shot with Ava in full focus and Bing blurred on the edge of the frame. This is very unusual composition, reversing the standard practice of showing the speaker in focus. Bing continues "I have not been good enough." She is shocked as he continues "I've let him down, I've let you down. I've let everyone down. It's too late." Ava kneels next to him, grabs his shoulder, and asks him, "Baba, what's too late?" before the scene cuts without resolution.

It is significant to focus on the detail presented in order to consider the participants' meaning making process. The film leaves it up to the viewer to guess how the two characters

resolved their discussion. However, the viewers do learn important information here that contextualizes Bing as someone who has felt he had to sacrifice and now feels he is a failure. For example, Amy discussed this scene as moving because it complicates the sacrifice narrative. Instead of it being presented to an audience as an inspirational tale, we see a man who does not feel that his children living a good life is the reward he expected it to be. He is not inspired by his own sacrifice and is experiencing self-doubt about his actions.

This scene does not represent a complete transformation. Later, at a family dinner, Maria stands up announcing she is going to her estranged son's wedding. Bing firmly states in Cantonese, "I forbid it", only for Maria to respond, also in Cantonese, "Who are you to forbid it"? Ava stands up, "You can't forbid her. She's a free woman. We're all going. He wants you to come". Bing is not swayed and, perhaps to justify his past actions, only digs in further. In contrast to a more Hollywood-like movie, where Bing would have had a change of heart, here he does not, or at least does not yet.

The participants discussed that Bing, because of sacrificing his teaching job in Hong Kong to work in a Vancouver slaughterhouse, inspires some sympathy. The film does not seek to use this as an explanation or excuse, but just context. While the responses from Amy and Yusif illustrate how they reacted in a complex way, there was an equal pattern from participants who located the problem with Lenni and Bing as merely bad people. At first, the pattern of reaction seemed to reflect Bloom's (2016) criticism that empathy can lead to a form of tunnel vision. However, by looking at who the empathy was for gives pause to this, as there was not a strong correlation with familiarity to the participants. While the three characters most empathized with

were women, this pattern was not correlated to gender and was shared by the majority of participants who vocalized their opinions in the discussion. The connection instead seemed to be empathizing with the "good" person in the films and more a result of understanding film through certain conventions. Mark, who is most familiar with non-Hollywood films remarked in his post-interview his surprise at the groups' lack of film literacy in terms of not being able to pick up on scenes or messages that provide opportunities to learn more about the characters or to appreciate their experiences. Amy reflected back on earlier discussion about unlearning and noted that how completely unaware she was of the "Hollywoodization" of what she watches. In particular, she noted.

> you don't know what you don't know. As a result of the film series and especially as a result of learning more about film during the post-film discussion I will learn not to expect consistently heightened tension or for the film to provide a clear resolution to the problem. I can see I need to do this unpacking myself. I can also see why students will need support in learning to do this.

Amy described the films as being meaningful to her because the "stories told that were familiar, but new subjects. So were easy to understand, but about new things". Familiar here means in form, that they were all narrative films, albeit narrative films that worked to undercut the familiar expectations of Hollywood drama. Amy continued that particularly *Stupid Young Heart* and *Meditation Park* had set-ups that suggested a scene would result in tragedy or catharsis, resolved through Hollywood-style heightened conflict, but their scenes instead either

offered an anti-climactic resolution or no resolution at all. Amy also recalled this as her favourite part “because it keeps me thinking”.

In dialogue with the participants during the interviews, we explored whether I erred selecting the films not based on Marks’ (2000) examples of intercultural films often being films which blurred lines between fiction and documentary. However, we discussed how the structure of the films I did select may have even been too unusual to the participants for immediate learning to happen. On one hand, we discussed how the films may have helped disrupt viewer patterns of identifying a hero versus villain story arc, question different ways of storytelling and create an unsettling affect. The participants felt the structure of the films served its purpose. Jane noted

> it is a balance when the viewers have the limited experiences we had. Bringing in such films may have been too outside our understanding of film, but with the post-film discussion and added film analysis we learned to bridge different ways of storytelling on film. It could have also led to complete confusion and this is where we need to think much more strategically before we just jump into showing just any film to just any group of students.

Jane’s latter point stimulated the participants to discuss whether simply helping participants become aware of the limitations of Hollywoodization would suffice as a strategy to supporting their film viewing. As the group pondered this, they realized that were other storytelling frames at play as well. Kim, Amy, and Matt, who had studied literature expressed concern that people most often can only recognize a couple storytelling conventions and that

when a story does not follow one, they either don't like the story or they don't even bother with it. Mark and Yusif also reminded the group that there are structures in visual storytelling that are common and recognizable, but that when artist subvert these structures, viewers are often either confused or non-responsive.

The question for the group grew into what influences structures – especially as related to Hollywoodization and film viewing. Returning to Tufekci's (2019) idea of sociological vs psychological storytelling, it appears the participants' empathy with one character did not necessitate building up another as a villain because of empathy's bias, but rather one dictated by conventional storytelling. The hero versus villain convention reinforces and is reinforced by emphasis on self-agency. Even a film focused more on the sociological perspective includes enough character information for a psychologically reasoned response. It is difficult to imagine a fiction narrative film purely sociological – perhaps early silent films when film form was still being cemented, like *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925). Turfekci's dichotomy is better thought of in terms of a sociological story that almost always has character psychology, while a psychological story could lack a sociological element.

Section Analysis.

This section has work to link some of the participants' findings about film viewing back to the literature as detailed in Chapters Three and Four. It also described the exploratory work towards new learning and mean making that occurred as a result of the post-film discussion. In doing so, I identified a gap in the participants' readiness to receive the films. The participants specifically focused on their lack of awareness around

films which did not use Hollywood style storytelling. They also identified that an awareness and acknowledgement of the imitations of storytelling structures, as well as the disorienting factors that occur when storytelling structures are not as expected was a significant learning and unlearning opportunity that could be used on a personal development level and an educational level.

The Learning Environment

As noted in the summary of the last section, the participants found that the learning environment was critical to how film created an unsettling affective experience. Along with identifying a film literacy gap that they felt existed, the post-film discussion was instrumental in helping to disrupt their thinking and their ability to focus on character's agency. Had the participants just seen the film, as Kim described in her earlier quote about how talking helped her to realize other angles, she could have walked away with it adhering to her existing frameworks. The several participants who were most interested in character agency were also the same participants most intrigued at understanding aesthetics through structural thinking. Several participants noted that an analysis of film form helped them to open up towards the films. For example, after viewing *Stupid Young Heart*, Mark noted the film's carefully constructed colour pallet, emphasizing warm colours with Kiira, while scenes with Lenni were typically presented in a more natural light. Mark suggested this choice may have affected feelings toward the characters. No one else had noticed this, but this led the participants' discussion in new avenues for dialogue to bring into the learning environment. Two participants in their individual interviews brought this up as something from the discussion that stood out for them, because it

helped ground the analysis in empirical evidence from the film and emphasized how visuals communicate information beyond plot. Although Mark and Yusif had referenced visual communication structures in the early post-film discussion, it was not until this level of discourse was introduced as part of the learning environment discussions did the majority of the participants begin to grasp the concept.

Melillo (2014) outlined how from the beginning of empathy theory, "vision has remained the paradigmatic empathic sense" (p. 61). While the participants watch a lot of film and television shows, this did not mean they necessarily possessed the language to discuss the films which they discovered while in discussion with each other. In addition to the above colour palette discussion, for example, Joe mentioned he did not notice cuts within a scene. Likewise, descriptions of film visuals from the participant during the interviews were limited to phrases such as "the filmmaking was very cool and interesting." The lack of conscious awareness does not mean the specific aesthetic strategies were not having an emotional impact on them, but was not until the post-film discussions was it easier for them to talk explicitly about the textual elements of the film. Since much of education is about expressing ideas through words, empowering a language around film response was something the participants felt was critical. The participants were almost all from a liberal arts background, several with graduate degrees, yet while they demonstrated well the academic discourse, there was a focus on the elements that could easily be transformed into academic discourse. For example, discussions around the characters and the plot, and less on the other elements that work to create the affective environment of the film. While the translation process from seeing to talking is possible, it is not

always possible immediately. Reflecting on this the participants suggested that when the discussion focuses on the textual elements alone, the textual elements can come to dominate a significant place in the memory of the film because that is what other people marked out as important, as the elements someone should be thinking about. Amy and Yusif who had used an occasional film in course they teach recalled this being the case. I, too, have noticed a similar pattern in classes I teach.

The Film Discussion Environment.

> But excitement about ideas was not sufficient to create an exciting learning process. As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence… That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the professor must genuinely value every one's presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes (hooks, 1994, p. 8).

hooks' (1994) discussion was influential in forming how I went about creating the post-film discussion environment especially once I discovered that the group was interested and expressed a need to talk about film beyond Hollywoodization. A key difference between hooks' situation and this study is that she referred to a classroom, while the participants were in a less formal group. The participants mostly saw themselves as colleagues and there was no formal evaluative tool to act as surveillance beyond the acknowledgment that they were participating in

an anonymous study. However, the rest of her description remained relevant. The value of having (mainly) the same participants in the room for the duration of the study, several of whom knew each other before the film series, was the relational aspect of being interested in each other. Amy specified that having intellectual stimulating conversations with friends was their expectation for the film series. Creating this environment was crucial, as I outlined in Chapter Two, because empathic reactions are only ever potentialities, which some environments nurture and other environments smother. Mayo (2012) wrote that the failure of art-inspired empathy to lead to action is often not the art's fault, but rather "the failure is within curricula design" (p. 77). Aiming to gather input from the participants on recommendations for future curricula development, taking time to debrief the impact of the environment was essential.

Most participants compared the post-film discussions to being in class, with Jane and Mark specifically noting that being beyond evaluation they felt freer than being in class. This response related to another element hooks emphasized, that "even though students enter the "democratic" classroom believing they have the right to 'free speech,' most students are not comfortable exercising this right to 'free speech'" for fear of displeasing the instructor in charge of their marks (1994, p. 179). Amy described

> In other settings, particularly in classes, there's a language around decolonization, Indigenization, intercultural, and gender, that there are expected phrases and ways of thinking that are accepted by academics and if you are unable to contribute through that vocabulary, it's hard to say anything. It's very unusual to find

someone in both lanes – that was my MA. I was a target until I learned the language.

To clarify, Amy was not deploying a conservative argument that we should not be in support of those concepts, but rather that because one can become fluent in labelling while not acting them out, or even knowing how to act, it can be difficult in academic settings to know who just knows to say the right things and who will actually support actions. Such language did not occur. But as Mark noted, in academia often the labelling of the problem is the end point, and that passing judgement is the goal. The goal in the film series discussion was to work backwards from the judgement to figure out why.

I did not enter the discussion space with a set, scripted plan. I did not lead the participants in any exercises designed to encourage empathy, because as outlined Chapter Two, I see empathy not as a skill to be honed, but an affect to be felt. Rather, I introduced the film with short contextual information about where and when the film was set, when it was made, and brief biographic information about the director. Critically reflecting on this strategy, I realize not to have a set plan can be unpredictable in a teaching and learning environment. However, creating a learning space that can be open, but can support further exploration became a role that I found myself in and one that I discussed with the participants once all three of the post-film discussions were complete.

After the film concluded, I asked a very general question and adopted a position of intentional listening. Amy explained

> I really liked that you let us wander down the paths we want to go. There was no agenda and as a result the feeling of community was established. We were then free to openly discuss and share – I guess unlearn in community. If we had felt there was an agenda or we were pushed in a specific direction this wouldn't happen. And I know for me I would have not engaged or for that matter liked the learning.

Of course, I did have an agenda, as this study indicates, but was open to how the participants responded to the films and I was not trying to get participants to agree with my personal reading of the films.

A second approach I sometimes took was to push a bit on how certain characters were framed as villains, to ask questions about moments where those characters were at their most emotionally vulnerable. The key to using this approach was not to contradict or frame something as an opposition, because that reinforces the conflict frame, but rather to respond "yes, and…", trying to extend the consideration to a wider group of characters. While I was not sure how this was going during the film series discussions, I learned in the post-series interviews that it had an effect.

