

## **Practice-Based Research Paper**

**“This Indian dance is so cool”: Identifying and analyzing  
racialized discourses in music videos**

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## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Author's Note	5
CHAPTER ONE: BACK-GROUNDING	
Introduction	6
Brief Review of Literature - Theoretical Underpinnings	8
Brief Review of Literature - Methodological Underpinnings	17
Design and Methods	22
CHAPTER TWO: FORE-GROUNDING	
Analyzed Data	28
CHAPTER THREE: GROUNDING	
Coded Data & Theoretical Connections	37
Discussion	44
Relevance of this Study & Implications for Social Work Practice	46
Concluding Thoughts	48
References	51

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*These consecutive years of being a student have enlightened me with the language to describe aspects of living that I continuously wondered about. This research study is particularly special as it allowed me to express my thoughts regarding racial subjectivities in the twenty-first century. Although my positioning as a student has been exhausting beyond words, it has allowed me to see versions of myself that I could not believe existed.*

*You did it Minahil, you did it!*

*Abstract*

*This research paper identifies and analyzes discursive productions and promotions of Others in and through twenty-first century music videos. Discourses of white and non-white subjectivities are examined. In-depth synthesizes of the data and discussions reveal that discourses surrounding white subjects laud this positioning whereas discourses related to non-white subjects are degrading. This paper unveils and critiques the existential dependence of dominant regimes on subjugated storylines.*

*Author's Note: Throughout this paper, I use the terms racialized, Other, Orient and non-white interchangeably. These terms are used to describe any persons that are deemed by dominant paradigms as not possessing white characteristics.*

## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUNDING

### **Introduction**

“The idea of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us” (Octavio Paz, 1961 as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 169). This quote refers to the multiple experiences and stories of people that become ignored in the face of dominant regimes. The hegemony of dominant paradigms makes it more than just another way to view the world – it claims to be the only legitimate way to view the world. The power of hegemonic views becomes so vast that it massively replicates its existence and determines what is worthy and what is not. Ladson-Billings (2000) further explains the dominant perspectives as distorting the realities of the [O]thers in an effort to “maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are locked out of the mainstream”.

Taking race into consideration, people encounter various experiences in their daily lives wherein the dominant subjects are more privileged and regarded than those outside the central regimes. Given the colonial continuities that exist within everyday practices, power is exercised by dominant white subjects, particularly Euro-Western persons, leaving those that are non-white as subjugated. The daily experiences that seek to uphold the power of white subjects construct racialized discourses – a form of discriminatory social practice that manifests itself in text, talk and communication (Ifedi, 2010). Racialized discourses contribute to the production of racism as a form of ethnic or racial domination. “Racism can be described in terms of a binary between an in-group and an out-group; a structure that is central to the interests of the dominant groups in a society” (Matheson, 2005, p. 141). This occurs through expressing, confirming and legitimizing racist opinions, attitudes and ideologies of the dominant subjects.

The media are one among many cultural institutions which produce racism. The media plays a critical role by providing definitions about nationhood (Thobani, 2007). The media reinforces values and norms by giving concrete examples of what happens to those who transgress these norms. Above all, it perpetuates particular ways of viewing the world and the peoples within that world. Matheson (2005, p. 142) explains that the “forms of representation by the media reflect certain power in disseminating wider social structures”. Moreover, Hall (as cited in Matheson, 2005) elucidates the media as constructing definitions of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries and what the problem of race is understood to be. There are numerous media outlets that convey such information including but not limited to: television, advertisements, newspaper articles, radio stations and the music industry.

This purpose of this research paper is to examine music videos as social practices that perpetuate colonialism. The songs selected for this study have lyrics and beats that are catchy, fun and exciting. However upon viewing their videos, there is an entirely different story – one that involves racist discourses and actions. This paper aims to address the following research question: How is the notion of the Other discursively produced in and promoted through 21<sup>st</sup> century western music videos? The paper is divided into three major chapters: Chapter One – Back-grounding, Chapter Two – Fore-grounding and Chapter Three – Grounding. Chapter One provides a brief review of the literature on the topic of race construction. Three specific post-structural theories are discussed followed by an explanation of the study’s design and methods. In the design and methods section, the methodological technique, selected data set and coding style is detailed. Chapter Two of the paper discusses the analyzed data. A series of paragraphs elaborate on the research findings gathered through analyzing each music video. Lastly, Chapter Three makes theoretical connections with the coded data. In addition, four themes that are most

salient across all eight music videos are explored with specific examples. A discussion is presented to further synthesize the research findings. The paper concludes by outlining the relevance of this study and its implications for social work practice. In this section, the importance of challenging racialized discourses is emphasized. Moreover, the necessity to consider multiple realities and stories as opposed to singular truths is also highlighted.

### **Brief Review of Literature**

#### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

My study is situated in post-structuralism and draws upon the work of authors who are influenced by Michel Foucault. Many scholars explain post-structuralism as a reaction to structuralism and work against seeing language as a stable and closed system. Derrida, for example, argues that languages lack a fixed and inherent meaning (Garg, Kumar, & Sharma, 2014). In addition, in the translators preface of the book *Of Grammatology*, Spivak illuminates Derrida's thoughts on working against widely accepted understandings of language and processes of meaning, particularly the supposition that knowledge leads to truth and that language is a catalyst for arriving at a steady truth (Derrida, 1976). Furthermore, for Derrida, Spivak explains, all signs are structures of difference, which are noted by traces of an absent but always, present other and which give rise to multiple possible meanings rather than singular, definite ones (Derrida, 1976). The exercise of acknowledging and unveiling the omnipresent yet cloaked phenomena is referred to as "deconstruction" by Derrida (Garg, Kumar, & Sharma, 2014, para. 23).

The theory of deconstruction, which is the basis of this research study, claims that because of the different moods of the person, their backgrounds and their different ways of experiencing things, a word or its meaning will not conjure the same idea to every person "(Garg, Kumar, &



Sharma, 2014, para. 24). Moreover, on the basis of deconstruction, Derrida challenged structuralism wherein meanings are constructed and understood. Another concept that is fundamental in Derrida's work is "differance" (Cooper, 1989, p. 488). "Differance" alludes to something more than the term "difference" as the latter points to a binary structure based on the idea of division that is commonly discussed in structuralism (Cooper, 1989, p. 488). Derrida's differance however, is concerned with the interaction between opposites making meaning unstable (Garg, Kumar, & Sharma, 2014). Thus, differance is "uncertainty and doubt built into the very fabric of the agent as constructed and living in a complex, heterogeneous world" (Cooper, 1989, p. 491).

Derrida's concepts support my research as I explore the notion of difference and its role in constructing racial binaries in and through the music videos. This idea of dissimilarity and variation is employed in my understanding of suppressors and suppressed when race is concerned. For example, in the music videos, there are bodies that are engaged in a relationship with power being the central catalyst. Particular bodies that are exercising power - by this act - become suppressors whereas Others that are recipients of force become suppressed. In addition to Derrida's work about multiple meanings and deconstruction, other specific movements in post-structuralism that further inform this research study include post-colonialism, race theory and whiteness studies. Three themes that are prevalent across these theories include: 1) current racial representation as having roots in colonialism and ever-flowing European imperialism, 2) racial differences are constructed through language and imagery and 3) it is imperative to unpack power relations facilitating racial superiority and inferiority. Transferable into the process of analyzing the music videos, these themes provide me with a platform for understanding discursive productions.

***Post-colonial theory: Roots of racial representation***

“Post-colonial approaches to reading, writing, and research are primarily concerned with the geographical notation, the theoretical mapping, and charting of territory that underlies Western fiction, history writing, and philosophical discourses of the time” (Said, 1993, p. 69 as cited in Middleton, 2005, p. 477). In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said discusses the western construction of the eastern world as a different and inferior place. In his work, Said explains the European uptake of the “Orient” “as a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories, landscapes, and remarkable experiences” (Said, 1977, p. 1). Orientalism refers to representations of the east, especially the Middle East in Said’s book, in a style that dominates, restructures, and has authority over the Orient. More specifically, “Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (Said, 1977, p. 3).

Similar to Foucault’s emphasis on historical underpinnings, Said encourages “that without examining orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systemic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (Said, 1977, p. 3). The idea then is to critically analyze the discursive ways in which the Orient is particularly represented in popular avenues such as the media, for the purposes of unveiling ever-flowing European imperialism. Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism supports my research as it describes how particular notions of the Orient are constructed. In the music videos, for example, particular assumptions about the Other are produced and promoted in ways that benefit the west. The specific positioning and

actions of Euro-Westerners in the music videos positions them as royalty and belonging to the ruling class. In contrast, the Other is noted to serve the Euro-Westerner, becoming a slave and subordinate being.