Group discussions do have limitations. For example, Kim reported feeling nervous after hearing other people speak. She felt she initially had difficulty bringing new insights and preferred instead to largely listen. However, Kim explained that she did feel more comfortable after the first screening and as a sense of community was built. Several participants [Amy, Jane, Yusif, Mark, Diana] enjoyed the discussion to the point they asked for the series to continue,

though this has not yet occurred because of the university COVID-19 lockdown. Amy described it as “some of the most exciting and intellectually stimulating conversations” she had had on campus.

Reflection on Media Habits

During the discussions about the learning environment the participants questioned what would be considered a learning environment. There was consensus that a classroom was a learning environment, but there was some debate about whether media was a learning environment. However, after a detailed discussion about where the participants learned, such as Mark sharing stories of learning in galleries and museums, Amy outlining the learning she has done through attending theatre and Sara describing the learning she does while gaming, the group determined that media was a learning environment, but best described as an informal learning environment unless directly used in a classroom setting. This created an opportunity for the participates to reflect on the impact of their media habits. To see this as a success assumes there is value in diversifying media usage, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Six of the ten reported a re-consideration of what they watch after participating in the film series. Matt remarked “it made me consider how little I watched was intercultural”, Kim said “I realized my recommendations [on Netflix] were very white”, and Bruce mentioned earlier when reflecting on unlearning, that he had actually avoided media with subtitles in the past thinking they would be more effort than the value he would receive. from them to be. Sara said she was “bored with Hollywood promoting white men doing white men things”. She also discussed the push for representation, particularly around the superhero films that dominate the

box office. She said the film news she sees on her social media feeds is mostly related to pushing for more diversity in blockbuster films. Sara acknowledged diversity was important, but now realized it was also important to support people from minoritized groups already representing themselves on screen.

There was also discussion about whether their learning came from the consideration that films that provided angles on problems they were interested in may already exist. Amy reflected it was important to see "two Canadian films without the flag waving white settler perspective". Many participants' prior experience with Canadian film was with the rare attempts where the films try to follow Hollywood formulas, but with a sense of Canadian patriotism, like *Passchendaele* (Paul Gross, 2008). Jane described previous Canadian films she had seen as "cheesy". She noted:

> Seeing *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Meditation Park* demonstrated that Canadian filmmakers were grappling with the issues in our local context and providing new ways of seeing these issues rather than being nationalistic.

As a result of reflecting on their own informal learning environments and their use of media, specifically film, the group started to pose questions about where to find new films, strategies for searching Netflix better, how to use media students would pay attention to, and who gets to determine what Netflix makes available. These questions pointed to an unexpected finding of this research. It suggested that viewers have limited information about what films are available and even more limited information about how to access them. This finding sparked a curiosity in the participants that could not go unaddressed. At the start of this research preparing for a thorough

discussion on viewer habits was not something I considered. Instead, during the latter stage of the film series, once the participants raised the issue, I returned to the literature as a text that could be used to enhance the analysis of the findings. This work is provided in the next chapter.

Section Summary.

This section has highlighted the participants' responses to the learning environment, both formal and informal. It has summarized areas that they felt contributed to their own learning and briefly outlined the limitations of group discussions. This section concludes by bringing to attention the questions participants had about their own media use after participating in the film series. These questions opened the participants to new learning and posed a question I had not considered when starting this research. I now realize after discussing the learning environment with the participants, especially those that teach, that remaining open enough to guide learners in unpacking their own responses and finding their own meaning and calls to action requires attention, awareness and often practice. It calls for a responsiveness on behalf of the facilitator to the expressed learning interests of the participants. In this case the participants' exploration of their access to film. This will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

Film Analysis and Participant Responses

This next section draws on Fairclough's (2001, 2016) suggestions that CDA often results in alternating between discourses and transgressing between disciplinary meaning making processes to explore new meanings or ways of analysing. As outlined in the previous sections of this chapter, the participants grew interesting in deconstructing the films at a deep level. This interest was motivated by their intrigue with the learning more about the film's messaging, but

more motivated by their interest in how film can be used towards creating opportunities for new learning. As a result, this section weaves the participants' questions and findings with an analysis of the films as text. It concludes with describing an expected outcome that resulted from this research.

Participants and film analysis

In comparison to the post-film discussions, there was less discussion of characters in the individual participant interviews. But interestingly the characters who did come up during the one-on-one interviews where not the ones the participants saw as heroes. This led me to explore with the participants' various factors related to understanding the films as texts.

For instance, one of most discussed characters among the participants was Lenni, the troubled protagonist of *Stupid Young Heart*. Dianne and Kim discussed how it stuck with them that Lenni's journey to white supremacist politics was pathetic and tragic. While Amy expressed being reminded of "all the stupid stuff I did as a kid" and contextualized Lenni's actions as not ideology driven, but about a lost teenager looking for experiences. Yusif shared a similar sentiment connecting Lenni's involvement with the white nationalist group to an independence group he joined in his youth shortly after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. He reported

> the film caused him to go look up what happened to his friends in that group and was relieved to find many left rather than getting even more extreme. He saw the film as showing how particularly young men join groups with extreme politics in order to have what they see as an adult identity, and such groups provided easy answers to difficult problems.

Similarly, when I returned to the literature and reflected on Rancière (2009) work, I found this quote significant

> We may no longer believe that exhibition of virtues and vices on the stage can correct human behavior. But we are still prone to believe that the reproduction in resin of a commercial idol will make us resist the empire of the 'spectacle' or that the photography of some atrocity will mobilize us against injustice (Rancière, 2009, p. 61).

Yusif captured the essence of Rancière's statement by linking the main themes of *Stupid Young Heart* and *Rhymes For Young Ghouls* to being about teenagers trying to find an identity in an environment either indifferent or hostile to them. Yusif responded that "a lot of films glorify the problem, which won't lead to finding a solution because you have to recognize it as a problem. And both those films identify problems." The glorification of problems here is that the search for identity is often framed as a type of hero's journey in which an individual succeeds or fails based on the content of her or his character. But as Yusif emphasized, in those two films, the situation that calls for dramatic assertions of identity could itself be seen as a problem that should not occur. Yusif, unknowingly in his response, reframes Fairclough's (2001) point, moving from who benefits from the problem existing, to who benefits from glorifying the problem.

This insightful comment reminded me of my interview with *Stupid Young Heart* director, Selma Vilhunen, about how movies depicting neo-Nazi groups are often popular with neo-Nazis. I also shared the following example with the participants which promoted a much deeper level of discussion among them. The example was of *American History X* (Tony Kaye, 1998), a film,

which in particular Hollywood style, depicts the redemption of a white supremacist through his friendship with a Black prison inmate and by reconnecting with a Black teacher. The film features a very didactic script, centred on a framing device of a white supremacist's younger brother's essay on rejecting his prior white supremacist beliefs. However, the film is quite popular with white supremacists, because up until the ending, they embrace how the film builds up the white supremacist Derek to show why his younger brother idolized him – muscular, violent, charismatic (Fraiman, 2018). Director Tony Kaye, who is Jewish, has disowned the film, saying "the problem with the way the movie was edited is, it lionized a neo-Nazi. It's saying: 'You can do this heinous stuff, show a movie star's smile and it's all ok'" (Higgins, 2017). Yet *American History X* is an acclaimed film, both at the time and on its 20th anniversary, when *Vice* (Schuster, 2018) and *Esquire* (Kirkland, 2018) ran articles praising its relevance. Perhaps the acclaim comes from the fact that the hard part the film depicts, Derek's re-radicalization, is presented as the easy part, as a matter only of the Hollywood cliché of getting to know someone who was previously the Other (Ahmed, 2000). The other hard part, understanding why someone becomes a white supremacist in the first place, is too melodramatic, and also is itself racist. In the film, Derek became a white supremacist after his father, a firefighter, was murdered by two Black drug dealers, framing it as a reaction to violence rather than a source. It confirms to an intended white audience that white supremacy is bad and places the onus largely upon Black people to save racists through their friendship. The movie indulges watching the problem while offering short, simple, personal causes and solutions, which tells an intended white audience that

they were neither in position to be taken in by the problem nor do they have a role to play in the solution.

James Baldwin (1955/2012) in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" explains who benefits from this problem existing:

> Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating: remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definitive thrill of virtue from the fact we are reading such a book at all… 'as long as such books are being published,' an American liberal once said to me, 'everything will be all right' (p. 19).

There is little I can add to such a perfect encapsulation of why this problem remains. Instead, the question became was there any success in subverting this feeling? Did the participants receive more than the thrill of seeing such a movie? To explore these questions with the participants it was important to looking at ways viewers resist and confirm dominate narratives is the next phase of analysis using Fairclough's method.

How do Viewers Resist?

While so far I have focused mainly on insights from the post-film discussion, I turn here to focus on the post-series interviews. The interviews were conducted anywhere from three to eight weeks after the series concluded. I see these interviews as valuable because the time span allowed for reflection and an opportunity for the participants to share their insights and personal learning on a one-on-one basis, creating less group influence and more room for individualized

interpretation. The definition of resistance in this section is not focused on discursive responses, but rather the specifically cinematic elements discussed in Chapter Three, primarily a dissensus brought about by cinempathy. Dissensus is Rancière's (2009) conception of how art creates a conflict in the viewer between what we see and the common-sense patterns of seeing. For Rancière, this is the key to politics, as politics is about creating the frames through which people make sense of the world. Because aesthetic experience is partially beyond the discursive, and has no one single, determined meaning, it can be the site of reorienting oneself to the world. Cinempathy is Sinnerbrink's (2016) definition of "synergy between affective attunement, emotional engagement, and moral evaluation" (p. 95), which describes responding to a film.

To look for signs of dissensus, I asked each participant "Are there individual scenes that have stuck with you? If so, why do you think these scenes matter to you?". A scene could be considered dissensus if it was not a point moving the plot forward or an example of the film's "meaning" in the synopsis sense, but a smaller scene that led to thinking beyond the film and towards unlearning or having a transformative impact. The standard response would be mention of a scene that had substantial plot significance. However, these were not the scenes participants reported if they chose to respond to a scene. Only two participants said they did not think about any one scene in particular, but reflected more on how the entire film series stuck with them. While there are certain specific elements of the scenes that could provide dissensus, which scenes ultimately do would vary by person. In this section, I briefly discuss minor moments of dissensus that can be associated to the group, before focusing on three specific examples from the participants.

As a group, the participants identified that scenes from *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* were the most likely to be recounted as plot points, with several participants [Amy, Bruce, Matt, Diana] mentioning the violence of the film as memorable, though in a more typical pattern of saying they felt bad for children who experienced violence in the film. Sara remarked how the violence reminded her of so much other violence in the media, pointing out that genre trappings did not help bring her closer into the story, but rather made it just another example of violence. As discussed in Chapter Three, one reason violence is not conducive to empathy is the failure for people to figure out a way to intervene in the direction action of violence, rather than pay attention to the conditions which enabled physically violence to occur. There is a social script for how to respond to individual violence, which the participants brought up by mentioning they find the violence "more than I would usually prefer to watch" (Bruce) or "I felt bad" (Matt). But this did not spark much further reflection because the social scripts do not suggest where people should go or the purpose of further reflection. Asking people to intervene in similar situations to the violence depicted is quite onerous as, once situations reach violence, the methods to intervene are more demanding. Since empathy in depictions of realistic violence are usually (but not always) in the direction of the victims, once something reaches violence, the ways to intervene are often imagined through physical action rather than preventative action. And while this is a popular fantasy, it is also not realistic.

Instead, the place people can intervene best with violence is to stop the circumstances before it escalates. The issue is that violence, because it is so consistently presented as the imagery which produces empathy and speaks to the tragedy of the situation, is the bar for

recognizing injustice (though violence is hardly sufficient to guarantee recognition, as empty empathy emphasizes). Such a bar means anything less than violence may have the plausible deniability of the situation not being bad enough to the point of needing intervention.

Rather than helping draw the participants in, the genre elements seemed to distance the participants. However, that is probably specific to this group, as only two participants identified themselves as fans of genre cinema. One was disappointed the film was not "horror" enough, as we had discussed the film beforehand as one drawing upon horror; but while the film uses the supernatural in dream sequences, it does not as part of the diegesis.

To focus on particular moments of dissensus, I have selected three examples of scenes participants singled out as being important moments to them. I describe the scenes in detail and combine both their commentary and my analysis of the scene's compositions as a text to examine what made these scenes stand out for the participants.

Example 1: Yusif – Aila's Father Returns.

There is much to admire about *Rhymes For Young Ghouls* beyond violence, as the film does a masterful job of showing how choices are constrained. Aila is able to avoid being sent to residential school through selling drugs on the reserve, a sale that takes advantage of the community's trauma. "This is what brings my people together, the art of forgetfulness", Aila intones during a scene where she dispenses marijuana laced with substances ranging from cognac to honey to formaldehyde and the scene that led to dissensus was not a violent one.

Yusif found the scene that stuck with him was not the violence, but the trepidation Aila feels when her dad, Joseph (Glen Gould), is about to return from prison after a seven-year

sentence. Yusif describes that the feeling is “not sincere excitement, but the uncertainty – who is this person? The father you know as a kid and as a teen is different.” In the scene where Aila learns her dad is coming home, she is shot in profile, with her sideways glance communicating a suspicious wariness. She takes several seconds to process the information, and then smiles. The next scene features the return of her dad, at night. Joseph exits the car in the far-left corner of the frame, which is centred on an establishing shot of their home. He walks to the middle of the frame, seeming small in the context of the house. The next shot is mid-shot of Joseph. Aila approaches from behind, also entering the frame from the left, as Joseph smokes a cigarette. We see a shot-reverse shot of close-ups of the two characters staring at each other, as if they are both trying to make sense of the other’s actual appearance versus their seven-year-old memories. Aila walks towards Joseph, but stops, moving forward again only when he also moves towards her to hug her. Aila then walks into the back of the frame as Joseph and his brother, Burner (Brandon Oakes), embrace much more enthusiastically. The characters become positioned with a gap between them, Aila occupying the left side of the frame and Joseph the right, communicating a divide. Throughout the scene, Aila’s face remains lit, allowing us to be able to always read her facial expressions, while Joseph’s alternates between light and shadow. The lighting allows for greater empathic response to Aila and keeps Joseph as a character who we need to figure out, just like Aila does.

Yusif described Aila’s situation as unique, where she is excited to see her father, but also apprehensive about meeting him now that she is no longer a child. Yusif responded that this was helpful in making him feel and then think through the ramifications of parent and child

separation in Indigenous communities, something he knew happened, but had not thought much about the emotional effects it would have on a young person's search for identity.

Example 2: Amy – Lenni's Reckless Stunt.

Amy recounted a scene in *Stupid Young Heart* where Kiira has just purchased a crib and is waiting for Lenni to help her carry it home. She calls Lenni, who is at his friend's watching mixed martial arts. Lenni picks up the phone and says, to an exasperated Kiira, it is a bad time. Lenni's friend asks him if "the missus is whining again", which leads to a fight. The fight is intercut with a visibly pregnant Kiira struggling to move the crib across a highway overpass before cutting to Lenni smirking on the balcony. The handheld camera shakily documents Lenni climbing onto the railing, his one friend exclaiming "don't kill yourself, man" and Lenni yells "I'm fucking God! Do you understand", as he holds a hanging flower basket for support and his friend holds onto his pant leg. Amy explained she figured this was about to lead to Lenni falling to his death as contrast to his hubris. She further explained

> I'm not sure why [I related to this scene], but one thing I liked was they told real stories with real outcomes – it didn't Hollywoodize things so that everything was some monumental event. I think about all the stupid stuff I did as a kid that didn't end in tragedy, and the scene reminded me that many scenes have potential to end in disaster, but don't.

By setting up what she expected to be a Hollywood moment only to have it be nothing of plot importance (but still carry a thematic point), Amy said it helped her enter the film more as feeling real and pushed her to reconsider why the scene was included beyond simple causality.

Example 3: Matt - The Police's Assumption.

Matt selected a scene in *Stupid Young Heart* when Lenni and his collaborators go to vandalize a mosque in the strip mall where they hang out. While this is close to ~~s~~electing a plot point rather than a dissensual scene, as it is the film's climax, it is the specific elements the participants selected that stand out as dissensus. In the scene, Lenni and two of his friends skulk at night into a local mall complex, lit by neon, which is the home of a local mosque. Lenni picks up a loose slate tile. His friends think they are there to graffiti the windows and react to Lenni in shock, gasping "what the hell? Are you serious?" Lenni grins wildly as he throws the tile through the window. The scene jump-cuts to his friends, giddily jumping round throwing their own pieces of slate before another jump-cut to spray painting a swastika on the remaining window. Lenni then prepares a Molotov cocktail, which he cannot ignite. At this point, two men, Mohammed (Ahmed Abdikhalif Ali) and Hassan (Abdulkadir Bashir Omar), return to the mosque and give chase to Lenni and his friends. They turn on their pursuers, kicking and punching them in the stomach. The police arrive, and while Lenni's friends flee, Lenni is still grappling with Mohammed when the police exit the vehicle. The police, who are unarmed, jump out yelling "police! Let the boy go!". While one officer holds Lenni, the other tackles Mohammed to the pavement. Mohammed exclaims "I didn't do anything; it was him" only to be told by the officer "shut up".

While the evidence confirms Mohammed's story, he has already been violently wrestled to the ground. Matt was very struck by how the police made the assumption so quickly and did not investigate before operating. Matt emphasized this occurred even though the mosque had

earlier in the film called the police because of graffiti vandalism. It is difficult to capture in writing the incredulity with which Matt related this story, as the tone emphasized how dissensual this moment was as much as his description of it.

Other Dissensuses.

Kim pointed to the scene where Lenni shaves his head. In stark contrast to Edward Norton's athletic physique and perfect shave in *American History X*, we first see Lenni's shaved head when he shows up late to an apartment viewing that Kiira is close to securing, but loses when the landlord sees Lenni – his head covered in several visible cuts and uneven patches of stubble. For Kim, this further indicated how much of Lenni's actions are pathetic posturing.

Another insight that the participants brought to light was similar to the effect described in Chapter Three of what Zavattini (1953) theorized as dailiness, the presentation of "normal" events on film. This occurred in two instances, both of which were more about engaging viewers' attention than leading to moments of dissensus. The first was Mark, who had spent a lot of time in dance studios growing up, and so the scenes of Kiira and her friends choreographing a number he described as bad, brought him back to memories of seeing similar performances. He felt even though this was happening in Finland that it connected him to the specific place and that Kiira could have been any of the girls he knew growing up.

The second was the location of *Meditation Park*. Seeing the familiar on screen led to a variety of feelings. Joe used to work in Vancouver and recognized several blocks near where he worked. Other participants were also interested in locating where in the city the story was taking place, which in turn led them to reflect on what it means that such a story was going on there.

Section Summary

To this point the participants' reactions and reading of the films for reasons that influenced their individual responses to resisting to further explore the films' messages beyond the dominant narrative has been discussed. However, there were elements within the various participant responses that suggested they were questioning their interpretation of the films. This same questioning was also present in their reflections on unlearning, film literacy, and the learning environment. I found this curious and it gave me cause to further explore the connections between these findings. The next section serves to explore, analyse and critical reflect these connections as a way to summarize the findings.

Empathy

During the interviews, I asked the participants specific questions relating to more than their individual viewing experience and the comfort level with interrupting film because it was evident during the post-film discussions that there was more at play in how the participants were drawing on the films to shed light on solving problems, such as Otherness, that influenced their responses and meaning making contributions.

Through the interview process I located two key ways viewing and discussing the films stimulated the participants and provide an affective experience. The first is that it both helped to conceptualize change as a matter of doing things differently rather than trying to play on feel-bad emotions to lead to the liberal politics of charity. The second was that it helped participants realize that there is a much larger world of media and a way to read it available than the limited perspectives they had encountered.

As discussed in Chapter Four, several of the key concerns around empathy as delivering a false claim of knowing exactly what another is experiencing did not come up. While a couple participants demonstrated judgement of certain secondary characters for not using their privilege sufficiently, no participant ever explained what they would do in another person's situation. There were also no self-congratulatory responses, where a participant indicated they felt they were now a better person for merely having seen the film. Participants avoided the mode of empathy as described in Chapter Two where they projected themselves into what they would do as a character. There were no instances of relating a character's situation to a deeper understanding of the self, which Chabot Davis (2014) argued is a common way in which white readers have appropriated the pain of others, as a form of empathizing with a character only to the extent they can recognize a piece of themselves in that character. None of the films led a participant to tears or any strong displays of emotions, which Brecht (1964) was suspicious of and just led audiences to be self-congratulation for having feelings, but providing no impetus to act on them. Finally, there was no discussion that hinted at the empathy-altruism hypothesis. Some of this may be due to the choice of film. As discussed above, the films show characters who are constrained by circumstances, but not as victims. This led to some participants reading them as characters simply needing to be more agentic. But by not presenting films that seek to induce pity, it also seemed to disrupt the idea of saving.

In regard to the direction of action, I asked, "how has viewing and discussing the films re-contextualized your engagement with news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues?" Two participants, Bruce and Diane, answered that they didn't think there

was a change. Four participants, Yusif, Matt, Mark, and Joe, discussed the film series as adding onto their existing approaches. Amy and Sara said they felt less complacent and mentioned feeling empowered to challenge their extended family about racism. Kim said that the series led her to "think more about what I do, to be more conscientious". This question could be considered a leading one, that something should have changed, which was not an expectation of the film series. It is possible the answers were attempts to describe changes only to placate the question. But the fact that many of the participants did not provide answers suggesting substantial transformation suggests a trend toward answering reflectively and less toward social desirability.

What I see as important is the potential for a learning environment that facilitates or that helps viewers imagine what change could look like through the use of film and film literacy. This potentiality was a consistent finding with the participants as demonstrated by their pattern of emotional reaction and analysis of the films. I am encouraged that the answers revolved around a change in behaviour, of how to interact with the people they already encounter on a daily basis. And not about doing more, but about doing differently. And while the examples the participants shared could be considered minor actions, such as Amy reflecting about helping to educate her Dad at family dinner, or Sara demonstrating she was starting to reframe how she would teach differently, or Jane now thinking twice about "going along to get alone" in her administrative roles, they are significant when taking into consideration that the film series occurred over a short period of time and that authentic transformative learning takes time as described by Baumgartner (2001). And more significantly is the new learning or the unexpected outcome of this research that surfaced indicating that the participants, as a result of film viewing,

now want to learn more about how to access film and question how access to film is controlled. This alone has the potential to bring about change.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the participants and identified four central themes the emerged from the participants' post-film discussions and post-series interviews. Quotes and stories from the participants were shared. This chapter also included insights gained from sharing aspects of film analysis with the participants to further expand their meaning making process and to explore their suggestions for new learning. It clarified how the participants realized they had a limited perception of what a film could be. By viewing these films, the participants became aware of gaps in their knowledge and how films could be starting points for enlarged understanding of a range of new viewpoints, rather than ending points for emotional consumption and self-congratulatory fulfilment. It introduced an unexpected finding with regard to media use and access to film that stimulated additional research in order to be responsive to the participants. And it concludes with an overview of the participants' responses to elements related to empathy.

The next chapter focuses on the unexpected outcome that developed because of consistent comments from participants about how they believed they had expansive viewing options, but as a result of the film series now realized they were only seeing a fragment of what was actually available. And while an unexpected finding, upon analysis of their comments, I realized the new technology of personalized recommendations has a significant effect on

learning through film, both in terms of physical access and in ways audiences are cultivated to see.