### ***Critical Race theory: Construction of racial differences***

Race theory supports my research study as it examines how dominant scripts about whiteness are created in the music videos. Critical race scholarship allows for the exploration of how discourses surrounding racial subjectivity are fundamental to modernity, the liberal project and white dominance.

As a form of oppositional scholarship, critical race theory challenges the universality of white supremacy/judgement as the authoritative standard that binds people of colour and normatively measures, directs, controls, and regulates the terms of proper thought, expression, presentation, and behaviour (Calmore, 1992, as cited in Tate, 1997, p. 196).

Hall (2007) sheds light on the fluid nature of identity. Identity is not transparent, unproblematic and an already accomplished fact. Instead, “identity is a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 2007, p. 222). Ladson-Billings (2000) discusses that the portrayal of racialized persons is different from that of non-racialized beings. Broadly, racialized bodies are depicted as primitive, wild, disobedient, and preposterous. In addition, Goldberg (1993, p. 199) discusses the concept of barbarianism, “a discriminatory category describing race and entering European social consciousness more or less explicitly in the fifteenth century”. “The barbarian possessed empathetically different, even strange language, conduct and culture and lacked the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 199). Ladson-Billings (2000) further explains:

literary scholars have created distinctions between literary genres such that some works are called literature whereas other works are termed folklore. Not surprisingly, the literature of peoples of colour is more likely to fall into the folklore category. As a consequence, folklore is seen as less rigorous, less scholarly, and perhaps, less culturally valuable than literature (p. 257).

The music videos depict discourses surrounding the white and Other body. The white body, for example, is shown as participating in acts that are different than the ones the Other is involved in. At a quick glance, the lauding of one race over another is evident and a thorough investigation to unpack this production further contextualizes this notion. The construction of the Others is also discussed by Ifedi (2010, p. 3) who describes literature and research on racialization as formed from a “deficit perspective.” The notion of representing people of colour from a lens that supports negativity and deficiency is apparent across textual practices. Furthermore, pictorial depictions of black Africans as exotic creatures are present in children’s and young people’s literature. “We meet men carrying their heads in their arms, men with four legs, or men with animal heads. The black African is surrounded by a world totally strange to the European. Strange plants, strange beasts, strange customs are the stereotype feature of this exotic black African” (Becker, 1973, p. 296). The common image of the savage encompassed “violence, sexual license, a lack of civility and civilization, and an absence of morality or any sense of it” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 202). What is not to be missed here is that all attributes point to the possibility of a “subhuman being” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 259), “this image of the black African increasingly served as a moral alibi for slave trade, colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation” (Becker, 1973, p. 296). This viewpoint informs my research as it outlines certain ‘isms’ and discriminatory social and political practices that disadvantage Others in music videos.

Similar to Said's conceptualization of orientalism, Goldberg (2002, p. 17) argues that "racialized discourses emerge through the co-dependent relationship between colonialism and modernity, and the production of white, liberal normativity". Racialized discourses construct racial differences in the world, and "racist expressions create the material effects of power to exclude and subjugate racialized populations" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 52). For example, "Indians of the east were portrayed by British and Spanish humanists of the day as stupid and an impoverished race, lacking culture, kindness, and most of all incapable of Christianity" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 204). In the sixteenth century, hierarchy as a means of creating superior and inferior populations was the norm. Indians were constructed as an inferior population and a war against them and their "subsequent enslavement was justified" (Churchill, 1998, p. 15). In the name of spreading the Christian gospel, the European drive to conquer and enslave the racial Other became a "natural" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 204) phenomena and a moral imperative.

The destruction of vast numbers of people happened through territorial penetration, population control and labour mistreatment. The late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century was occupied with the Enlightenment period. Empiricism, scientific logic, and religious beliefs marked the "exclusively white, bourgeois, European, male and the Enlightenment period" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 208). The beginning of scientific thinking and obsession with anthropology brought racial groupings –subspecies of homo -sapiens. White, upper-class, European scientists produced other subcategories like "exotic", "oriental", "east", "Negro", "Indian" and "Jew" (Churchill, 1998, p. 69). Said (1977) and Goldberg (1993; 2002) both discuss the construction and regulation of subjugated populations for the purposes of imperialism. Said's (1997) concept of orientalism explains economic superiority through mastery of market laws and Goldberg (1993) illuminates colonial control and expansion through physical and cultural domination.

In the same light, music videos for example, are a commodity. The second a music video is released via mainstream media (i.e. internet, radio, social networking apps) they begin to generate money. Once gone viral, every viewer contributes by bringing economic enhancement and within a matter of hours, these videos have already made millions of dollars. The dances, costumes, and language used in the videos becomes a popular fad, a “thing” – rarely challenged, usually accepted, and mostly replicated as if it is the mere truth. Goldberg (1993; 2002) and Said (1993) support my study as they present arguments regarding the sanctioned racist assumptions of the racialized beings. The particular domination and hegemonic social and political practices of the Euro-Western world allow me to view the construction of Others through a critically perplexed lens.

### ***Whiteness studies: Superiority and inferiority***

My research also draws upon whiteness studies which discuss the construction of the white body as the “master race” (Churchill, 1998, p. 7). With regards to whiteness as a racial subjectivity or the ideal racial subjectivity, Hage (1998, p. 58) helpfully explains that whiteness is an “ever changing, composite, cultural, historical, construct. It has roots in the position of cultural power at the same time as the colonized were in process of being racialized. An important feature discussed most in critical whiteness studies is the invisible power of the liberal white subject. To westerners of European decent, whiteness is akin to normalness; yet, as Frankenberg (1993) points out, it is unacknowledged and unknown to most white people. Westerners do not identify themselves as white and they do not have to – due to their mere construction as “standard” and “normal”. However, white subjects do assert themselves as not being people of colour. Whiteness operates through social practices that allow white subjects to remain unmarked and unnamed, or as Frankenberg (1993) argues, racially neutral (as cited in

Badwall, 2013). In the book, *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, the dramatic portrayal of Indigenous People's by Europeans is discussed. "Travel narratives as early as the 1500s depicted the Native American as fierce, a cannibalistic creature, and the woodcuts accompanying the stories portrayed the Indian as less than human - naked, violent, warlike, and frequently, more animalistic than human" (Bataille, 2001, p. 2).

Native Americans, like Africans discussed in the previous paragraph, are another racialized group mythologized by anthropologists and ethnographers. Over the years, literature, media, and art have established a widespread subjectivity and created the "Indian that never was" (Bataille, 2001, p. 4). Moreover, "Indian images reflected the creators of those images more than the people themselves, and the images have changed through time, with portrayals of vanishing Indians, primitives, half-breeds, squaws, warriors and militants taking their turn in the foreground during various historical periods" (Bataille, 2001, p. 4). Moreover, Churchill (1998, p. 101) explains: "the realities of Indian belief and existence have become so misunderstood and distorted at this point that when a real Indian stands up and speaks the truth at any given moment, not only are they unlikely to be believed, but will probably be publicly contradicted and 'corrected' by the citation of some non-Indian and totally inaccurate 'expert'. Thus, critical whiteness studies are important as they strive to unveil the processes and imagery of whiteness that instil notions of neutrality and normativity in order to expose structural privilege (Frankenberg, 1993 as cited in Badwall, 2013). Most critically, whiteness studies examine the dependence of the white subject on non-whites for their transcending superiority (Dyer, 1997).

Present in the music videos, there is a dramatic portrayal of the white body as adopting the Other's culture and mimicking it as if it is outlandish. The mere racial difference displayed in the

videos, encompasses discourses surrounding both identities and speaks to the manner in which they are interrelated and co-exist. Dyer's (1997, p. 9) work discusses racial imagery as central to the organization of the modern world. "Race in itself- insofar as it is anything in itself –refers to some intrinsically insignificant geographical/physical differences between people, it is the imagery of race that is in play" (Dyer, 1997, p. 9). In contrast to the majority of literature discussed that focuses on illuminating the construction of the racial Other (Said 1997, Goldberg 1993, Churchill 1998, Bataille 2001, Becker 1973), much of Dyer's (1997) work is based on the reproduction and preservation of whiteness in visual culture. More specifically, the invisibility of whiteness as a racial position is examined. Dyer (1997) explains that "as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they function as the human norm" (Dyer, 1997, p. 10).