Chapter 6: Algorithms, Film, and Empathy

I realized after my discussions with the participants that almost all of them were finding their media through Netflix, particularly through Netflix' recommendation algorithm. Both Amy and Sara were confident if they just looked harder in Netflix's catalogue, they could find more and better material. I initially saw the participants' reliance on Netflix as a minor finding, but reflecting on it, I realized it has major significance for understanding how viewers use film for informal learning. While I was reviewing the participants' responses in the summer of 2020, I saw a news story that coincided with what I was thinking about, and helped to clarify a major issue regarding Netflix dependency. In the same week when people across the United States and Canada took to the streets to support Black Lives Matter movements after police killed George Floyd in Minneapolis, the most viewed movie on Netflix was *The Help* (Tate Taylor, 2011) (Roberts, 2020). *The Help* is a filmic example of Baldwin's (1955) definition of the protest novel. In *The Help*, white college student Skeeter (Emma Stone) writes an anonymous book based on discussions with two Black maids, Aibileen (Viola Davis) and Minny (Octavia Spencer) who work in her Jackson, Mississippi neighbourhood in order to "expose" racism. Predictably, the film was nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards and Octavia Spencer won the Best Supporting Actress award. Jessica Chastain and Viola Davis also received acting nominations for their performances. The film's popularity led the Association of Black Women Historians (Jones et al., 2011) to release an "Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*," outlining how the film downplays the verbal, physical, and sexual abuse Black domestic workers faced and how the film removes Black agency from the Civil Rights struggle. Davis said in 2018

she regrets the film (Murphy, 2018) and two years later when it was trending on Netflix, co-star Bryce Dallas Howard (2020) wrote on Instagram "'The Help' is a fictional story told through the perspective of a white character and was created by predominantly white storytellers. We can all go further", before listing a series of recommended alternatives.

To be generous to the many viewers, it seems that people were turning to film as a way to learn about anti-racism and they simply ended up with a bad example. Twitter users were quick to jump on why *The Help* was a bad choice (Roberts, 2020) and pointed to alternatives, several of which were already on Netflix, but because they lacked white Hollywood stars or a feel-good narrative or a closed ending, they were judged more niche than *The Help* and so not as widely recommended. Common tags in Netflix's "Black Lives Matter" collection, launched a week after *The Help* was trending (Spangler, 2020) include "dark", "gritty", "controversial", or "provocative". In contrast, *The Help* is tagged "heartfelt" and "emotional". The comparison of these words in and of itself is telling, as if difficult issues have to be filtered through comforting lenses to reach (white) audiences.

A recommendation algorithm that constantly caters to the user's existing tastes fails to decentre the viewer. Films more conducive to empathy centre the Other rather than the experience of the presumed privilege viewer. Gates (2020) in her editorial "The Problem With 'Anti-Racist' Movie Lists" addressed one problem with the films that are constantly recommended as anti-racism education tools. She writes "such lists reduce Black art to a hastily constructed manual to understanding oppression, always with white people as the implied audience" (para. 5). She outlined that there is a need for Black film to go beyond simplistic

education on issues and to recognize the complex humanity of Black lives (para. 8). She points to filmmakers like Kathleen Collins, Charles Burnett, and Horace Jenkins, whose work in the 1980s has largely disappeared from public access. Gates wrote "How many more Black films languish on the verge of disappearance, films that may not have been deemed 'important' because they cared more to focus on the lovely intricacies of Black life rather than delivering Black pain for white consumption?" (para. 13). The films of Collins, Burnett, and Jenkins present a sense of dailiness missing in most of the frequently recommended films that "delivering Black pain for white consumption". The later films recall Hartman's (1997) argument that anti-racist empathy has too often been about white people confirming the horror of pain suffered by Black people, but not focusing on full personhood of the body suffering the pain. Anti-racist movie lists operate on the idea the viewer simply does not know, and by learning new facts will develop new relations to the world. Those lists feature films that avoid the challenge of finding a way to know differently.

Access to Films

When I asked participants "has discussing and participating in the film series led you to seek out more intercultural media than you would have before viewing the films?", I received a consistent answer (from eight of ten participants, Amy, Bruce, Diane, Sara, Matt, Kim, Jane, and Joe). Their answer was the series made them realize how narrow their viewing habits actually were. They also all mentioned Netflix as their primary, and sometimes only, source of finding new films. While I was aware that my findings would discuss film selection and how a knowledge of what films are in the archive is a valuable tool, talking with the participants made

me aware there is a significant lack of general knowledge around the breadth of available films. But more than just lack of knowledge, their responses illustrated, both to them in their own reflections, and to me, how engagement with technology, which promises to expand our horizons, is actually foreclosing discovery.

The participants of this research are not unique in their usage of Netflix. In Telefilm Canada's latest Audience Report (2017), 64% of Canadians reported watching movies and television shows on Netflix, as opposed to only 33% of Canadians who watch films on DVD or Blu-ray disc (though this number could overlap). Netflix usage far exceeded other streaming options like Crave (6%), Amazon Prime (3%), and CBC on Demand (3%) (p. 34). Netflix Vice President of Product Innovation, Todd Yellin, claimed 80% of subscribers watch content based on algorithmic recommendations rather than through random browsing (Chhabra, 2017). Such usage has a substantial impact on film as an informal learning device. Interestingly, the participants in their discussion of Netflix used it as a shorthand for the totality of what is available to watch. As Lobato (2019) emphasized "Netflix is one of the few media brands of the internet era to penetrate so deeply… into broader popular consciousness that it has become a verb" (p. 13). Netflix is joining other brands like Kleenex and Band-Aid in becoming the word for any streaming service. And streaming is for many people, like the participants, the only way they can watch films, leading Netflix to be the verbal stand-in for watching anything. Bruce mentioned that he no longer owned a DVD player, joining the 67% of Canadians who do not watch movies on disc (Telefilm, 2017).

Netflix is designed to make it difficult to parse how much is actually available on the service, promising more than it can deliver. While you can view an alphabetical listing, the default option is a home-screen with multiple scrolling bands, each containing 30 titles. The same title can appear on multiple bands. There are the standard bands, like “Popular on Netflix” and “Trending”, and bands on genres like “Documentary” and “TV Drama”. There are also personalized bands, with thousands of possible combinations. Currently, my Netflix account recommends to me “Food for Hungry Brains” and “Dark Movies”, apparently based on my prior viewing tastes. By scrolling through this home page, it is difficult to determine exactly how many films are on Netflix. Several participants believed finding films was simply a matter of scrolling further than they usually do. For example, Amy said watching the films during the study made her more “open to trying new things on Netflix”. Bruce related that he would look in the foreign section in the future. Kim said “Netflix is where I get stuff because I don’t know where else to look”. All were surprised when I mentioned the limits of Netflix’s catalogue, as they assumed it was much deeper and would have most of the films I discussed. Some of the perception of Netflix’s depth was attributed to articles like “Netflix secret codes: How to access hidden films and TV shows” (Stolworthy, 2020). But these are not hidden films or TV shows, just hidden categories containing content that can be found in other categories. This is something the participants had never considered. Jane, for example, said that she hears so much about Netflix, she just assumed that everything must be there.

Mark’s explanation of how he finds films matched the older, pre-algorithmic model of following “tastemakers”, in this case listening to podcasts and reading interviews and reviews

featuring artists and critics he finds interesting and creating a list of films he would like to see. Mark currently has a list of things to watch that is over 500 titles, and finds films through used DVD online sellers, new disc releases, YouTube uploads, and streaming. Mark was the only participant to mention putting effort into finding where a particular title can be seen. However, he also explained he watches a lot of Netflix because it required the least amount of effort and because so many people have Netflix, its new releases are often among the most talked about shows. The tastemaker model is also shrinking because taste makers are drawing from the same small pool.

While all participants who mentioned Netflix realized it was limited in some fashion, they also were largely satisfied with the service, or at least with subscribing to two or three different services. Kim mentioned Netflix as being the easiest place to look for shows. Jane reflected that she usually watched Netflix at night, mainly because other people seem happy with its offerings and so kept trying new things there. Jane also made the key point that the more you watch on Netflix, the better value it becomes, so there is incentive to try to maximize the service over other options.

Amy said the film series strongly affected her because:

> it made me realize what a narrow line we were in with what we were watching. We watch CNN, CBC, *The Office*, and *Modern Family*. My big takeaway is we need to expose ourselves to more. It felt like cable and the internet would push our walls further, but now it's just what Netflix suggests to you.

Yet Amy remained hopeful of Netflix, suggesting she had to simply look deeper than look elsewhere. The participants use patterns reflective of early communication theorist Wilbur Schram's (1954) "fraction of selection", the expectation of reward divided by the amount of effort required to achieve it determined the frequency of an activity. Using Netflix to find something enjoyable to watch is easy, and Netflix is interesting enough not to encourage the greater effort needed for finding potentially more rewarding films. The Netflix algorithm has one goal, to keep users watching Netflix. CEO Reed Hastings semi-joked that "You get a show or a movie you're really dying to watch, and you end up staying up late at night, so we actually compete with sleep. And we're winning!" (Raphael, 2017, para 11).

The participants only had one main criticism of Netflix. First, Sara mentioned that on Netflix she feels the company is mainly recommending their new, original shows rather than licenced content. Similarly, Amy reported "Crave, Netflix, and [Amazon] Prime all push their new branded shows."

The reliance upon a channel as the summation of entertainment brings up a second issue affecting how viewers' informal learning through media is constrained, through the mechanisms that go into producing films. Popular press has reported excitedly about how Netflix content caters to audience interests, as if their approach is unique because it is consumer focused. Journalist Alexis C. Madrigal's (2014) profile of Netflix's coding system proclaimed, "the data can't tell them *how* to make a TV show, but it can tell them *what* they should be making". Film and television become not vehicles through which to experience someone else's artistic expression, but a product that is supposed to fulfill viewers' already existing desires.

The idea that film will be completely subsumed under the interests of capitalism is nearly as old as the medium itself (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944), and so far the medium as an art survives and will likely survive the belief that data can tell filmmakers how to make films.

A large driver of interest in data for filmmaking is that films are a significant investment as an art form. Technology is deployed to mitigate risk. Increasingly, investors are turning to analytics to analyze if a film would be a good investment (Vincent, 2019; Wilkinson, 2020). Algorithms are conservative, able only to look at what did and did not work in the past. Art can not be conservative to be effective, to produce a dissensus.

> Director Martin Scorsese (2020) wrote in the New York Times that modern films are: market-researched, audience-tested, vetted, modified, revetted and remodified until they're ready for consumption. Another way of putting it would be that they are everything that the films of Paul Thomas Anderson or Claire Denis or Spike Lee or Ari Aster or Kathryn Bigelow or Wes Anderson are not. When I watch a movie by any of those filmmakers, I know I'm going to see something absolutely new and be taken to unexpected and maybe even unnameable areas of experience. My sense of what is possible in telling stories with moving images and sounds is going to be expanded (para. 12-13).

It is important that Netflix's users know this, and in the same way educational studies encouraged critical reflection on television in the past, there is also a need for critical reflection on the algorithmic entertainment culture that determines an increasingly larger percentage of how people encounter the world on screen.

The reliance upon algorithmic understandings of what should be made is concerning given the above examples of how the algorithm does not actually know what users watch and makes inferences based on patterns the viewer may not be focused on. Recommendation systems encourage a passivity. Five participants discussed that they had paid more attention to the discussion around film award season after participating in the research film series, particularly the ongoing discussion about diversity and representation. These discussions took places through communication channels such as social media, and a close analysis illustrated what the research participants were experiencing when now aware there was more to film viewing than simple entertainment. For example, the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite was created by inclusion consultant April Reign in 2015 to emphasize how six of the seven Best Picture nominations focused on white characters, four of five director nominees were white and all were men, and all 20 acting nominations were white actors. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, whose members vote on the awards, responded to criticism by announcing "the academy takes historic action to increase diversity" in January 2016, saying they would double the number of "women and diverse members of the Academy by 2020" (para. 1). Yet the Academy's diversity efforts are not apparent. Reign noted the membership has gone from "92% white and 75% male" to "84% white and 68% male" (para. 1), which is indeed doubling the number of non-white members, but because the original number was so low, it is still unrepresentative. #OscarsSoWhite resurged in 2020, given that eight of the nine Best Picture films focused on white characters, four of five director nominees were white and all were men, and the only person of colour nominated for an acting award was Cynthia Erivo, who played Harriet Tubman.

Reign discussed “Since I started #OscarsSoWhite, the pushback has often been, “Well, there just weren’t enough diverse films to nominate.” But that clearly was not the case in 2019” (2020, para. 2), pointing to films including *The Farewell* (Lulu Wang, 2019) and *Us* (Jordan Peele, 2019). Almost all “surprise” omissions were films with racialized stars or directors, such as *Dolemite is My Name* (Craig Brewer, 2019), and *Hustlers* (Lorene Scarafia, 2019) (Youngs, 2020).

Yet in 2020 the Oscars also awarded the Best Picture for the first time to a film from outside the USA or Britain, as South Korean film *Parasite* (Bong Joon-Ho, 2019) won. Bong had identified that “The Oscars are not an international film festival. They’re very local” (Jung, 2019), which emphasizes that it is not that *Parasite* is the first international film to be worthy, but rather just the first to finally receive recognition. Part of the reason for this may be that Bong Joon-Ho is a transnational director, his prior films being primarily in English with Hollywood actors. *Parasite* earlier won the 2019 Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival, arguably the most prestigious international film award.

The results of the Oscars do little for a film’s historical reception and have been well documented as the product of much insider lobbying (Wilkinson, 2019). But they matter in the moment because they express what Hollywood in the moment deems as “important”, and given for many North Americans, Hollywood is synonymous with movies as a whole, this carries some weight. It can do damage, as Joe mentioned watching several Best Picture winners in the past and thinking, if this is the best movies are, then maybe there are not many good movies. But importantly, it is an argument about what matters. When *Crash* won the Best Picture in 2005, it

spurred a valuable public discussion about how it was not anti-racist, but rather indicative of the limits of contemporary liberal discourse on racism— limits on individual attitudes and acts rather than on systemic structures. Now *Crash* routinely tops polls of the worst Best Picture winner ever (Lodge, 2018) and was a comparison for why the "feel-good" Best Picture winner *Green Book* was a similarly ill-advised film (Chang, 2019).

In these debates over films, there is audience agency that engages with what the films represent, why their emotional structures appeal to some viewers, and how to imagine better films. It also means there are people who know more about a film before watching than if they had just been recommended it on Netflix. While pre-knowledge could dissuade people from watching some great films, at least they would know that the film exists and would have the knowledge to make informed viewing choices.

How Netflix Changed How Viewer's Watch

The last decade has seen a substantial shift in how viewers watch television and film. I am grouping the two together partly because of similar form, but also because of how increasingly the line between the two is blurred, based on how viewers access both through the same on-demand platforms. The television device has also transformed. No longer is it a small box with a square aspect ratio, with content delivered at a set time in low resolution. Now the television features a more cinematic rectangular screen, displaying digital images in high definition, and is able to be hooked up to a variety of peripherals like DVD players and digital recording devices, which allow the viewer more choice in what to watch. Newman & Levine (2012) argue that the technological convergence of the television coincided with a renewed

status for television shows. Cable subscriptions and costly top-line equipment meant television was increasingly presented as a "legitimized" art form. Cable networks began to invest more in series, using a higher budget to emphasize their film-like qualities, such as well-known actors, auteur show runners, and content not restricted by networks' standards and practices of self-censorship.

In the past, television series consisted of serialized episodes available on broadcast television, airing at specific times, whereas movies were screened in theatres. Beginning in the late 1970s, a variety of video storage formats for home viewing were introduced to consumers, though they were slow to catch up in aspect ratio and image quality as compared to projected film. Beginning in the late 1990s, the majority of television series also became available on DVD discs, giving control to viewers over when to watch certain episodes. Newman & Levine (2012) argued that it also changed the value of television, where the series was no longer offered free or at a low rate to attract audiences which could be sold to advertisers, but that the series itself could be directly sold to audiences. The limitation was that every film and television season had to be purchased separately (or rented from the selection at a local video rental location).

Kelly (2020) outlined that for a brief period of time in the early 2000s, television was the least ephemeral it had ever been, as physical media allowed for an archive diffused across multiple commercial, library, and personal collections. DVDs, even to a greater extent than the prior format of VHS, because it presented films in their original aspect ratio, allowed a similar archiving of films. While Kelly (2020) cautioned that there was a gatekeeping aspect as to what

was deemed worthy of preservation on physical media, the majority of films received a DVD release (though primarily as a commercial consideration).

Since the peak Kelly described, the viewing economy in North America has shifted from purchasing of physical objects (or even digital copies) to a subscription economy, where for a monthly price of around $10, you receive the ability to watch any movie or show on that service at any time. In exchange for convenience, the subscriber loses out on dependability. Unless something physically damages the disc, I can watch my Blu-ray copy of *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954) now, or next January, or in ten years. With a subscription service, I have no guarantees. I can find out what is leaving in the next months (Daley, 2020), but that is the extent to which I can be sure something will be available. While a DVD may go out of print because it does not sell sufficiently, the existing DVDs still exist. The library still has a copy. When a title is removed from streaming due to lack of interest, it is gone.

Netflix provides an illusion of an archive, with the library size fluctuating constantly. For example, in April 2019, Netflix in Canada had 5, 692 titles available to view (Stoll, 2020), a number more significant than all but the most dedicated and wealthy home viewer's collection (though the home viewer is interested in all, or most, titles they own). However, that is a much smaller choice of selection than Netflix's disc rental service, which offered over 100,000 titles on DVD (Monahan & Griggs, 2019). Additionally, Netflix's movie collection is shrinking annually (Clark, 2018). In 2016, Netflix's Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos reported that viewer data from Netflix found that films were not actually a big draw to the service, with two thirds of viewers focusing on watching TV (McAlone, 2016). This has led Netflix to become more

focused on original content, primarily television, but also film, operating more like a distributor, which bids against other distributors for films, than an archive (Luckerson, 2016). Netflix spends over $17 billion on acquiring new content annually, with about 85% spent on developing original content (Chacksfield, 2018), that does not require sharing income with licensees. Typical of digital consumerism, Sarandos framed the shift away from films as an audience choice, suggesting that even attempts to increase the quality and quantity of films made little difference (McAlone, 2016). However, it means that while individualization is promoted, this individualization is drawn from an increasingly smaller pool of standardized content, preferably content Netflix itself produces. Additionally, Netflix approaches maintaining subscribers not by promising a permanent archive, but by promises of continual, new exciting content.

Because no one giant streaming company is interested in amassing a film archive, there are many streaming options, each with a limited set of films. There are currently 26 streaming services in Canada. For example, Disney+ offers much of the Disney Studios catalogue and Crave has a deal to include content from Warner Brothers in Canada. The Criterion Channel ($10.99 per month) has the largest selection of critically and academically acclaimed classic and/or international films, around 2000 options. However, it still operates on a scarcity model, where films are removed from the service on a monthly basis to encourage people to watch content before it is gone. Kanopy is a service available through university and public libraries, with up to 30,000 titles and has been promoted in media with stories like “How to Stream Thousands of Free Movies Using Your Library Card” (Castillo, 2017). While Kanopy is free to the user, it uses a “patron-driven acquisition” format, where more than three views of any title

leads to the library being charged a yearly fee of approximately $150 per title (Cagle, 2019). Some libraries have dropped Kanopy altogether because of escalating costs while others restrict access. For example, McGill's library had over 1500 titles trigger a yearly fee in 2018 and so removed all titles they had not already paid for from being available to McGill students and faculty. The library encouraged students and faculty to use their DVD collection instead (McGill Library, 2018). The proliferation of streaming options has complicated streaming as an archive, with titles so dispersed over options a dedicated viewer would need subscriptions to multiple services, who even then may only have the title for a limited time.

The home screen lists are generated by Netflix's recommender algorithm, a sequence of guidelines that allow for generated recommendations based on user viewing and rating history, collaborative filtering based upon users with similar Netflix viewing and rating histories, and metadata coding, where each film and show is assigned a series of tags. The precise nature of the algorithm is proprietary. Netflix data scientists argue its value to the company is in the range of $1 billion per year, citing the reduction in monthly subscriber churn since its implementation (Gomez Uribe & Hunt, 2015), which suggests that presenting the catalogue in a more personalized way is actually preferred by many users. Netlix has over 76,000 internal combinations to describe their content (Madrigal, 2014). Netflix Vice President of Product Innovation, Todd Yellin developed this system, using coders to watch their content and rate the films based on traditional genres, but also character's jobs, if an ending is happy, sad, or ambiguous, and on a five-point scale, how "socially acceptable" (though it is not clear how this is defined) is the lead character (Madrigal, 2014). From these combinations of tags, the algorithm

produces categories like “feel good” or “dark”. The coding formula works out to “Region + Adjectives + Noun Genre + Based On... + Set In... + From the... + About... + For Age X to Y” (Madrigal, 2014, para. 29) though it is limited to 50 characters for display reasons. Madrigal (2014) suggested the strength of Netflix’s system is that it does not just suggest what you will like, but it will tell you why.

This “why” relies upon a lot of assumptions. As an example of the algorithm’s limitation, I looked through the films recommended to me such as “Dark”, Netflix included everything from indie legend Kelly Reichardt’s quiet, reflective drama C*ertain Women* to superhero film *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005) to absurdist political comedy *The Death of Stalin* (Armando Iannuci, 2017). I can understand why these may be “dark”, but they are all dark in different ways. *Certain Women* is an empathetic film about people searching for connection, but failing to find it. The film ends without resolution for its characters, which may be why it is categorized as dark. *Batman Begins* is a dark movie in the sense it emphasizes a superhero fighting corruption in a city more similar to one found in a crime film than a fantasy. But it is a Hollywood blockbuster, where the appearance of realism is meant as a set for action rather than a consideration of reality. *The Death of Stalin* is a dark comedy, finding comedy in assassinations, threats of violence, and political coups, which depicts a version of the Soviet Union inhabited by caricatures vying for power. The “dark” categorization is conceptually useful only in indicating the films that do not have typical happy endings.

Figuring out “taste” is a complex endeavour. Returning to Einfühlung and the work of theorist Theodor Lipps, he demonstrated this with his belief “aesthetics is either psychological

aesthetics or a collection of declarations of some individual who possesses a significantly loud voice to proclaim his private predilections or his dependence on fashion" (Koss, 2006, p. 144) and subsequent results suggested it was indeed the latter. Bourdieu (1984) theorized taste in cultural products as being the result of education in a particular class and social milieu. The very assumption that someone should have a defined taste follows a governmentality logic. Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality refers to practices that shape how subjects learn to govern themselves. Rouvroy (2013) describes algorithimic governmentality, which builds "supra-individual models of behaviours or profiles without ever involving the individual, and without ever asking them to themselves describe what they are or what they could become" (p. 173). There are no actual individuals in personalization through algorithms. As Cheney-Lippold (2017) describes, algorithms are built based on assumption about who we are based on the data we input. Users are recommended based entirely on past habits, making new discovery difficult. Given that someone may not know where to begin, viewers can enter a cycle where they are receiving media they will watch, but it may not actually be reflective of their interests because there is not a fit in the limited library or they did not identify the fit early in the profile building process. Arnold (2014) describes this process as moving from audience produced recommendations to "audience identity as produced through data" (p. 50). In turn, Netflix recommends content that does not challenge the viewer, but rather re-affirms that they are the person Netflix believes them to be.