This conception that white subjects are just humans and just people is severely problematic. The notion that the embodiment of whiteness is raceless confines cultural and ethnic studies to only racialized beings. "Western representations of whiteness are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, occupying central and elaborate roles, placed as the norm, the ordinary, and the standard" (Dyer, 1997, p. 11). In terms of racial representation, white subjects are portrayed as not a form of a certain race but rather as just the human race. Thus, the goal of racial and cultural studies should be to not only focus on racialized peoples, but rather also problematize "whiteness as felt to be the human condition defining normality and fully inhabiting it" (Dyer, 1997, p. 9). Whiteness studies inform my research as they allow understandings of how dominant subjects are produced. More specifically, the consumption of culture by the white body helps me explain that although it is implicated in the process of race construction in and through the music videos, it benefits while the Other experiences injury. The



next series of paragraphs will provide an in-depth review of literary pieces that discuss post-structural methods of research.

### **Brief Review of Literature**

#### **Methodological Underpinnings**

My study involves conducting qualitative research. Words, phrases, and pictures are “texts” that do not come ready packaged with a specific delimited meaning that can be known as if they were self-contained and permanent. Rather, it is the interweaving of these texts in different contexts that give them their meaning, and when we attempt to grasp patterns in a text we always have to carry out that exercise against a cultural backdrop (Parker, 1999). The cultural backdrop is made up of various social institutions (i.e. families, schools), subcultures, and languages. “These provide shared systems of meaning that we selectively draw upon to communicate to each other” (Parker, 1999, p. 2). Thus, the process of discursive research and exploration of construction and assessment is strongly a qualitative activity.

My research utilizes a Foucauldian informed discourse analysis. Two themes that are persistent amongst literature on methodology are: 1) critical post-structural analysis involves searching for alternative understandings specifically the ones that are salient yet remain cloaked and 2) taking a Foucauldian approach involves understanding the historical roots of discourses. There are numerous authors and scholarly publications that discuss and utilize Foucault’s conceptualization of discourses as a research design. Fairclough (1995) for example, is concerned with how power comes into play through language particularly in analyzing media discourse. The major premise of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to understand that “all social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served”

(Fairclough, 1995, p. 32). Fairclough's three dimensional model of discourse includes: the object of analysis, the process by which the object is produced and understood, and the socio-historical conditions that facilitate this process. The object of analysis could be written, visual, or verbal and the process by which the object is consumed could be through reading, writing, listening, and watching. Although all three elements of Fairclough's discourse model reflect Foucault's ideas, the last dimension of socio-historical analysis mirrors Foucault's (1984) genealogy and archeology. According to Fairclough (1995, p. 62) "socio-historical analysis pertains to three aspects: economic (i.e. economy of the media), political (i.e. power and ideology of the media), and cultural (i.e. issues of values)".

I have selected Foucault's conceptualization of discourses as a research design in order to examine the production of knowledge, power, and subject-formation in music videos. Hajer (1995, p. 44) defines discourses as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (as cited in Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 196). The study of discourses articulates the language practices, texts, and actions constituting the "objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 117). Discourse research allows for the critical examination of aspects that are not really there and to challenge notions that "value one way of talking about reality over others" (Parker, 2004, p. 252). In addition to Fairclough (1995), Parker's (1999) work on critical textwork and discourse analysis is also heavily influenced by Foucault. Parker's (1999, p. 6) work focuses on understanding "words and phrases that have meanings organized into systems and institutions, what Foucault (1969) called discursive practice". The underlying notion of discourse analysis is not to indicate what is correct or not, but to illuminate the close association between meaning, power, and knowledge (Parker, 1999, p.

6). Discourse analysis involves unveiling: “Why was this said, and not that? Why these words and where do the connotations of the words fit with different ways of talking about the world?” (Parker, 2004, p. 252). Much of Parker’s work (1999; 2004) discusses the criteria for distinguishing discourses. Some of the criterion for understanding discourses includes but is not limited to: “discourse is about objects, discourse contains subjects, discourse is a coherent system of meanings, discourses are related to one another, discourses have historical underpinnings, and discourses support institutions” (Parker, 2004, p. 255). Consistent with many other post-structuralist thinkers cited so far or at least those who utilize Foucault’s ideas, Parker also places a heavy emphasis on the historical location of a discourse. “Discourses are located in time, in history, for the objects they refer to are objects constituted in the past by the discourse or related discourses. A discourse refers to past references to those objects (Parker, 2004, p. 257). Thus, a discourse analyst aims to understand how and where a particular discourse emerged and interpret how the discourse has come about and told a story.

Moreover, discourse analysis involves deconstructing essentialist notions of subjectivity and experience to examine the ways in which “social beings come to be made into certain types of subjects [...] through various modes of seeing, knowing, and talking about the world” (Carter, 2000, p. 28). A key tenet of the Foucauldian approach is the understanding of power as not something merely present in powerful groups (such as the ruling class or capitalists) but as something circulated and deployed in discourse (Talbot, 2007). Furthermore, Given (2008) explains Foucaultian discourse analysis as involving “more than just analyzing the texts for the ways in which they have been structured in terms of syntax, semantics, and so forth” (p. 356). Instead, Foucault is concerned with the way in which texts themselves have been created, reproduced, and ordered in terms of their social and historical positioning.

Discourses are omnipresent. Whether written, spoken, or seen; there is no “discourse-free” living. Discourses take many forms and exist in a variety of different places. In the western world, the importance of media is incontrovertible. Talbot (2007, p. 5) explains, “for many sections of society, at least, the media has largely replaced older institutions (such as the Church, or trade unions) as the primary source of understanding of the world”. Television, newspapers, texting and other widely available communication forms play an important role in mediating society to itself. Similar to Talbot’s (2007) viewpoints, Matheson (2005, p. 1) illuminates, “we assume that the shared world of a culture – what its members think is real, interesting, beautiful, moral, and all other meanings they attach to the world – is partly constructed by each member and partly by institutions such as newspapers or radio stations, and prevailing ideas” (Matheson, 2005, p. 1). As discourse plays a vital role in constituting people’s realities, the implications for power and influence of media discourse is apparent. Discourse analysis of the media allows for examining and assessing sharing of meaning in closer detail. More specifically, “it analyzes what kinds of interactions media texts set up between people and the world and between the powerful and the rest” (Matheson, 2005, p. 1).

In his book *Critical Text Work*, Parker (1999) discusses “visual texts” such as comics, advertisements, television, and films as densely meaning making and producing sources. These sources serve as various outlets for the media to “transfer meaning” between signs, objects, feelings, and social situations. Thus, a discourse analysis utilizing Foucault’s ideas studies textual productions of the media as part of the ongoing oppression, prejudice, and struggle to gain power by knowledge (Parker, 1999; Matheson, 2005; Talbot, 2007). The overarching objective is to understand discourses as a part of a network that exercises power and constructs identities.

There is no specific method of conducting a Foucaultian discourses analysis (Parker, 1999; Matheson, 2005; Talbot, 2007; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). In fact, Foucault avoided creating an analytical set of principles to steer away from formalization (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). However, for the purposes of interpreting the selected music videos, I will be drawing upon the work of scholars who utilize Foucault's conception of discourses and illuminate strategies for conducting an analysis. Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) discuss three broad dimensions for coding and analyzing discursive practices that are also briefly explained in Parker's (1999) and Talbot's (2007) work. Firstly, discourse analysis involves historical inquiry or in Foucault's words, "genealogy". This entails examining those elements which are felt without history (Foucault, 1977). The idea is not the construction of a linear historical development for the racial discourses present in the videos, but rather, the search for pieces of influence that power has had on the singular truth or story. Secondly, analysis attends to mechanisms of power and offers a description of their functioning (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). In this sense, the manner in which power is utilized to produce and reproduce a particular image of the racial Other in the videos is taken into account. Lastly, analysis is directed to signifying practices. "Foucault does not mean that individuals act on themselves according to some personal moral philosophy, but engage in specific practices of self-regulation to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 32). Herein, the depiction of the white body as superior in all areas of existence is dislodged.

### **Design and Methods**

My study conducts in-depth qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience

dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds (Fossey et al., 2002). Statistical procedures or quantification is absent in qualitative research and instead various methodologies and techniques are used to describe peoples' experiences, behaviours, interactions, and social milieus. There are numerous paradigms that shape a researchers' qualitative research but the approach that I selected for this study is critical. Fossey et al. (2002) explain critical qualitative research involves examining micro encounters with powerful structures as serving and contributing to macro level societal ills. The overarching goal is to find and unveil moments of aggressions, interpret struggles, and identify spaces for resistance.

Although the most prevalent form of conducting qualitative research is through participant interviews, an analysis of written texts and visual aids also provide rich insight of social contexts. Words, phrases, and pictures are "texts" that do not come ready packaged with a specific delimited meaning that can be known as if they were self-contained and permanent. Rather, it is the interweaving of these texts in different contexts that give them their meaning, and when we attempt to grasp patterns in a text we always have to carry out that exercise against a cultural backdrop (Parker, 1999). The cultural backdrop is made up of various social institutions (i.e. families, schools), subcultures, and languages. "These provide shared systems of meaning that we selectively draw upon to communicate to each other" (Parker, 1999, p. 2). Thus, the process of discursive research and exploration of construction and assessment is strongly a qualitative activity.

My study utilizes a Foucauldian informed discourse analysis. Foucault's conceptualization of discourses is selected as a research design in order to examine the creation of knowledge, power, and subject-formation through music videos. A Foucauldian informed discourse analysis is particularly well adapted to understand the idea of race because it is centrally concerned with

meaning as a social activity and with social life as constructed through language and actions. Hajer (1995, p. 44) defines discourses as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (as cited in Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 196). The study of discourses articulates the language practices, texts, and actions constituting the “objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972). Discourse research allows for the critical examination of aspects that are not really there and to challenge notions that “value one way of talking about reality over others” (Parker, 2004, p. 252). More specifically, doing discourse analysis involves unveiling the existence of certain aspects versus others and the permission of particular actions versus the rejection of others (Parker, 2004).

Essentialist notions of subjectivity and experience are deconstructed to examine the ways in which “social beings come to be made into certain types of subjects [...] through various modes of seeing, knowing, and talking about the world” (Carter, 2000, p. 28). A key tenet of the Foucauldian approach is the understanding of power as not something merely present in powerful groups (such as the ruling class or capitalists) but as something circulated and deployed in discourse (Talbot, 2007). Moreover, Given (2008) explains Foucaultian discourse analysis as involving “more than just analyzing the texts for the ways in which they have been structured in terms of syntax, semantics, and so forth” (p. 356). Instead, Foucault is concerned with tracing the roots of texts and the manner in which they came to be.

Discourses are omnipresent. Whether written, spoken, or seen; there is no “discourse-free” life. In the western world, the influence of media is incontrovertible. “For many sections of society, at least, the media has largely replaced older institutions (such as the Church, or trade unions) as the primary source of understanding of the world” (Talbot, 2007). Television,

newspapers, texting and other widely available communication forms play an important role in mediating society to itself. “We assume that the shared world of a culture – what its members think is real, interesting, beautiful, moral, and all other meanings they attach to the world – is partly constructed by each member and partly by institutions such as newspapers or radio stations, and prevailing ideas” (Matheson, 2005, p. 1). As discourse plays a vital role in constituting people’s realities, the implications for power and influence of media discourse is apparent.

Discourse analysis of the media allows for examining and assessing sharing of meaning in closer detail. More specifically, “it analyzes what kinds of interactions media texts set up between people and the world and between the powerful and the rest” (Matheson, 2005, p. 1). In his book *Critical Text Work*, Parker (1999) discusses “visual texts” such as comics, advertisements, television, and films as densely meaning making and producing sources. Music videos, for example, are outlets for the media to “transfer meaning” between signs, objects, feelings, and social situations. Thus, a discourse analysis utilizing Foucault’s ideas studies productions in the music videos “as part of the ongoing oppression, prejudice, and struggle to gain power by knowledge” (Matheson, 2005, p. 9). The overarching objective is to understand discourses as a part of a network that exercises power and constructs identities in and through the videos.

### ***Selected Data Set***

For my study I have analyzed a total of eight music videos. These include: Dark Horse by Katy Perry, Lean On by Major Lazer ft. Dj Snake, Bounce by Iggy Azalea, Looking Hot by No Doubt, Princess of China by Coldplay and Rihanna, and Hello Kitty by Avril Lavigne, Burqa by Lady Gaga and Hymn For The Weekend by Coldplay and Beyonce. All of these music videos



are on average three to five minutes in length. The selected videos are recent as they have only been released over the last five years. The oldest video went viral in late 2011 and the newest one was released in early 2016. I purposefully selected these videos as I am most interested in analyzing the ways in which Other identities and cultures are portrayed and promoted in and through the media. Some of the videos specifically Dark Horse, Looking Hot, Lean On, and Burqa have received attention from critics regarding cultural appropriation.

The use and misuse of ethnic adornments, particularly from the eastern world, is a discussion in many news articles and magazines. However, not much research and information is available regarding the historical underpinnings of cultural appropriation and its connection to the continuous construction and re-construction of discursive racial binaries. I specifically choose to work with these songs as they are quite popular in mainstream media (i.e. television, radio, internet), have topped billboard music records, and been nominated for awards. All of the lead artists present as non-racials and although this was an unintentional factor in the data selection, it does serve the purpose of discussing racial exaltation and denigration and the interrelation between discourses. Overall, an in-depth analysis of the selected music videos uncovers discursive representations of the Others and also examines the use of power in subject formation.

### ***Data Extraction & Deconstructing Questions***

There is no specific method of conducting a Foucaultian discourses analysis. In fact, Foucault avoided creating an analytical set of principles to steer away from formalization. However, for the purposes of interpreting the music videos, I drew upon the work of scholars who utilized Foucault's conception of discourses and illuminated strategies for conducting an analysis. Stainton-Rogers and Willig (2008) discuss three broad dimensions for analyzing and coding discursive practices. Firstly, discourse analysis involves historical inquiry or in Foucault's words,

“genealogy”. This entails examining those elements which we tend to feel without history (Foucault, 1977). The idea is not the construction of a linear historical development, but rather, the search for pieces of influence that power has had on truth. Secondly, “analysis attends to mechanisms of power and offers a description of their functioning” (Stainton-Rogers & Willig, 2008, p. 91). In this sense, the exercising of power in relationships is taken into account. Lastly, analysis is directed to signifying practices. “Foucault does not mean that individuals act on themselves according to some personal moral philosophy, but engage in specific practices of self-regulation to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Stainton-Rogers & Willig, 2008, p. 103).

I used Foucault’s concepts of historical inquiry, power, and subjectification to analyze the music videos. The lyrics of the songs and videos are explored in further detail through the following sets of five deconstructing questions: 1) What is being represented here as a truth or as a norm? 2) How is this truth or norm constructed? (What evidence is used? What is left out? What is fore-grounded and back-grounded?) 3) What interests are being mobilised and served by this and what are not? 4) What identities, actions, practices are allowed and normalized and what are disallowed and pathologized? and 5) What voices are being heard and what voices are silenced? Who benefits and who does not benefit? The questions not only examine visual imagery but also song lyrics and their overall creation and re-creation of subjects.

I was able to unpack the music video through drawing on examples of how particular images of racialized people are constructed.

### ***Data Coding***

After extracting the data from the music videos via analyzing questions, the answers were thematically coded. Various discourses that have a connection to the production and promotion

of the Other were high-lightened. Broadly, the songs were coded and revealed discourses surrounding location/setting, attires, dances, words, phrases, and actions. A standard chart was created to organize the coding. The chart encompassed the following headings: Common Themes/Discourses, Example of Lyrics/Visual Imagery, Particular Song, and Connection to the Discursive Production and Promotion of the Other. There were numerous discourses that emerged as the coding took place; however, I selected the most salient themes that were present across all music videos. Later on in this paper, those themes are discussed using theoretical frameworks.

## CHAPTER TWO: FORE-GROUNDING

### Analyzed Data

#### **Deconstructing Questions & Answers**

There was no specific order in which music video was analyzed first and which was analyzed last. However as discussed previously, data from all eight songs was extracted using a series of five standard questions. There are numerous racial binaries and identities that are constructed in and through these videos. Some of these include: Indian, Chinese, Indigenous, Japanese, Egyptian, and Arab. The following series of paragraphs will discuss the production of each subjectivity by drawing on examples from the videos obtained through the five deconstructing questions.