Alexander (2016) points out that this means Netflix is unlikely to recommend films that challenge our habits. Netflix personalization engineers Xavier Amatriain and Justin Basilico

even warned that predicted ratings can lead to the recommender recommending "items that are too niche or unfamiliar" (2012, para. 5). Sarah Arnold (2016) troubled, Netflix's algorithm participates in marginalizing certain identities and recommending films in those categories primarily to people who have already shown an interest in them. Arnold gives the example that watching the crime dramas *The Bridge* (Meredith Stiehm & Elwood Reid, 2013-2014), *Top of the Lake* (Jane Campion & Garth Davis, 2013), and *The Good Wife* (Robert King & Michelle King, 2009-2016) provides the algorithm featuring the common pattern of women protagonists and assumes the viewer is choosing them because of gender. Arnold (2016) argued this results in not only reductive demographic categories, but also because categories do not include white, male, or heterosexual, but do include Black, female, and gay, then some identities remain normative in entertainment and others are shown as a particular interest (or lack of interest). The coded identities illustrate Noble's (2018) analysis of algorithms as being not neutral or objective, but created by people, who, as she demonstrated, can install racist and sexist logics within the formulas. Netfix's rankings have taken a political art form and attempted to define it based on the common-sense categories of dominant culture, which entrenches present ideologies as mathematical outcomes.

Does Netflix Have Potential for Empathy?

Netflix is a global brand, available in nearly every country. As Netflix increasingly becomes a producer, it has a varying degree of commitment to localized and transnational content. Netflix, which has a different catalogue by nation, due to distribution rights deals, offers

about 15-20% local content with the rest being Hollywood or other international. Lobato's (2019) analysis suggests Netflix's definition of "local" is primarily language based.

In theory, such offerings could be great for spreading recognition. In practice, however, Williams' 1974 prediction that in a world-wide television service, "the national or local components in their services would be matters merely of consent and publicity: tokenism" (p. 48) has largely come to pass.

Netflix is in constant battles with national regulations over content quotas. Many countries require traditional TV providers to offer a percentage of local content. Netflix argues it is exempt from such requirements because it is an "over-the-top" service, meaning it is distributed through the internet and falls under internet content regulations instead of broadcast regulations. In 2018, the European Union (EU) passed a law mandating 30% of streaming catalogues be content made in the EU. In Netflix's 2018 Q3 shareholder report, they complained about such regulation, writing "quotas, regardless of market size, can negatively impact both the customer experience and creativity" (Netflix Investors, 2018, p. 5). Netflix has also defended their primarily American catalogue as simply reflecting audience taste, noting that local content is not as popular (Lobato, 2019). In Canada, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has battled Netflix for years to engage in supporting Canadian content. Netflix argues that the CRTC's request to include a quota of Canadian content is "anti-consumer" because it is forcing content viewers "would not watch" (Glasner, 2020, para. 4). Netflix also refuses to pay into the Canada Media Fund to provide funding for Canadian filmmakers (Glasner, 2020). The language of consumer choice is deployed to justify not

expanding their content pool, which raises questions about how can consumers know they want something that does not yet exist?

The upside is that Netflix does create potential for shared community. Katz & Wedell wrote in a 1977 UNESCO report on "perhaps conflict among nations will be reduced if they find common ground in *Peyton Place*. Perhaps the audiences everywhere do really prefer *Bonanza* to locally made cultural products?" (p. 47). While events since 1977 certainly suggest media viewing is not sufficient, the value of common ground cannot be ruled out. However, the fact everyone has to have common ground with the United States rather than finding common ground in media from a variety of places does not suggest much for envisioning a different future.

Netflix is not aiming for shared community in their explicit focus on personalization, but because of their limited offerings, in practice they do create a common set of experiences. While there is no interactive element of Netflix, it was also unnecessary given how often Netflix is discussed on Twitter and Facebook. Examining how Netflix's content, which is simultaneously available to the majority of the world, fosters cross-culture understanding, as well as analysis of what this understanding is centred upon, would be a valuable future research direction.

The Selective Tradition

Part of Netflix's investment strategy is to buy and distribute films from international award-winning filmmakers, including Alfonso Cuaron, Bong Joon-Ho, the Coen Brothers, and Martin Scorsese. While bringing these films to the platform is a positive, it is more a way to build Netflix's brand through existing cultural capital rather than create new cultural capital. Lulu Wang, the director of *The Farewell* (2019), rejected an offer from Netflix because "when

you're an established filmmaker, you are a brand that they want to partner with to help build their brand. But with newer filmmakers, newer voices, you don't have a brand, you need to build that brand" (Spellberg, 2020, para. 4.) and the only brand Netflix is interested in is its own.

The result is that much of what is not owned by Netflix is being left behind. Netflix refuses to comment specifically on their lack of classic film, but likely Netflix views the cost of the rights will not add a substantial number of subscribers. While concerns about people discovering "the classics" are not new, the difference is this time the technology promised an archive which isn't met. Critic Emily VanDerWerff (2016) wrote "It's never been easier to see classic movies — but it's never been harder to become obsessed with them" (para 1). She argued there were three ways people became film fans – 1) introduced through a family member or friend, 2) self-guided research, or 3) by the accident of renting a random movie at the video rental store or watching an old movie on TV due to the cheap rights to air it. VanDerWerff emphasized that that third avenue is now essentially gone. While video rental stores did prioritize new releases by giving them prime wall space, the older films were still present. With Netflix, it is like only the "new release" wall. Users assume there is an archive that they just have not looked for, but in reality there is not an archive at all.

Encountering movies from the past is important for two reasons. One is that a movie can slip away fairly quickly. While both *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Meditation Park* are streaming on CBC Gem, *Stupid Young Heart* would be impossible to watch on streaming. It played at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2018. There it received only four mainstream English press reviews, which were mixed. Many films, which have later been critically re-

evaluated, received middling reviews and this should not cause a film to disappear from being accessible. It then played 15 additional film festivals. While it was Finland's submission to the Academy Awards for Best International Film, it won no major awards. Its only DVD release was in Finland. The above circumstances make it unlikely to appear on North American streaming services.

I am an Associate Editor for Seventh Row, a film website dedicated to promoting films that fall under the radar during festivals. Site founder Alex Heeney noticed many films at festivals, particularly films directed by women early in their careers, tended to not receive much critical attention. One of the site's main focuses has been to work at correcting this, which is how I learned about both *Stupid Young Heart* and *Meditation Park*.

The second reason of importance is through what Williams (1961) described as the "selective tradition," one of three ways culture can be studied. The first was the lived culture of a particular period, which only those who live it can know. The second was the recorded culture of a period, which encompassed everything preserved. The third was the selective tradition, where subsequent periods produce a tradition. Williams' example is that when someone is an expert on the nineteenth century novel, they have read hundreds of examples, but no one "has read, or could have read, all its examples" (p. 71). This was true of the reader in the nineteenth century as well, but everyone living in the period better understood the context and had different constraints of selection. The selective tradition begins in the period itself, where certain works become seen as "the best and most relevant" (p. 71). Then, working with the works documented, some are discarded upon re-evaluation and others re-interpreted. Williams outlined that this creates, on

one level, a historical record of general culture, on another, of a particular society, but also-"a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture" (p. 72). "The traditional culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its contemporary system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation" (p. 73).

Williams writes, "the selective tradition is of vital importance for it is often true that some change in this tradition – establishing new lines with the past, breaking or redrawing existing lines – is a radical kind of contemporary change" (p. 74). Analysis of historical work is "to make the interpretation conscious, by showing historical alternatives to relate the interpretation to the particular contemporary values on which it rests; and, by exploring the real patterns of the work, confront us with the real nature of the choices we are making" (p. 74). Williams argues that some work from the past is kept alive because it is foundational for work that came after it. However, other work is used to prop up certain ideas about the past needed to justify the present.

The selective tradition is now, at the very least, heavily influenced by algorithmic recommendation rather than active debate. As Williams emphasizes, part of the importance of preserving historical work is to understand how the past approached problems. Much of the work of challenging dominant culture happens on the fringes of a period's artistic sphere. Not only do these works show the history of how structures of oppression became normalized, but there is also a record of resistance. By ignoring the films already made by racialized people, by women, and by LGBTQ+ people, the limited progress of the present moment can seem more impactful

rather than merely attempts to, like universities in the last chapter, incorporate some new symbols into existing power structures.

Recommendation for a Film Scholar's Role

While new technology promised the democratization of film culture, making everything available, the result is that there has never been a more important time for conscientious archive collection and preservation, secured beyond the potential disappearances due to rights, licensing deals, and a film simply not being "popular" enough. While it was presumptuous of me to select both the themes and films for the group rather than asking them what they were interested in learning about, my knowledge of what films exist is valuable. What film scholars may be able to borrow from Netflix is their coding system. Creating a database of film titles linked to critical and sociological theories would be a helpful resource in helping instructors and learners find what they are looking for when engaging films from a perspective of interconnection empathy and knowledge rather than appeal to their entertainment instincts.

Conclusion

Sarandos explained "if we pick the shows right and we invest heavily in the right kind of content, we'll make the viewers' dreams come true. We connect people to media in a way filmed entertainment has lost to video games and the web" (Curtin, Holt, & Sanson, 2014, p. 135). This chapter has illustrated the dangers of Netflix's use of empathy as a buzzword. Netflix is interested in empathy, but only as a way to understand consumers, targeted at Others because of a pre-determined goal and is not conducive to truly broadening perspective. The only concern Netflix has is to better understand their customers in order to sell them content. Such deployment

of empathy becomes a barrier to experiencing others. It as also demonstrated the issue with Netflix is not a behaviourist argument that the algorithm could be recommending better films. The issue with algorithmic recommendation is epistemological.

Algorithmic personalization cannot achieve empathy. As noted in Chapter Two, Krznaric (2014) called the 20th century's self-help obsession "the age of introspection", "the idea that the best way to understand who you are, and how to live, was to look inside yourself and focus on you own feeling, experiences, and desires" (p. xxiii). He argued that the goal of introspection-oriented culture is happiness, albeit a happiness that is forever deferred in the search for the next object. Davies' (2015) argument about happiness was similar, that the pursuit of happiness was always framed as an individual's quest for the right motivation, the right tools, or the right lifestyle. It is a quest that can never end because it never seeks answers outside of the self. Each step of watching something on Netflix is similarly a never-ending quest, part of a meta-viewing project building to a more perfectly recommended content… next time. Rather, personalization actually becomes standardization, as audiences can only view from a pre-selected pool and their tastes conform to what Netflix offers or they disengage with the medium entirely.

The significance of this chapter was to extend and further contribute to the meaning making process that the participates initiated, in terms of wanting to learn more about how technologies driven by algorithms influence how film is accessed towards extending learning.

Outlining critically the way learners entering university classrooms, for examples, are encountering films in their personal lives was essential in order to gain insight into the questions the participants raised and the gap I found in the literature around this recent development in

regard to education. The concluding chapter includes addressing how this change in film culture engagement provides new opportunities for educators along with discussing the central research question of how film viewing can create empathic responses in the sense of an affective experience.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter incorporates Fairclough's (2016) recommendation to add critical reflection as a fifth phase of CDA. The aim of this final chapter is to discuss the insights I have gained and to stimulate further research and dialogue about the relevance of this study to film, media and cultural studies, educators using film as a teaching and learning strategy regardless of discipline, educations working in anti-racist education/advocacy work, and interested in the curation and preservation of art and society's knowledge. The chapter is organized into four sections. The first section summarizes the study, outlines the key findings and connects them to the reviewed literature. The second section discusses the study's limitations. The third looks at implications for media studies, intercultural and anti-racist educators, and film curation and preservation. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the outcomes of the study and its potential for setting the stage for further research.

Summary: Process and Discovery

As outlined in Chapter One, this study grew out of identifying a need to critique empathy and an academic interest to explore the affective value of film in education. I entered this study because of a curiosity about engaging with film as a way to understand other perspectives. I also developed a concern for how empathy was becoming a goal or a skill linked to employability, rather than a process, especially when reflecting on where people have formal and informal learning opportunities to radically shift their thinking and reframe their understanding of the experiences of other people, how and where they contribute to society in ways that improve understanding equity, and that fosters empathy as an action – not just a skill to add to a resume.

I used a case study approach and followed Fairclough's (2001, 2016) critical discourse analysis CDA methodology. Throughout the study I remained open to new learning and new insights, and as a result I discovered the need for a critical review of algorithmic recommendations systems for discovering new films and the limitations they place upon potential transformative art experiences.