#### ***India***

Three out of the eight music videos construct an Indian subjectivity. These are: Bounce by Iggy, Hymn For The Weekend by Coldplay ft. Beyonce, and Lean On by Mo ft. Major Lazer. All three videos are assumed to take place in India. There is no clear indication whether the artists travelled to India or extracted pieces of the culture and created a background in a studio somewhere else. Nonetheless, the setting in each video is similar as all three are shot on busy streets and inside old fortresses. The videos portray India as a needy and poverty-ridden place, with reckless parenting, and exotic and entertaining women. These ideas are represented as a truth or norm through language, actions, pieces of clothing, and gestures. In Bounce, Hymn For The Weekend, and Lean On there are crowded streets with a lot of pollution, broken houses, locals taking public transportation, beggars sitting on the floor, and children wearing minimal to no clothing playing in the puddles. Showing children in this manner not only represents poverty, but also speaks to the idea of parenting. The fabric of clothes is destroyed with huge rips. The

children, even the older looking ones, are petite with skinny arms and torsos. They have messy hair and are wearing slippers while playing cricket or running around in the slums. The idea of showing children in this state alone induces thoughts regarding the type of parenting that takes place in India. The clothing and behaviour of children coupled with the absence of parents while the children are playing suggests a parent-less child – a body without any guardianship. Lastly, the notion of Indian women as exotic and entertaining is produced and solidified through female dancers in all three videos. The dancers are dressed in traditional outfits and although their attires are not as heavily embellished as the lead singers, their actions create feelings of excitement and nostalgia.

There are numerous interests that are being mobilised and served and a few that are eliminated. In this case, all lead singers are presented as having fun in India. They are placed in the center of locals, with everyone passing by and living their daily mundane lives, except them. The lead singers seem to be having the most fun. Their absorption of the culture by wearing some of the adornments (bindi and sarees) and mimicking religion (Hindu gods and goddesses) seeks to mobilize their interests. The interests that are eliminated include voices of the locals, their thousands of years old traditions, and sacred ceremonies. Following this, the videos normalize some practices and pathologize others. Some identities are portrayed as primary, standard forces whereas others are secondary and sub-standard. In all the music videos, the local Indian population is shown as barbaric through imagery of poverty and pollution.

Moreover in the song Bounce Iggy sings, “pulling up NASCAR, black car, shitting on everyone, sipping whatever we feeling..” Round and round, shake it, break it, make it bounce! It’s a fucking celebrating, go go go...” This shows Iggy’s autonomy. She is expressing feeling free to do whatever she feels like doing. In that, her actions cannot be stopped as she is having

fun and embracing life. The identities and practices that are pathologized include India shown as an uncivilized and poor place, lacking meaning to actions, and having no societal boundaries. And lastly, the videos clearly demonstrate which voices are heard and silenced. Throughout these videos, it becomes evident that the voices being heard are those of the lead singers and the ones that are silenced are the people of India.

### *China*

The song Princess of China by Coldplay ft. Rihanna constructs the Chinese subjectivity. The lyrics of the song have no actual reference to China. Instead, this video has pieces of Chinese and Japanese culture and also the Hindu religion. This vast enmeshment of cultures and religions creates this feeling that Others' are undifferentiated and undistinguishable. The song is about a heterosexual couple who were in a relationship that ended. The visual imagery produces notions of China as a mystical place needing to be discovered by the white explorer. Throughout the video, the hypersexualization of Chinese women also becomes apparent. The video begins with Chinese letters on the screen. Rihanna is wearing a Geisha robe with chopsticks in her hair and sitting on a couch in a room filled with paper lanterns. The men facing her are wearing samurai masks. She is singing while waiting for the lead singer of Coldplay, Chris to come into the palace. Chris enters wearing a dress shirt and pants. He is storming through the desert to get to Chinese palace. When he gets to the palace, he begins to have a sword fight with a man dressed as a ninja. Simultaneously, Rihanna becomes a Hindu goddess by wearing a bindi and having many arms. She is dancing in front of dancers who are wearing kimonos. The video ends with Chris winning the sword fight and rising up to the sky with Rihanna with drums and gongs playing as background music. It is evident that the white explorer's interests are being mobilised. His acting of travelling across the land and being a saviour of love identifies him as mighty,

relentless, brave, and daring. The voices of the Chinese and Japanese women are missing as well as the subjectivity of the Hindu goddess briefly used by Rihanna.

### *Egypt*

Dark Horse by Katy Perry produces the Egyptian subjectivity. The costumes, dramatic makeup, and striking visual effects situate ancient Egyptian culture as an artistic theme that attempts to negotiate its manipulation of civilization by constructing it through the realm of fantasy. Egypt is shown as magical, mythological, chaotic, complex, and overall exciting. The introductory lyrics of the video are: “From Brooklyn to Babylon”. Instantly, this geographically situates the thoughts of the viewer. The video continues with the lyrics: “In Memphis, Egypt a crazy long time ago...” and the lead singer, Katy Perry dressed as Cleopatra but referred to her pseudo name as “Katy-Patra” in the video. In addition to the lyrics of the songs, pharaoh costumes and specific cultural items such as the eye of horus, pyramids, snakes, jewelry, cat head dresses, and heliographic writings on the wall further create the Egyptian body. Katy-Patra is sitting on a throne mimicking the Great Sphinx of Giza while suitors are serving her by bringing her jewels, gold, food, and water. All three suitors in the video are racialized and burned to nothingness by Perry. More specifically, if she does not like them, she uses the lasers from her eyes to burn them down or turn them into small dogs.

Overall, everyone around Katy-Patra is dancing and trying to please her by following her orders and catering to her needs. Towards the middle of the video, it becomes apparent that the only interests being mobilized are that of the lead singer. More specifically, her representation as queen, being in charge, being in demand, desired, wanted, pleasurable, and worshipped. The interests that are obviously eliminated are of the slaves and suitors. Through the actions and practices present in this video, the lead singer normalizes her positioning as a strong free woman

with the ability to accept what she likes and reject what she hates. Despite her slaves and suitors trying to please her, she lives on her own terms. The lyrics that compliment this idea include: "...cause I, I'm capable of anything, of anything and everything; are you ready for, ready for, a perfect storm, cause once you're mine, once you're mine, there's no going back". The identities and actions that are disallowed and pathologized include materialistic goods still do not erase the desire of the queen and the notion that racialized suitors are not good enough for the white queen. Overall, it is evident that the voices being heard and benefiting are that of Katy-Patra and the voices silenced and not benefiting are that of the slaves and suitors.

### ***Indigenous Peoples***

The song Looking Hot by No Doubt mocks the profound historically situated violence against Indigenous persons. The video constructs a handful of notions that are promoted as truths. Some of these include: Indigenous peoples as savages; needing to be tamed; controlling the savage is important in whatever way possible; Westerners/foreigners are better than Indigenous; Western/foreigners bring order to the Indigenous who is primitive; Westerners/foreigners are noble and well mannered whereas the Indigenous is wild and the Indigenous is undoubtedly sub-human. These truths are solidified through visual imagery as the song has no actual reference to Indigeneity. The music video begins with a scene of war between the Indigenous and white cowboys. Actors who are dressed as Indigenous persons are wearing colourful feather head dresses, wooden jewellery, fringe tops and skirts, animal skin outfits. The Indigenous possess spears while the cowboys possess pistols. The cowboys win the battle murdering many Indigenous persons, capturing and tying two with ropes.

The lead singer, Gwen Stefani plays the role of an Indigenous female that is dragged on the floor by two cowboys. Her arms are restrained with ropes and she is hung against the wall. The



video continues with Stefani being held captive by two cowboys. Stefani is chained to the wall while the two cowboys each have a pistol in their hands pointing at her. As she is singing and dancing against the wall, the two cowboys are touching her. Towards the middle of the video, the other actor dressed as an Indigenous person, is seen as held captive in a prison cell guarded by another cowboy. The actor is pacing back and forth in the cell while the cowboy, armed with a pistol, is pointing fingers and making fun. The entire video is shot on dry, plain land that is barbed-wired with cowboys surveilling the premises. Sporadically throughout the video, Stefani and other actors dressed as Indigenous persons are dancing inside a tipi, around the fire, holding sticks lit up with fire, and dancing with enthusiasm and rage. The video ends with Stefani being able to escape, running towards the desert, while cowboys chasing her.

Through the visual imagery, it becomes apparent that the only interests being served are those of the cowboys. Indigenous persons are demonstrated as in need of control and taming whereas the cowboys are shown as well-mannered and possessing humanistic features. The interests that are not being served and ignored are those of Indigenous. Their collective lifestyle and values of harmony, balance and living in peace with the environment are not shown. Indigenous persons are depicted as not worthy of life and thus murdering them is an action that is normalized. Their captivity is sanctioned by the moralistic cowboys. Overall, the music video silences the voices of Indigenous persons and pathologizes their very existence.

### ***Japan***

Hello Kitty by Avril Lavigne creates the Japanese subjectivity. Through this video, Japanese culture becomes child-like, colourful, fun, exciting and a dreamland. Moreover, the construction of a particular womanhood in Japan is present in the music video. The video begins with Lavigne on a rooftop shouting out Japanese words. The next scene is where most of the video takes place.

Lavigne is standing in front of four Japanese dancers in an extremely feminine room. The room is filled with pink and purple cupcakes, objects decorated with glitter, huge bows and occupied by females. The dancers are wearing the same clothes, have the same make-up done, and essentially look alike whereas Lavigne looks apart with a colourful tutu. The dancers are not smiling and their actions show them as mundane, robotic, plain, and homogenous. Furthermore, they are performing the same dance routine over and over again while Lavigne is doing her own dance moves that are fun and enthusiastic. The video continues with Lavigne dressed up in a restaurant alone while a Japanese chef prepares a sushi dish for her. The dancers and chef are on the kitchen side of the restaurant while Lavigne is sitting on the other side as a guest waiting to be served. When the chef is finished preparing sushi for her, he serves her the platter and bows down. She is thrilled, clapping and shaking her hands. The movie ends with Lavigne strolling through a street in Japan. The dancers are behind her and passerbys are waving at her, noticing her and treating her like royalty. Lavigne is proudly walking down the street doing a queen wave and smiling at those who acknowledge her.

This music video mobilizes the interest of the Western viewer. Japan is introduced as a fun and colourful place that admires Western pop music. Lavigne's ability to walk freely through Japan entices viewers to the idea of autonomous exploration and exhilaration. However, the experiences of residents and locals are eliminated. The video does not show the residents ability or lack thereof to exercise freedom. Moreover, the mundane portrayal of Japanese women introduces and normalizes their subjectivity as powerless, submissive, and only useful for decoration. The many stories and realities of the women as well as the lifestyle of Japan aside from a heartfelt candy land place are disallowed.

***Arab***

The music video called *Burqa* by Lady Gaga constructs many notions surrounding the Arab subjectivity, particularly Muslims. It is important to note that the only lyrics in this song are “burqa, work it”. This is said a few times and the rest of the video has no other lyrics. The ideas that are represented as truths in the video include Arab women as possessors of the burqa and nothing more; women wearing burqas are mundane, odd, and strange; burqa does not fit with the everyday Western life; women without burqas are free and better than women with burqas; women in burqas are dangerous and do not belong. Throughout the video, there are many actions and practices that facilitate the construction of these norms. First of all, the video starts with Arabic writing on the screen and Arab beats in the background. Woman wearing burqa emerges and starts to aimlessly walk around, lost in the streets, on boat docks, inside the mall, and in houses. The burqa is covering the woman from head to toe and no skin is shown. Gaga is not wearing a burqa and is dancing around with no clothing. In this particular instance, a binary is drawn between nakedness and over-covering the body. Nakedness is embraced by the white woman and over-covering of the body is presented by the Arab woman.

Gaga is presented as sexual and wanted. She is also wearing a princess tiara to demonstrate as though she is queen while woman without burqa has no status and is essentially a nobody. The video continues with the woman in the burqa taking the subway, walking across the mall, going up the stairs, walking on the dockside – all without having an interaction with anyone. Passers-by however, are looking at her strangely but the woman in the burqa continues to wander and walk away. With techno/dance music playing, Gaga is dancing and having fun while the woman in the burqa is not. The video ends with her sitting in front of a lavish and expensive looking dresser, staring in the mirror, silently admiring herself and applying lipstick. The last scene of the video shows a silhouette of Gaga’s naked body, merged in with curtains.

Since the video alienates the woman wearing a burqa, the only interests being served are that of women without a burqa. The primary message conveyed by this video is that women with burqas lack freedom cannot participate in aspects of life that are “fun” due to cultural/religious obligations. On the other hand, western women like Gaga who are without burqas are portrayed as enjoying independence, experiencing choices, and expressing sexuality freely. The striking difference between women who wear burqas and women who do not wear burqas is created. The music video eliminates the interest of women who wear burqas. It does not show this sacred piece of clothing as a part of a larger culture and religion. The act of wearing a burqa is pathologized as the woman in the video is presented as not-attractive, strange, alone, and dangerous. The voices of women who choose to wear a burqa and enjoy it as a daily life practice are silenced.

## CHAPTER THREE: GROUNDING

### **Coded Data & Theoretical Connections**

There were numerous discourses revealed through the five deconstructing questions and answers. From the clothing worn to the manner in which certain instances were taking place, each music video constructed subjects, power differentials, and racial binaries. A discourse chart was created for each subject produced and promoted in and through the music videos. A total of six charts were compiled: a chart for three videos that construct the Indian subjectivity and a chart for each of the Other identities (Japanese, Chinese, Indigenous, Arab, and Egyptian). The discourses gathered from the deconstructing answers were charted under the following headings: Common Themes/Discourses, Example of Lyrics/Visual Imagery, Particular Song, and Connection to the Discursive Production and Promotion of the Other. Then, all six charts were coded together to look for the most common discursive themes. Through this process, four broad discourses emerged: 1) chaos 2) slavery 3) lack of autonomy and 4) danger. The following series of paragraphs will explore each of these discourses in greater detail by drawing on the work of specific post-structural theories and movements.

#### ***Chaos***

The lead singers in all music videos are placed in the middle of cultural Others. While the singers are singing in English, the locals surrounding them seem to be in a world of their own (and they actually are). The children on the street are playing, guests at a wedding are dancing, people are talking to each other and overall living their daily lives. There is really no interaction between the singers and the Others. The lack of contact and connection between them creates a sense of chaos. This is explained as mediated quasi-interaction by Talbot (2007). “Mediated quasi-interaction is different as the engagement has a one-way quality and is not reciprocal”

(Talbot, 2007, p. 84). The notion of being in a unfamiliar environment but still utilizing the surroundings for ones' own benefit positions the lead artists as carrying-out mediated quasi-interaction. Their lack of connection to the surroundings including people and places is indicative of a non-reciprocal relationship. The singers inserted themselves in places that are 'different, cool, and exciting' and yet have no interaction with those around them. Talbot (2007) further explains this notion as a "structured situation in which some individuals are engaged primarily in producing symbolic forms for others who are not physically present..." In the case of the music videos, although racial Others are physically present, their presence is not accounted for as they are portrayed as incomprehensible and detached.

Moreover, the depiction of racial Others in this manner by white artists is an example of how dominant scripts about whiteness are produced. Critical race theorists, specifically, Hall (2007) explains that the experience of the Other is produced through exercising cultural power and normalizing dominant Western regimes. The idea is not to portray the Other in a light that seeks to admire it's assets and virtues. Rather, the focus is to expropriate cultural identity; crippling and deforming it. By showcasing the Other as a troubled and complicated identity, white subjects become "individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels" (Fanon, 1963 as cited in Hall, 2007, p. 226).

The white body's interjection in the eastern culture and production of it as more remarkably different than the Western-Euro is deliberate. Throughout all the videos, it is well noted that the Other is not really represented. Rather, it is extracted and adopted by the white body and displayed in a lampoon manner. For instance, some of the singers are wearing outfits of the cultural subjectivity they are trying to create. In the video *Lean On*, Mo is wearing a bindi on her forehead, Adidas sports bra and skirt, and dancing in an ancient fortress surrounded by Indian

deities. The video then proceeds with Mo and the rest of a band naked, in a bathtub filled with yellow flower petals, surrounded by women in sarees. The band is also riding a bus through a slum in India and the video ends with the band dancing. The song is about falling in and out of love and the lyrics do not mention India at all. The artists' decision to wear outfits that barely mimic traditional outfits and then represent the identity in a manner as if it is the mere truth is problematic. The white subjects are shown as dominating the cultural identities and space while the racialized Other is demonstrated as lost and puzzled in these moments. The videos serve the interests' of the artists by demonstrating a single distorted story of each culture and leaving the Other depicted within a chaotic light – confused, incomprehensible, and disposable being.

### *Slavery*

Aside from culture being presented as disordered, the manner in which the artists and racial Others are positioned produces a master and slave dichotomy. In all the videos, the lead singers are consuming various pieces of cultural identities (clothing, gestures, and rituals) while the owners of that culture are seen as serving them and catering to their needs. For example in Hello Kitty, Lavigne is leading a group of Japanese dancers. While Lavigne is seen as having fun and doing what she pleases, the dancers are repeating the same dance moves over and over again with no facial expressions. Later on in the video, Lavigne dines in alone at a restaurant while the dancers and chef are serving her sushi. Similarly in Dark Horse, Perry is sitting on a throne while the women around her are fanning her, fixing her hair, and dancing for her. As discussed earlier, Said (1977) names this notion as Orientalism. Orientalism explains representations of the east as done so in a manner that dominates, restructures, and claims authority over the Orient. The discourse of slavery is repeated over and over again in each video and there is no doubt that it reinscribes colonial continuities. The act of speaking for and doing on behalf of is a symbolic

representation of the European explorer/colonizer concept. Said (1977) further explains the idea of dealing with the Orient by describing it, teaching it, and ideally ruling over it.