As the inquiry progressed the central research question grew into an exploration for how film viewing for adults in a formal and/or informal learning space can create an empathetic response in the sense of a radically unsettling affective experience (Pedwell, 2012, p. 166) and produce what Ranciere (2010) called dissensus, or the sensory break with the normal order of things to imagine new possibilities? CDA facilitated the inquiry because of its transdisciplinary approach to meaning making. This was important to me, as I identify more with being a film, media and cultural studies researcher than one specifically aligned to education. However, at the same time I am fascinated in the use of media for its educational contributions towards both formal and informal learning. As a result, the transdisciplinary methodology of CDA supported my research.

The data collection for this study was conducted just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic lock down. Ten participants, as outlined in Chapter Four participated. I followed Crouch & McKenzie's (2006) advice that when building an environment for participants to openly and honestly share their thinking, feelings, and insights the maximum number of participants should be limited to no more than 20; and because the topic of empathy and trying to establish a learning environment that creates a 'radically unsettling' was the focus of this research I elected

to keep the number of participants to ten. The participants attended three film viewing sessions and participated in post-film viewing group discussions immediately following the viewing. Several weeks after the entire film series ended, I conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants. I applied Patton's (2002, p.110) rule that analysis should focus on the similarities, traits, and analogies within diverse data. I also applied Brown & Gilligan's (1991) suggestion that participant data should be listened to or read four different times, each using a different lens or perspective. The time during the pandemic lock-down was used to employ these methods and for analysis, reflection, meaning making and further exploration into the insights that the participants brought to my attention as a result of their participation in the research. I identified core themes and used them to organize the findings, as presented in Chapter Five. Using CDA, the participants' narratives, and interview notes, along with the literature and a review of the films, served as a variety of data sources or 'texts'. The participants also identified a key finding that promoted further exploration into the impact of personalized recommendation systems on access to film for learning.

While this last paragraph outlines the research process, CDA is not a prescribed method. If viewed only as a research method, then it results in a missed opportunity to learn from the complexity and vulnerability that participants and I brought to this study and to the collaborative work that was done to understand how the film viewing experience impacted them on an individual level. There have been moments of awareness building, personal sharing, new learning, and the disclosure of unlearning. After sharing the findings with the participants, several of them have commented on how the film series and post-film discussions are still

continuing to inform them and motivate them to continue on a journey of self-discovery through film. As noted several times, transformative learning takes time, but the latter statements from the participants indicate that film viewing had a transformative learning impact on them. As the university is now in transition back to 'regular' on-campus activities, the participants have suggested the film series continue and be expanded to include more faculty and students to create a community of practice around anti-racist learning through film viewing. This is something, as a result of this research, that I am in the early stages of developing through a research centre at UFV.

It was evident that each of the participants experienced the films and post-film discussion in their own unique way. There is also evidence that suggests each of the participants were at varying stages of readiness in which to receive the messages reflected in the films or that resulted from the group discussions. However, using the CDA process and a careful reading of the various data sets and films as 'text' the findings can be summarized into four interrelated themes that speak to how film viewing has the potential to create:

1. learning opportunities for viewers (i.e., students, general public) to experience the feeling of having sympathy through exposure to the lives of circumstances of different characters. It also opens the learning space to explore the differences between sympathy and empathy, and stimulate personal reflection to address "how do I contribute to this already created situation" rather than "how can I fix it"?

2. opportunities for viewers to deconstruct what they for instance dislike about certain characters and to practice reflecting purposefully on why. This has the potential to foster dialogue about the “radically unsettling” affective experience and creates a situation where the viewer can engage and share with others an imagining new possibilities. Film viewing provides a focus or content for people to engage in reflective practice without, at first, having to be feel personally vulnerable because they can focus on the characters or the story and not their own selves.
3. entry points to stimulate rich discussion on topics that might otherwise go unexplored, be considered challenging, or be avoided because they are uncomfortable. Through facilitating or participating in post-film viewing discussion a learning environment can be created that helps ease people into expanding their awareness, and their use and appreciation for the extensive canon of films available that are most often missed as teaching and learning resources. Discussion further helps to develop personal reflective skills and the practice of exchanging ideas with peers and colleagues etc.
4. awareness for the critical review of current media habits and limitations for both individuals and institutions. Media is often framed as entertainment and as a result its communication and learning impact on individuals is often left unchecked. Film or media literacy (or lack thereof) is often not considered as a factor in contributing to what individuals are learning (or not) from it. As a result, viewers

> do not always realize what constructs are being reinforced as dominant. Likewise, without attention paid to supporting or increasing film literacy instructors or facilitators using film viewing have little to no way to assess if or what learning is occurring. They run the risk of film viewing, being what one participant described as a "fly by" message or something assumed to be pure entertainment. They miss the opportunity to make use of informal learning or the power of learning that could be considered happenstance.

Each of these findings are useful for instructors or facilitators to take into account when preparing to enter the learning space and as a result they inform the focus of the implications for this study.

Study Limitations

The clear limitation in this study is the short time frame which the participants had to engage with the films and reflect on their own learning. It is insufficient to definitively claim anything about the movement towards the greater ability for participants to demonstrate empathy, or to see "how much" empathy slipped through the cracks in the wall of common-sense understanding. Personal transformative learning takes significant time and ongoing reflection that is more involved than what was possible in the post-film time frame. However, this study was not meant to demonstrate what changes occurred over time. Rather it was designed to gauge how film has the potential to facilitate a "radical unsettling" affective experience and this was accomplished as indicated by the second core theme that resulted from participant data, especially from the post-film viewing interview data. What the study achieved was the sharing of

insights beyond the purely theoretical, indications that film viewing and reflective discussion are promising practices for stimulating the transformative learning process, personal reflections related to Otherness, and examples for how film viewing can be positioned as an impactful mode of formal and informal learning in the affective domain.

The other limitation of this study is that, while it is frames from within a Canadian context, the participants were all from British Columbia (BC) and therefore the participants` understanding and appreciation for the meaning of intercultural may not be the same as it is across all provinces in Canada, such as Quebec or the Atlantic provinces. That may have additional factors that need to be considered when introducing the films and their contributions to a dialogue on interconnection empathy.

In the next sections, I discuss considerations for how the way people are encountering films has ramifications for the facilitator's role, how films are made accessible, and what Film Studies can contribute to a learning environment devoted to creating potential dissensus.

Discussion and Implications

This research provides potential insight into how film viewing can help to create learning environments, whether they be formal and informal, where viewers explore the stories of other people, engage in dialogue with each other around topics that may otherwise not naturally come up, and provide media that they can locate on their own and engage with in a self-directed way. It does not supply a single answer to the complex challenge of anti-racist education, rather suggests a transdisciplinary approach that creates multiple enter points into creating conditions that offer the potential for transformative learning to be stimulated. As outlined in Chapter Two,

empathy can not be demanded. Empathy is the emotional connection to another person or situation that Pedwell (2012) defined as a "radically 'unsettling' affective experience" (p. 166). We need to deconstruct what is taught as prescribed reactions or responses that lead to the claim of empathy. Empathy is not a measure to assess as contributing to recognition or "intercultural competency". Instead of demand, we must consider the environments that are conducive to empathy slipping through the cracks in walls of unquestioned belief rather than breaking down the entire wall.

These implications are multi-layered and can be relevant to Film, Media and Cultural Studies, the work of educators across multiple adult learning spaces, especially those teaching to inform recognition; and those that aim to curate and protect art and cultural memory.

For Film, Media and Cultural Studies

Engagement with film is more complex than an idea that films are engaging and a way of meeting learners where they are at just by using media they are already familiar with on a regular basis. In order for a film to be a "detonator" (p. 937) for discussion, as Solanas & Gettino (1969/2011) described, the viewers have to be engaged with a film and not reject the film from being too different from their preconceptions of what a film should be. I watched part of Solanas & Gettino's *Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) with one of my film classes, and it failed to detonate any discussion because it neither spoke to the students' immediate circumstances, nor did it conform to their concept of what a film typically is. That class was the first film studies class I taught. I realized after the type of screening that I needed to do to expand students' conceptions of what they could see. While I expected this of first year students being introduced to critical

concepts and even film for the first time, I was surprised to learn the participants of this study were not that much different. The participants, who were enthusiastic about seeing films and had nearly all completed degrees in liberal arts subjects, also mentioned having to adjust to the film forms beyond the typical Hollywood story telling patterns.

As discussed in Chapter Three, how the participants had to adapt to new ways of thinking about what a film story provides supports Decoster & Vansieleghem's (2014) suggestion that the division about how film can be used in education, as objects of learning and as modes for learning was evident. Their analysis of Giroux's (2004) use of film as a reflection of a society's ideologies is appropriate for some films, but this usage is more suited to Cultural Studies' attempts to understand films as cultural products than in transformative learning as Giroux's approach does not include what Bartky (2002) called "the emotional dimension that is part of the search for better cognition" (p.72), only examples in service of "better cognition". There is certainly educational value in performing the analysis, but such analysis requires, first, the discursive toolbox to apply towards examining the films. I have done previous work in this field, restricting my work to looking at films as the object of study themselves (Pardy, 2019). As Decoster & Vansielegehm describe, "a particular pedagogy is installed in relation to the coded world that film represents and the spaces that are inhabited" (2014, p. 795) in this method. They follow up suggesting that this approach misses out on the particularity of what film as an art form provides. Instead, they advocate to embrace learning through cinematic image first. Decoster & Vansielegehm envision film as similar to the book in Rancière's (1991) *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, where it enables learners to learn through an object.

> Emancipation begins when the student understands that she is always and already capable of observing, selecting, comparing and interpreting in relation to cinema, and that there is no restriction to the capacity of her thoughts during the cinematographic experience; that there is no secret knowledge or model necessary to speak about moving images, or a teacher who would guide the student through that knowledge or model so that finally the student would 'understand' the film (Decoster & Vansielegehm, 803).

I quote this at length because, while it is a goal and it excites me, what I realized from my study is that when working with adult learners there are two major barriers to this idyllic vision of films. First, viewers do not enter films without extensive pre-conceived notions of what a film should be. I did not see, with my participants, support for the idea that films will help students learn because they are fluent in engaging with film. The group had significant discussions about expanding what their conception of a film could be. One participant even said they "have often looked for something easy in entertainment, but realized that film can be about serious issues". This came to them as if it was a revelation that film was not always pure entertainment. The way the participants imagined film mostly as entertainment is support for analyzing film as products that reflect a society's ideologies. Seeing film primarily as entertainment also necessitates a need to teach a visual literacy that expands learners' possibilities to see what can be and has been expressed through film, without doing so in a way that tells learners how to see, as that would only re-inscribe adherence to different formulas. As Sinnerbrink (2015) argued, it is necessary to

draw upon phenomenological and cognitivist theory in teaching film in order to introduce the ideas of different ways of seeing to learners.

Part of this learning is to encourage attention. White's (2012) chapter "pay attention, pay attention, pay attention" emphasized how focus was key to aesthetic experience, and the classroom can be conducive to encouraging a sense of focus. Film theorists have long focused on how the experience of watching a film in a darkened, public space encourages engagement. Viewers at home have the option of distracted viewing and many people multitask while watching, partially because there is a feeling of needing to remain productive and partially because so much of the rest of the day is taken up trying to feel productive. While breaking the mindset of constant productivity is a long-term goal, in the short-term, attending class itself is productive time, so if introduced as a learning experience as opposed to solely entertainment, students could frame watching a film as being productive. Classroom use would necessitate emphasizing that watching is indeed a productive part of learning, as much as any lecture or reading. I have noticed that assigning a film to watch at home during online teaching does not lead to as many students viewing the film as when I show the film physically in class. There is also less discussion because there is not the unity of being together in the room. In order for the film to feel productive, some form of interactivity is necessary, such as the post-film discussions that were found to be instrumental in this study. Even for the students who do not participate in discussing afterwards they can at least link together what they have just seen with what they are hearing in the discussion as was indicated in the findings by the participants that reported it to be hard at first to engage in the discussion.