The most widespread way of ruling is by creating and emphasizing Others' maladies. Viewing the other from a lens that supports the deficits more than the assets is discussed across post-colonial and critical race texts. More specifically, Others are shown as engaging in practices that are different than what is considered 'normal'. Goldberg (1993, p. 202) explains that almost always the image of the Other encompasses "violence, sexual license, a lack of civility and civilization, and more importantly an absence of morality or any sense of it". The portrayal of Others as possessing characteristics that are worthless eludes to the notion of a subhuman being. For example, in *Looking Hot*, Stefani is dressed as an Indigenous woman who is dragged on the floor by ropes and tied up against the wall. The entire video is based on the taming and controlling of Indigenous peoples. This dramatic portrayal of captivity suggests the Indigenous peoples as lacking values of human equals. Moreover, it sanctions them as a "moral alibi for slave trade, colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation" (Becker, 1973, p. 296). The idea of maximizing deficits and masking control in the name of providing insight and cure is evident.

The act of showing Indigenous peoples as wild and animal-like authorizes the power of the cowboys. The cowboys are presented as noble saviours striving to make the savages' life better. In the videos, the liberal white subject assumes the role of the master through continuous raceless and unmarked (Dyer, 1997) representations. Meanwhile, the racialized subject is marked by difference and thus regarded as the slave. Another example of slavery in the video is when Stefani is chained to the wall; the two men guarding her are touching her and rubbing their bodies against hers. This is a representation of the gruesome treatment of Indigenous women during colonialism. In discussing the depiction of Native American women in the media,



Churchill (1998, p. 193) explains “it is not uncommon for them to be portrayed as appropriate objects of Euroamerican sexual aggression”. Moreover, they are ridiculed by being demonstrated as “suffering a hopeless, usually fatal, attraction to the omnipotence of white men” (Churchill, 1998, p. 194). Correspondingly, Stefani is shown as unharmed and enjoying the touches of the cowboys. While her hands are tied, she sings in the cowboys’ ear and also dances with them. Dramatic representations like these induce notions regarding Indigenous women with hypersexuality as a widespread discourse.

### ***Lack of Autonomy***

The representation of Others as slaves also brings forward the idea of lost autonomy. Throughout all the videos, racialized persons are shown as powerless and lacking independence. Specifically in the video *Burqa*, this notion is most apparent as a woman is shown alienated. This woman is wearing a burqa and covered from head to toe. Throughout the video, she encounters people who look at her weirdly due to her clothing. The woman is seen aimlessly wandering the streets, boat docks, and the mall. She seems to have no friends and looks utterly lonely. On the other hand, the lead singer, Gaga is not wearing a burqa and shown as beautiful, free, independent, sexual, and liberated. Gaga is having fun dancing to music, engaging with men, and expressing her sexuality. Whereas, the woman with the burqa is portrayed as tied down and unable to express herself freely.

The white subjects’ ability to have choice and independence is also present in *Dark Horse* where Perry is able to pick what she likes and leave what she does not like. The lyrics further compliment this notion: “Cause I, I’m capable of anything, of anything, and everything; Are you ready for, ready for, a perfect storm, cause once you’re mine, once you’re mine, there’s no going back”. The three racialized suitors present Perry with gifts (food, clothing, gold) and she rejects

them all with rage. She also burns them into nothingness – some end up being sand while others are turned into dogs or cats. Regardless, the suitors keep trying to impress her and her slaves are providing entertainment. Perry's ability to pick and choose positions her as "just human" (Dyer, 1997, p. 2) in which she remains unnamed and unmarked. Her "racial neutrality" (Frankenberg, 1993) allows her to remain liberated and possess virtues and morality. By constructing difference, the racialized being is able to exercise less power than the white liberal subject. Thus, whiteness becomes a set of practices and a particular subjectivity that the white subject and those wishing to belong to the nation, aspire to as an ideal (Hage, 1998; Schick, 2000).

The depiction of all eight videos as 'ruled' by white subjects in itself shows a lack of control when the racialized Other is concerned. The white subjects' ability to occupy racialized spaces and demonstrate itself as a spokesperson for that particular subjectivity robs the dignity of those who live in it every day. The white body takes the front stage in the video while the racial Other is used as a backdrop. Within a matter of three to five minutes, the white subjects demonstrate themselves as a masters and owners of that particular race. The racial Other in contrast, is left merely as instrumental, cosmetic, and decorative. The use of the racial Other as 'secondary' evokes feelings of lost power and control. The Other not only evidently gets dominated but also is shown to lose sight of what truly matters most to them.

### ***Danger***

The racial binaries and subjects constructed in and through the music video present the notion of difference in the sense that it is dangerous. Broadly, Ladson-Billings (2000) explains that racialized bodies are depicted as "primitive", "wild", "disobedient", and "preposterous". In Gaga's video, nothing can be seen of the woman wearing a burqa. She is covered from head to

toe, people passing by are looking at her as she is demonstrated more differently than them, there is nothing anyone knows about her; she is completely alone.

With the current Islamaphobia movement, this video provides a perfect example of how feelings of threat are constructed with Arab Muslims as prime suspects. While everyone in the video seems to be living freely, the woman wearing a hijab is shown as suspicious and someone who needs to be watched. On the contrary, this video also cleverly entices Muslim women to fit into western ideals of womanhood. The notion that western women are emancipated and ideal representatives of beauty and modernity is present through Gaga's role. The video sends particular messages that invite Muslim women to participate in western womanhood particularly through unveiling the burqa.

In a similar light, Indigenous peoples are represented as dangerous and in need of order and taming. The videos shows them screaming around the fire pit, holding spears, and angry and rebellious. The cowboys on the other hand are seen as surveilling the premises, capturing the Indigenous people, possessing guns, and winning a fight. Their engagement in such actions positions them as embodying humanistic features and sanctions violence against Indigenous persons. Hesse's (1997) work explores how racialized Others are produced as dangerous. He explains that white nation building and racist harassment intertwine to produce the Other as "a threat, a resource, a fantasy, or an epigone to be regulated by that culture" (Hesse, 1997, p. 98). In the music videos, various racist notions are generated that posit the Other as "threats" to the moral fabric of the nation. Thus, white governance secures dominance through processes of normalizing violence against racialized Others. As discussed by Churchill (1998), Bataille (2001), and Dyer (1997) the racial differences constructed present the Other as dangerous and worthy only after controlled by the white subject.

## **Discussion**

The theoretical connections made to the four major themes found in the music videos explored the nature of race representation and construction. There is no doubt that the videos produce racial binaries and discourses that specifically acclaim one race over another. The most important point to note is the interrelation between racial discourses. Explained best by Goldberg (2002) and Dyer (1997) is the idea of dependent power possessed by the white subject and exercised on non-whites for transcending superiority. These divisions yet co-existence of subjects are also linked to Thobani's (2007) concept of 'exaltation'. Thobani (2007) argues that the state structures the rights of national subjects through processes that naturalize and elevate white subjects as representative of national subjectivity. In the music videos for example, the media's mass construction of white subjects as superior and racial Others as inferior continuously asserts white supremacy. Furthermore, Thobani (2007, p. 11) explains that processes in which national subjects are 'exalted' are not available to subjects who are understood to be 'non-western', 'non-modern' and not in possession of exalted qualities of 'western' nationalities". This can be viewed in the videos wherein violence against Indigenous peoples, racist assumptions of India, and threats of Arab Muslims are authorized. Through these productions, racism becomes sanctioned and justified by practices that situate the Others as a risk to the moral fabric of the nation.