Carefully considering the creation of the learning environment in which to view film is essential. This was especially true for the participants of this study. They all commented on how viewing and discussion together is what enabled them to see and appreciate film differently. They almost all commented that it was the experience that started their transformative thinking. However, this is likely limited to groups of a small enough size where participants can grow to feel comfortable with each other. In a larger classroom setting, it would be ideal to create sub-groups and have them be consistently the same on a week-to-week basis to create familiarity.

For Anti-Racist Educators

The important theoretical contribution of this research is that educators should be aware that affects, like empathy, are not teachable skills. Nor should educators desire they be skills. Rather as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, such promotion is generally a re-packaging of current values in new formats. Using the literature and film analysis as data or "texts" within the CDA methodology, this data outlines that this re-packaging dilutes the affective potential of empathy. Nor is mere exposure to any particular film or book or new emergent technology the solution.

As I have been writing this dissertation, I have also been involved at the University of the Fraser Valley's (UFV) Race and Antiracism Network (RAN) since May 2020, just before the 2020's Black Lives Matter resurgence. In the following months, there was a lot of discussion around the need to address anti-Black racism, both from within the university (UFV Blog, 2020) and across both Canada and the United States. Future educational objectives may (indeed should) include anti-racism as a core competency rather than "intercultural competency". Educators must

be vigilant that such anti-racism initiatives do not become, as I addressed in Chapter Three, a way that collects knowledge about differences or which confirms goodness.

In drawing upon Bannerji (2000), Razack (2001), and Ahmed (2004), I set out in Chapters Three and Four the goal of reflection on how it is that we are already intertwined in a social web and must not only recognize connectivity, but understand how it limits the autonomy of others. Such reaction involves recognizing individual autonomy in a way that is anti-essentialist and learning to live together, not because we are all the same, but because we can appreciate the impossibility of sameness. I hoped to move the participants from the [neo]liberal mode of individual charity, to asking questions about structural solutions and interrogating their own complicity.

The above is not a short journey. Chabot Davis's (2014) work, a major inspiration of this study, noted in her experiences with white students and anti-racism, she only ever noticed a difference over the course of years. With this study's participants, I could see reactions forming. Eight of the ten participants showed significant reaction to what they had seen. For example, sometimes there were defensive attempts to have what they saw cohere back into their world view. The defensive attempts were not rejections of the film or discussion however, and these participants are the same ones that hope the series continues.

My primary recommendation for educators is to pay attention and to set up environments with thorough and thoughtful intention that move strategically and mindfully beyond viewing "intercultural competencies" as a series of rote outcomes, beyond what Razack (2001) called the management-of-diversity form of learning. To help build an environment conducive to

transformative empathetic learning, I found in working with my participants that it was essential to emphasize openness as a facilitator. Questions need to be phrased in a way that is not searching for a particular answer. As Amy said "you let us wander down the paths we want to go. There was no agenda and the feeling of community was established. If we felt there was an agenda or we were pushed in a specific direction this wouldn't happen." This environment allows empathy to develop or grow and in this study when I took this approach it eventually allowed for conversations several participants described as the most intellectually engaging they had experienced in a university setting. For me, I believe this type of transformative knowledge building and intellectual dialogue is the core of a liberal arts education. And for educators working in the anti-racist learning space these types of learning experiences can significantly contribute to education for the public good.

For Curation and Protection of Art and Cultural Memory

The shift towards streaming platforms is critical for educators to keep an eye on because they pretend to have the capability to expand horizons, but in reality is offering only a small selection of films. For example, older films and films not seen as potentially drawing many viewers are disappearing. As discussed in Chapter Six, a library's DVD collection is not less important now because of streaming, but in reality is actually more important than ever before because it has the responsibility of preserving important educational resources unavailable on the commercial oligopoly of streaming services. For the same reason, it is important for educators to access these archival collections because as the participants reported they trusted that their streaming services were providing all that was available to them. They never once stopped to

think about who is controlling what is available to them, who gets to decide what disappears, or how recommender systems assess what they would be interested in viewing. Most significantly, when thinking about formal and information knowledge building, the participants had never questioned that the recommender algorithms could be biased or even promote racist stereotypes. Individual educators and university libraries have an important role in preserving and ensuring films remain accessible for reasons beyond not just that they are profitable to particular corporations.

For Further Research

In the previous chapters' descriptions, I have outlined what I saw as meaningful, indicative moments. These moments have provided a consideration of how the changing landscape of accessing film is also further reorienting the idea of what a film is and how it should appease rather than challenge the viewer, as supported by "data".

There is a need for a longitudinal project as this study could not determine the extent to which film viewing caused transformative learning to occur, or to what level of action it caused the participants to take. At the conclusion of the series, the participants were beginning to reflect on how to act differently. However, I only demonstrated that two of the primary concerns about film empathy, self-congratulation for having any feelings and/or relating a character's situation to what they would do in the situation, did not occur. Such reflection is necessary for change, but like empathy, it is only a starting point. A longitudinal follow-up study could capture this if that reflection leads to transformation in behaviours. If it does not, the follow-up study would also investigate why not, and if reflection is simply analogous to self-congratulation about having

feelings. Ultimately, the significance of the film viewing is not that it definitively proves anything, but rather that there is evidence of hope and value in pursuing research on films and empathy learning further. This study serves as the foundation on which to build both philosophically and methodologically. A research project involving a more representative sample of university learners than the self-selected and motivated participants in this study would also be an important follow up path. Both these research areas I am motivated, as a result of this study, to pursue.

Final Reflections from the Study

Rancière (2015) emphasized that dissensus can occur at any time, but can never be calculated. The process I theorized as producing dissensus though film and feeling empathy similarly is, unlike Netflix's recommendation system, incalculable. When reflecting on incalculability of dissensus I became aware that for some educators this may seem like an unpredictable endeavour, especially for educators or facilitators that are not comfortable in the affective domain or that are personally more comfortable having fully developed lesson plans. As part of this research, I am not suggesting that all educators consider using film viewing or attempt to establish learning environments to foster a radically unsettling. It is absolutely something the instructor or facilitator must prepare for both personally and professionally. However, for me, I am drawn to transformative learning practices and draw motivation from scholars such as Butterwick & Selman (20120, Cranton (1994; 1996; 2000), Daloz, (1999), Dirkx (1998), Freire, (1970); and Taylor (2000). I also realize, as a result to this research, that my own teaching and learning practice will be an ongoing process involving risk taking and

reflection. The incalculability of dissensus is what an element of what makes education exciting, as the potential is always there, and teaching and learning is about the search for those moments. Philosophically it is a disservice to analyze this project in terms of calculability. And while this may seem to point to a limitation of this research it is important to remember, as outlined in Chapter One, transformative learning is gradual and cannot be forced. Individuals will journey towards new learning and unlearning, each on their own path. Kegan (2000) outlined that "literally, transformative learning puts the form itself at risk of change" (p.49). Learning in adulthood builds on lived experience and what individuals already know. Transformation occurs when individuals gain insight into how it is they know, and film viewing has the potential to stimulate a viewer towards reflection and a self-discover of how it is they know.

In Chapter One, I discussed why I loved films, that through them I have learned to empathize with many different experiences. While I entered this research thinking empathy was an answer, I have learned through doing the research that empathy is instead a potential pathway to the dissensus needed to be experienced for a more just world. Reflecting on my experiences of teaching university Media, Culture and Communication courses to first through third year undergraduate students, and my work on UFV's RAN committee, I have a heightened awareness of the need for creating learning environments that foster learning from a power-free place of inquiry, embrace intentional listening, encouragement of different ways of seeing, and are capable of engaging others in topics that may at first start as uncomfortable conversations. Such engagement may create a radically unsettling affective experience, and then ignite transformational learning which can stimulate action. I leave this study encouraged that film can

help start this process. I have also discovered that using film to start this process requires the instructor or facilitator to acknowledge and prepare for the different entry points the viewers are at, the varying levels of personal readiness the viewers have to receive and deconstruct the films messages, the importance of teaching towards film and media literacy, and the vulnerability present in the learning environment. Films can be, and must be preserved as, pathways for knowledge mobilization and a way to capture the "dailiness" of the lived experience whereby empathy, through the emotional connection to another, triggers action towards a more just world.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Introductory Questionnaire

Email Address Age:
Years in University:
Cultural Background You Identify With:

1. What interested you in attending this film series?

2. Have you taken formal coursework on decolonization or intercultural issues?
   2B) If the answer is yes, "please describe?"

3. What does intercultural mean to you?

4. What is your prior experience with intercultural films?

5. How do you currently engage with news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues? What do you see as the major issues? Do you see yourself as connected to these issues?

6. What do you hope to get out of this film series?

Appendix 2: Final Interview Questions

1. Are there individual scenes that have stuck with you? If so, why do you think these scenes matter to you?

2. Did the post-film discussions add to or change your understanding of the films? If so, how?

3. Has discussing and participating in the series led you to seek out more intercultural media than you would have before viewing the films?

4. Have you applied, or do you see how you could apply, anything you learned from viewing and discussing the films to situations in your life?

5. How has viewing and discussing the films re-contextualized your engagement with news coverage and/or institutional policies related to intercultural issues?

6. Overall, what have you learned or taken away from the experience of engaging with these films as part of a discussion group?

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Researchers: Brett Pardy, PhD Candidate, McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education
E-mail: brett.pardy@mail.mcgill.ca Phone: 438.862.7190

Supervisor: Dr. Boyd White, McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education

Email: boyd.white@mcgill.ca Phone: 514.398.4527 Ext. 00730

Title of Project: Opening Difficult Conversations: Empathy and Intercultural Film Viewing

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to learn how watching film and participating in facilitated, respectful discussion contributes to learning around raising intercultural awareness. I am interested in understanding how your viewing process is linked to your thought process and how this may or may not change as you watch a series of films. The goal of this research is to provide practical advice for how similar film viewing groups can be used in other educational settings.

Study Procedures*:*
Participants will be asked to contribute in two ways:

1. an initial profile interview, to understand your interest in the series and your prior knowledge and experience. This interview will be conducted at a comfortable public location. This interview will be recorded for research use only and will not be shared
2. a project close interview, conducted in a comfortable public location (for example: a local coffee shop) (45 minutes). This interview will be recorded for research use only and will not be shared

Voluntary Participation*:* Participation in the study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any part of the study, such as opting out of a particular film or discussion without needing to withdraw from the study. You may decline to answer certain questions. You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason and any data you have provided will immediately be destroyed unless permission is granted otherwise. Signing this form does not waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Potential Risks: The films we will watch may include some potentially traumatic content. All films are commercially released and this risk is no greater than watching a film in a public theatre or at home. Before each screening, there will be a content forewarning if the film contains such scenes. The film discussions may be uncomfortable, but will be handled by experienced facilitators who will ensure the conversation is moderated and respectful.

Potential Benefits: By participating in the film series itself, you will acquire new knowledge for refugee and immigrants experiences in both North America and Europe and have an opportunity to create connections between communities that can lead to increased empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and community resilience. By

participating in the study, you will potentially help me learn how and why film series can be of benefit in other educational setting

Compensation*:* At both interviews, I will provide coffee/tea of your choice (value approximately $6)

Confidentiality: I will be collecting information about your name, age, educational background, and racial and gender identities as well as recording two interviews with you. This information will be accessibly only to me and kept on a password protected file on my computer and a password protected backup USB drive stored in a fire safe filing cabinet.

The results of this study will be used to fulfill my research requirement for a McGill University Doctoral Degree in Integrated Studies in Education. The research will be published as a doctoral thesis. It will also be used in conference presentations and potential publications in academic journals. No personally identify information will be disclosed.

Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission:

To be digitally recorded: Yes: ___ No: ___

Questions: If you have any questions/clarifications about the project, please contact Brett Pardy at brett.pardy@mail.mcgill.ca

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

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Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

UFV Research Protocol: 1143E-19
McGill Research Protocol: 201-1018