It is impossible to discuss the production of racism without making connections to the neo-liberalization of diversity. The music videos serve as a commodity. Their production, releasing, and consumption make them a popular marketed item. Moreover, not only are the videos themselves a commodity, but the clothes and adornments used within them become readily available for consumers. For instance, the marketing of the bindi, fringe animal skin skirts, house

decorations in the shape of an Om or Eye of Horus. In the midst of “listening to a cool new song” or “watching an exotic video”, racism remains concealed, individualized, and actively denied (Goldberg, 1993). Individual racism can be carried out on conscious and unconscious levels. At the conscious levels, it refers to the deliberate discriminatory actions against people of colour. In the case of the music videos, the artists’ choice of extracting only particular pieces of the Other and then representing those who belong to that culture in a ridiculed manner proposes the idea of conscious racism. Moreover, the act of traveling to the east or re-creating particular images of it as the setting in the videos further deploys the actions of the white subjects as purposeful. Once these videos are released, within a matter of seconds consumers begin to listen to the ‘coolest new song’. As mentioned previously in this paper, although the songs are catchy, their videos demonstrate an entirely different story. At the unconscious level, individual racism manifests itself through allowing consumers to indulge in these songs and experience the feelings of nostalgia created by them. Although the racist assumptions within them are completely obvious, their popularity supersedes letting racism go unnoticed.

Moreover, in the song lyrics, racism is cleverly carried-out without any actual reference to race but instead through the use of racialized bodies in the videos. In the western neo-liberal societies, the idea of “multiculturalism” is in crisis as it does not just ‘bring diversity’ or ‘blend cultures’. In these post-racist societies, multiculturalism seeks to group all racialized peoples as ‘one’ deeming them as Others and strives to profit-off their experiences. The various pieces of cultures are saturated and appropriated to best fit the liberal white consumer. This not only enhances the image of the white subject but also seeks to ignite colonial continuities. The most forthcoming argument of post-structural scholars is that multiculturalism in the neoliberal age rejects the experiences of people living in that culture. The vast culture enmeshment does not

acknowledge the stories of racialized peoples but seeks to amplify the encounters of white subjects who consume Others' identities. By discrediting the many stories of racialized peoples, racialized discourses constitute differences in the world and racist expressions create the material effects of power to exclude and subjugate racialized populations (Goldberg, 1993).

### **Relevance of this Study & Implications for Social Work Practice**

Living in a post-racist society, I constantly question the many ways in which race is taken up or to be frank, taken down. As a racialized female about to enter the field of social work, I was curious to understand how western societies progress at the specific cost of Others in the east. I wanted to be informed about the historical underpinnings of western markets, and in this case, the successes of the music industry. My work was twofold – to gain insight into race construction for the purposes of complicating the experiences of potential racialized clients and to understand my positioning as a possible change seeker. For example, when I encounter clients who have experienced some form of racial violence, how do we together combat aggressions that are massively sanctioned? From the perspective of a future practitioner, how would I address racism when as a racialized body, I am also implicated in the process somehow? These were the kinds of questions that arose and sparked my interest in this research.

Through this paper, it became evident that there are numerous studies and scholarly publications that address the representation of race. More specifically, with the up roaring of recent anti-racist movements including “Black Lives Matter” and “Islamophobia”, discussions surrounding the media construction of race and subjectivity are a rising phenomenon. For post-structuralist thinkers (specifically Foucauldians) the aim is to unveil race relations at play and present an account of the different media discourses involved in the construction of racial subjectivity. My study brought forward those concerns with a specific interest in unveiling

dominant discourses present in forms that are otherwise overlooked due to overpowering feelings of nostalgia and amusement.

With the dramatic rise in the access and utilization of social media applications; the current cyber generation is addicted to posting “cool things”. Whether it is on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, people are obsessed with sharing their “exotic findings” and “newly discovered passions”. Thanks to Halloween costumes, outdoor music festivals (especially in the summer), and post-secondary frat parties, discourses surrounding racialized beings are constructed, consumed and reproduced over and over again. Moreover, the misuse of sacred cultural items and practices has become a wide-spread western spectacle with the help of popular advertisers and artists. In the music industry, for example and specifically in videos, racial differences are sanctioned but masked by creating feelings of popularity and enjoyment. The use of cultural items/practices in music videos mystifies ethnic identities to the point where their true essence and multiple realities are lost. Racial identities are prefabricated and mass-marketed. For the benefit of the western hyper-capitalist and hyper-consumerist world, an entire race’s dressing, dances, or religious adornments are created and made readily available. Race becomes nothing more than something exciting to taste, try, discard, buy and keep.

Thus, the overarching goal of my research study was to unpack avenues where racial exaltation and denigration are constructed and promoted. Moreover, I illuminated music videos as stimulating and advancing ever-flowing colonialism. My research critiqued the liberal white subject as a being that is applauded for penetrating territories and extracting pieces of a culture that is then produced and re-produced as the mere truth. Interestingly, I unpacked the white subjects’ act of traveling, becoming involved in racial spaces and consuming culture. More

specifically, I revealed the exaltation of the white body for committing this very act versus the state of the Other body that lives and breathes it every day, but remains unacknowledged.

Despite civil rights movements and the recent wave of anti-racist groups, racism persists. It manifests in stealthy ways. The role of a social worker is pivotal especially when people are denied equal opportunities. Practitioners working in ethno-specific spaces should strive to address poverty, unemployment, discrimination and other manifestations of unjust encounters. The most crucial change that all social workers - especially those operating from a critical lens - should aim for is systematic. Structures that are specifically designed to idealize the liberal white citizens need to be challenged. The idea is not to over-throw current regimes but rather work for spaces that are inclusive and anti-oppressive. Areas of particular focus include but are not limited to: the justice system, education, employment, and health. The primary goal is to unveil disparities experienced by Others and address their oppression as historically situated and sanctioned.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

My research specifically tried to declare that the eastern world is in crisis due to western misrepresentations. The invisible power of white subjects should not only be revealed but spaces of resistance need to be mobilized. Showing alternative storylines is one method of going forward. For example, if western videos demonstrate eastern appropriations, identities and bodies of the eastern world should take moments to inform and educate. In my experience of currently residing in a predominately South Asian community, I often hear racist slurs and notions standing in line at grocery stores, at the malls, or even in workspaces. For the longest time, I wondered what these encounters meant. For a while, I began to internalize these thoughts and accepted them as “flaws within me”. However, my views dramatically changed when I began to



realize the hypocrisy that exists within supposedly ‘multi-cultural’ communities. On one hand, people of colour are applauded for bringing in their culture but then on the other hand are ridiculed for bringing too much. Moreover, I began to realize that the subjectivity of the Other only comes into existence after approved by the white body. A simple example is the marketing of fringe and animal skin clothing mimicking traditional Indigenous outfits. Canada’s continuous failed attempts to address the issues experienced by this population are evident. Their poor health issues including diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, suicide and socio-economic factors including alienation and poverty are some of the many barriers experienced by Indigenous peoples. In the face of neo-liberal societies, there is no doubt that these issues are overlooked. The entire Indigenous race is appropriated with the readily available colourful dream catchers, feather head dresses, beaded head bands and animal skin clothes with fringes. During Halloween, I observe “native princess” and “native chief” outfits as the most popular costumes. The mass-marketing and popularity of these items masks the multiple realities of Indigenous peoples. They continue to be victimized and silenced. I personally believe that it is only through persistent awareness spreading and micro acts of resistance such as the research study discussed in this paper, that society can at least be informed about such injustices. The problem is remembering that these unjust acts exist. Neo-liberal market-force is exciting and induces consumers. However, it is important to keep a critical lens in check and employ teachable moments and acts of resistance where possible.

Through a Foucauldian informed discourse analysis, this paper analyzed eight music videos that construct discursive notions of Other identities. All of the videos produce racial binaries and differences with a specific focus on the acclaiming of one race over another. The white liberal subjects present in the videos are shown as kind, noble, possessors of humanistic features and

culturally adaptable. Meanwhile, racialized Others are depicted as savages, unclean, sub-human, and culturally wild. Although each music video constructed a particular cultural subjectivity, it is to be noted that these portrayals are incomplete and lacking. They do not demonstrate the many voices and experiences of those in that culture. Instead, the videos serve the sole interests of the western neo-liberal regime – that cultural is profitable.

After drawing on specific post-structural theories (post-colonial, critical race and whiteness studies) it becomes evident that the most salient racial binary is that of white and non-white with all sub-cultures grouped as one in the non-white binary. The particular actions such as food, clothing, dances and gestures embodied in the videos hyper-produces the Others. There is no doubt that racialized Others are presented as disposable, non-functional, consumable and irreplaceable. The Other body is mystified and appropriated to best fit the white song artists' interests and overall catch the attention of western consumers. The most striking result through the analysis was that the song lyrics that nothing to do with the visual imagery of the video. The use of cultural identities and racialized bodies in this manner proposes the notion that culture is not regarded by western neo-liberalists. It is rather used and misused as a means of enhancing the image and beautification of white bodies. The very construction of racial binaries can be understood as a way of exercising control and power over subjects. The music videos strive to exalt liberal white subjects while denigrating Others.

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